Westlake Church Lausanne (07.08.16)

I AM the Resurrection and the Life (John 11)

Introduction

If you are visiting the church for the first time, we are in the middle of a sermon series on the great "I AM" statements of Jesus found in the Gospel of John.

Why are we doing this?

Because Christianity is not a set of rules to follow. It is about a personal relationship with God Himself, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Now if you are trying to get to know someone that you haven't yet met personally, what do you do? **You Google them!**

You reads whatever they have written about themself: blogs, Facebook, Linkedin etc. Let's be honest – we all do it!

What better way, then, to know Jesus than to listen to what he says about Himself.

Thus far we have looked at five of His statements:

- I am the Bread of Life
- I am the Light of the World
- Before Abraham was – I AM
- I am the Door
- I am the Good Shepherd

These are extraordinary claims – in fact, they would be considered the claims of a maniac – *unless*, of course, they are true!

This means that we cannot simply consider Jesus to be a good, moral teacher. He either is all these things he claims to be, or He is a madman.

In the passage that we will be considering today from John 11, we will be looking at Jesus' statement: ***I am the resurrection and the life*.**

This is an equally bold claim that has enormous implications.

So with this, let's look at today's main passage. If you don't have a Bible with you, it will appear on the screen.

Read the passage: John 11:1-27

[1] Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. [2] It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. [3] So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." [4] But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." 11 After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." 12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." 13 Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, 15 and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16 So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

17 Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. 20 So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

The passage goes on to describe Jesus' miracle in raising Lazarus from the dead, but I'll stop here as I want to focus on Jesus statement about himself.

Before I go on, however, let's **pray**.

I have three points that I want to make regarding Jesus' statement "I am the resurrection and the life:

1. Jesus is the source of our resurrection and life

2. Jesus is the surety of our resurrection and life

3. Jesus is the substance of our eternal life

1. Jesus is the source of our resurrection and life

For some of the I AM statements, the setting in which it occurs is closely linked to the statement itself. For example, "I am the bread of life" came just after he fed the 5000. In the present case, the serious illness of a close friend sets the stage for Jesus' statement about Himself and reinforces its impact.

Let's first set the scene – verse 1.

> [1] *Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.*

(Bethany was about 3 km from Jerusalem.)

Mary, Lazarus' sister was identified as one who anointed Jesus feet with oil – verse 2.

> [2] *It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.*

It seems like this was an event that John expected his readers would be familiar with. It also suggests that the family was probably wealthy, since they would have been able to afford expensive perfume.

Some of you may remember Mary and Martha from Luke chapter 10 – the sisters had invited Jesus to their house. Martha was busy serving while Mary sat and Jesus feet. Martha complained that she was doing all the work while Mary sat and listened to Jesus. Jesus commended Mary.

The two sisters and Lazarus seem to have been particularly close to Jesus, presumably in His inner circle – perhaps even the closest outside of the disciples. verses 3 and 5

> [3] *So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."*

> [5] *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*

Now to understand this passage in its context, it is important to feel the full weight of the situation in which Martha and Mary find themselves. Many of you will have had a close relative who has been gravely ill and then died. People of my generation inevitably deal with their parents as they get older. Even for those of us who are Christians, there is a deep sense of loss at the prospect of being separated from someone we love.

If someone who is close to you loses someone, it is a time you want to be there to comfort them. And later in the passage we learn that Jews had come from Jerusalem to do just that.

Jesus was clearly different from other friends that might have been a support to them. Mary and Martha knew that Jesus had the power to heal their brother, so they sent a message to him, hoping that he would come and perhaps heal him, although they don't ask this explicitly (verse 3):

> [3] *So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."*

Now, given their apparent closeness of their relationship with Jesus, what happens next is somewhat surprising. When the messenger brought Jesus the message about Lazarus, His reaction is not at all what we would expect!

Look at verses 5-7.

*5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 **So**, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."*

Verses 5 and 6 certainly sound contradictory. If these were people whom you loved, would this be your response?

If one of you received a phone call from school telling you that your child was in a serious accident, even if you were in an important meeting at work, you would immediately drop everything and rush to their side – even if there were nothing you could do medically to intervene.

Or if you learned that your mother or father was gravely ill, you would likely hop on the first plane back home. This is what you do when you love someone.

This is not what Jesus does, however. *Because* He loved them, he waits an additional two days before coming. This was clearly intentional on Jesus part.

It is important for us to understand why Jesus does this. Why the delay?

There was a Jewish superstition at the time that when someone dies, their spirit hovers over the body for three days and then departs. At that point the body begins to decay (remember, there was no embalming), and resuscitation is no longer possible.

Jesus' waiting an extra two days meant that when he arrived Lazarus had already been dead four days. (Jump down for a moment to verse 17)

17 Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

This made it unmistakably clear to everyone that Lazarus was really dead.

The most important thing for Martha and Mary, for Jesus' disciples, and for us as well, is to understand who Jesus really is. It is more important than their grief about losing their beloved brother. It is more important that physical life or death itself.

Because Jesus loved them, He wanted them to know that he has the absolute power over death, and the two-day delay allowed him to make this perfectly clear.

This is something that they would soon need to know when they would see his own body laying in a tomb!

This was the most loving thing he could do. And it is the thing that glorifies God the most.

I would like to just pause here for a moment. When bad things happen: losing your job; financial difficulties; the break-up of a relationship, a serious illness – do you ever consider that these times can lead us to understand God in a new way, make us rely upon Him in a way that we have never done before, and perhaps experience His love a new way. Because He loves us, he may allow us to go through difficult times, which in the short term may seem like the most unbearable situation, but in the greater picture of things, may bring us to a deeper knowledge of Himself. From an

eternal perspective, this may be much more important than the difficulty of our present circumstances.

Many of you may know that my wife Karen was diagnosed with an aggressive form of leukemia two and a half years ago. During this difficult time of her treatment and now the ongoing recovery, it is fair to say that we have drawn closer to Jesus in a way that perhaps we would have never done if this hadn't happened. While it may seem strange to say this, it may have happened because He loves us. It may, in fact, be a blessing.

As we continue in the passage, verses 8-13 describes a discussion Jesus has with His disciples about his going back to Judea to see Lazarus, and they object because the Jews there were seeking to stone him. I will skip over this discussion and jump down to verses 14-15,

> *[14]Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, [15]and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."*

Once again, it was important that the disciples understand that Lazarus was really dead to fully appreciate what Jesus was about to reveal concerning Himself.

Let's now look at the interaction between Martha and Jesus upon his arrival in Bethany.

To understand the context further, we have to understand the culture of the time surrounding grief. In Western culture today, one expresses grief rather quietly and discretely.

My mother was the youngest of 8 children, so when I was growing up I had many aunts and uncles. Because she was younger by quite a bit, most of them died before she did. As a child I was thus dragged to quite a few funerals. It became clear to me at an early age what the etiquette was at funerals. When one goes to the funeral home where the casket is laid out, one spoke very softly, even in a whisper. And if one cried, it was very quietly and discretely.

In first-century Jewish culture, however, this was not how grief was expressed. They did so with loud cries and wails. It was even customary to hire flute players to play dirges in minor keys as well a professional mourner to keep the wailing going and increase the sense of sadness of the occasion.

The two sisters were obviously well known in the Jerusalem Jewish community. Verses 18-19:

> ***18*** *Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off,* ***19*** *and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.*

It must have then been quite a scene, with such a large crowd crying and wailing.

When Martha hears that Jesus is approaching on the road, she goes out to meet Him.

> ***21*** *Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.* ***22*** *But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."*

Martha is not really blaming Jesus for what happened, but she is lamenting the fact that Jesus had not been there to prevent it from happening. However, she seems to

have a glimmer of hope that He still might be able to do something (although if we were to read further v. 39, we would see that she certainly did not expect it a resurrection).

Jesus then replies to her:

> [23] *"Your brother will rise again."*

Don Carson calls this verse "a masterpiece of planned ambiguity".

Martha thinks that he is talking about the resurrection on the last day (verse 24), but Jesus is promising a more immediate resurrection for Lazarus. However, Jesus uses this statement to change the subject and focus the attention on Himself. He says:

> ***25*** *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,* ***26*** *and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"*

In the middle of her grief, and in the middle of the crying and wailing of the crowd, rather than adding simple words of consolation by agreeing that he will rise on the last day Jesus turns attention away from Lazarus and Martha and turns it entirely on Himself!

Jesus is making two extraordinary claims here: that He is the resurrection and He is the life.

What does it mean that He *is* these things?

For one, it means that he is the *source* of resurrection and the *source of life.*

John 5:21

> ***21*** *For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.*

John 5:39-40

> ***39*** *And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.* ***40*** *For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."*

He is claiming to be able to raise people up and bestow on them eternal life.

This tantamount to claiming to be God – the very one who created life!

If this is true, it would be the most important thing that Martha, Mary, the disciples, and us, for that matter, would ever need to know.

How do ***we*** know today that this fantastic claim that Jesus is the source of resurrection and life is true?

For Mary and Martha and the disciples, he later demonstrates this by first raising Lararus. But we weren't there. How can we know?

This leads me to my second point.

2. Jesus is the surety of our resurrection and life

After Jesus crucifixion, His resurrection was the main message of the early church.

The disciples staked the entire credibility of their message on the fact that Jesus physically rose from the dead.

The Apostle Peter makes this point clear in his very first sermon to the crowd after Pentecost recorded in Acts chapter 2:

> *24 God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.*
>
> *32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.*

What does this have to do with our resurrection and life?

The Apostle Paul addresses this in 1 Cor 15:20-23

> *20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.*

The first fruits were the very first part of the harvest.

Jesus was the first to be raised. If we can know that he was indeed raised, it provides a guarantee to us that we also will be raised.

Jesus resurrection is an historical event that either happened or didn't happen.

If it didn't happen and the Jews or Romans could have produced Jesus' body, Christianity would have died there and then.

However, if it happened, it changes everything!

It confirms that Jesus is who he claimed to be, and this means that we will be raised as well.

A few years ago, I was invited to give a talk during the GBU mission week at the EPFL. Being the Dean of Science, my topic was the compatibility of science and faith. There was a room filled with about 200 or so students and staff members from EPFL, and I delivered a talk aimed to convince them that there is no inherent incompatibility between science and faith. At the end I challenged the scientists in the audience to take a rational, scientific approach in considering whether the Gospel is true or not – by examining the evidence for the resurrection of Christ. After I finished there was time for questions, and one student got up and said something like the following:

"I was brought up in a Christian home and I greatly appreciate the teachings of Christ, but I have always considered his resurrection as something metaphorical rather than an actual historical event. Would you consider me a Christian?"

Professors are usually pretty good at thinking on their feet. I stood there in front of this crowd, with my mind racing – how could I construct a well reasoned response that would true to what the Bible says but not offend this guy or turn-off the crowd of scientists and engineers. So after a few seconds, I summoned up all of the professorial eloquence that I could muster and said: NO.

There was nothing else to say. The resurrection of Jesus is so central to the Gospel that one cannot consider oneself a Christian if you do not consider it to be an actual historical event.

The apostle Paul goes on to make this abundantly clear.

1 Cor 15:14, 17-19

> ***14*** *And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.*
>
> ***17*** *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.* ***18*** *Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.* ***19*** *If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

Our hope of resurrection is tied to His resurrection. If it is true, then He is who he claims to be. If he didn't rise then as Paul says our faith is futile, and we are to be pitied. We are wasting our time (and money)!

I grew up in a Catholic home, and while I went to church *religiously* (we didn't have a choice), I found myself as a teenager merely going through the motions. I questioned whether the things I was taught in church were anything more than fiction. I was a doubter and had trouble accepting things without proof. During my senior year in high school, I had met a number of students who called themselves Christians. I was open to hearing what they had to say, and I began reading the Bible for myself.

I heard all their arguments. I read a number of books and examined the evidence for the resurrection of Christ. I listened and thought carefully for several months. But I wasn't convinced that it was true. For me, as a budding young scientist, everything was either black or white--if it were true I would believe it and if I felt it was not I would not.

I began to think about the disciples who were preaching the message of the resurrection. Many of them were beaten and imprisoned for their faith. Some of them were martyred. I asked myself why anyone would subject themselves to this for something that the knew wasn't true?

Shortly thereafter, I was reading in John chapter 20 about the apostle Thomas, who was not with the other disciples when Jesus had first appeared to them after the resurrection.

> ***26*** *A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"* ***27*** *Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."*

As I read verse 27, I felt that God was speaking directly to me. I knew deep down that what the Bible said about the resurrection was true.

Ever since that day, Jesus' resurrection has been the bedrock of my faith. It is the proof that the Gospel and the Bible is true. It is the surety of our own resurrection and life.

Paul says in Romans 10:9

> ***9*** *. . . if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Jesus resurrection is the surety of our resurrection and life.

This brings me to my final point:

3. Jesus is the substance of our eternal life

Do you think about heaven? Do you sometimes picture what eternal life will be like?

Those of us who are getting older and a bit closer to that point likely think about such things more frequently.

And you can be sure that those who are suffering, those who are persecuted, or beaten or imprisoned for their faith, may even ***long for it.***

There are many verses in the Bible that provide clues as to what eternal life will be like, but it would take at least another sermon to do any justice to this subject.

Nevertheless, I would like to explore briefly how Jesus statement: ***I am the resurrection and the life*** speaks to this issue.

What does it mean that Jesus is the life?

He is the source of life and the surety of our eternal life, but is He more that that?

Is Jesus simply useful to get us to a good place?

I just want to focus on a single verse from John's Gospel. It is from the prayer that Jesus prays to His Father in the presence of the disciples.

John 17:3

> ***3*** *And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

In the introduction to his book entitled *God is the Gospel*, John Piper posed the question: Would you be happy in Heaven if Christ were not there.

Let me read a short quote from him:

> *The critical question for our generation—and for every generation— is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on*

earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ were not there?

And the question for Christian leaders is: Do we preach and teach and lead in such a way that people are prepared to hear that question and answer with a resounding No?

If we fully understand the depths of these statements that he makes regarding who He is, and if we understand the cross, we too will answer Piper's question with a resounding no! We will not be satisfied until we have Jesus Himself.