

## I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

A woman in Arkansas was sitting in her car in a parking lot last year when she heard a loud bang and then felt a sharp pain in the back of her head. She reached back and felt a warm sticky substance on the back of her head and realized that she had been shot. Her life flashed in front of her eyes – all the things she had done, and not done, all the people she was leaving behind. She was holding her hands behind her head when someone walked by and asked, "Are you OK?" The woman answered, "I've been shot in the head, and I'm holding my brains in." Well, it wasn't her brains. It was dough. A Pillsbury biscuit canister had exploded in the back seat, apparently from the heat, making a loud explosion and shooting dough into the back of the woman's head.

Like this woman at some point we all have to come to terms with our own mortality. I turned 50 a few years ago and have come to the realization that I have more days behind me than before me. There are some here today that have faced illness and alarming medical reports. Unless Jesus returns, one day all of us here will have to face death.

I am not afraid of dying. I just don't want to be there when it happens. -- Woody Allen.

Today we are continuing in our series looking at the I Am statements of Jesus. As I said last week, each one of these statements tells us another thing about the character and care of Jesus for us. Today we want to remember that the words of Jesus show us that we can face death with certainty instead of fear.

John 11:17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18 Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, 19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. 21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." 28 And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." 29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. 32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34 "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. 35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

In Jewish belief when a person passed away their soul remained near the body for 3 days. The period of mourning for the dead lasted of 3 days of very heavy mourning, 4 days of heavy mourning and then 30 days of lighter mourning. It was customary for friends and relatives to come and comfort the family. Lazarus had been in the grave now for 4 days which meant that all hope was lost.

In this story there are three characters who all responded to the death of Lazarus in a different way.

1. Martha Hoped (vs. 17-27) – Jesus is able

Martha ran out to meet Jesus as He arrived. When she met Him her words were clear “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” The emphasis here seems to be on the fact that she knew that Jesus was able to help. “I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” She knew that Jesus was the Christ. She believed that he would have been able to heal her brother. However 4 days had gone by. Lazarus’ soul was gone. It was too late. Yes, God would do what Jesus asked and yes her brother would rise again some day at the resurrection – but he was gone.

Have you ever felt like that? You face a difficult and, when God doesn’t respond in the way you expected, you grow confused. You know that God is able to intervene but all you can do is hope for the best. Jesus responded to her by saying that He WAS the day of resurrection. He IS life. To be with Jesus is to be with life.

As a young man, D.L. Moody was called upon suddenly to preach a funeral sermon. He hunted all throughout the four Gospels trying to find one of Christ's funeral sermons, but searched in vain. He found that Christ broke up every funeral he ever attended. Death could not exist where he was. When the dead heard his voice they sprang to life.

Many people today are afraid of death. They hope for the best but expect the worst. You can tell a lot about a person by the way they face death. We need not fear the unknown wondering if God will have mercy on us and let us in. If we are with Jesus we have life. Wherever we go, whatever unknown we face – we have LIFE. Not just eventually but now.

With Jesus at your side even the Valley of the Shadow of death is safe. Dr. Donald Barnhouse was one of America's great preachers. His first wife died from cancer when she was in her thirties, leaving three children under the age of twelve. Barnhouse chose to preach the funeral himself. What does a father tell his motherless children at a time like that? On his way to the service, he was driving with his little family when a large truck passed them in the highway, casting a shadow over their car. Barnhouse turned to his oldest daughter who was staring disconsolately out the window, and asked, "Tell me, sweetheart, would you rather be run over by that truck or its shadow?" The little girl looked curiously at her father and said, "By the shadow, I guess. After all, a shadow can't hurt you." Dr. Barnhouse said quietly to the three children, "Your mother has not been overrun by death, but by the shadow of death. That is nothing to fear." At the funeral he used the text from the twenty - third Psalm, which so eloquently expresses this truth.

2. Mary Hid (vs. 28-32) – Jesus is willing

Mary had been the one to sit at the feet of Jesus. She had heard His words and knew His teaching. And yet when word came that Jesus was arriving she did not run out to meet Him but stayed at home. Why?

Matthew Henry’s commentary makes the observation: “Mary sat still in the house; this temper formerly had been an advantage to her, when it put her at Christ's feet to hear his word; but in the day of affliction, the same temper disposed her to melancholy.”

Mary said the same thing to Jesus that Martha had – “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” The focus however does not seem to be so much on what Jesus was able to do as upon what Jesus was willing to do. Mary knew that Jesus could have saved her brother if He had only come earlier, but he hadn’t. He was able, but not willing. Mary does not question the ability of Jesus but His motive. She was angry.

Many like Mary also approach death in anger and unbelief. Why did God allow this to happen? Doesn’t God know how much I needed this person? What will happen to me now? They see death as a waste and as a tragedy instead of seeing the victory.

Two little birds had a nest in the bushes in the back part of the garden. Julia found the nest. It had four speckled eggs in it. One day, after she had been away some time, she ran into the garden to take a peep at the speckled eggs. Instead of the beautiful eggs, there were only broken, empty shells. "Oh!" she said, picking out the pieces, "the beautiful eggs are all spoiled and broken!" "No, Julia," said her brother; "they are not spoiled: the best part of them has taken wing, and flown away." So it is in death: the body left behind is only an empty shell; while its soul, the better part, has taken wings, and flown away.

### 3. Jesus Wept (vs. 33-37) – Jesus loves us

Why did Jesus weep? Was it for Lazarus? No. He knew that Lazarus was about to be raised from the dead. He knew that Lazarus, in life or death, was safe and would be with him forever. He wept for those who were mourning because He loved them and felt the pain that they were going through. God does not like to see His children suffer even if in the end it is for their good.

E.g. me taking the girls to get their shots. Even though it for their good you feel sorry for their pain.

It is OK to cry at funerals. It is not a sign of despair, only that we will miss the people that have gone.

1 Thess 4:13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

Jesus wept that day because he felt the pain of what His friends were going through. Death means separation and that always brings a sense of lose and emptiness. It is normal and natural to grieve – just not as someone without hope. We weep not because we think that we will never meet again but because it could be a long time before we do.

E.g. saying goodbye to family when you live overseas. Naomi cries when she says good-bye to the girls going away to school, not when our daughter who is still home goes off to school. The difference is the distance, the longer separation.

In this life there will be good days and bad days. Good days like today, as we celebrate with those that are being baptized. They are days of rejoicing, celebrating decisions that have been made. We are welcoming in new brothers and sisters to the body of Christ.

There will also be bad days when we say goodbye to brothers and sisters in Christ. Through it all we need to remember that Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

A workman of the great chemist Michael Faraday accidentally knocked a silver cup into a solution of acid. It was promptly dissolved, eaten up by the acid. The workman was terribly disturbed by the accident. The chemist came in and put a chemical into the jar, and shortly all the silver was precipitated to the bottom. The shapeless mass was lifted out and sent to the silversmith, and the cup was restored to its original shape.

At some point we all have to come to terms with our own mortality. The good news of the gospel is that in Jesus the sting of death has been removed. In Him we have hope. In Him we have life.

In Catherine Marshall's book *A Man Called Peter* (about her husband), she cites a story of a young terminally ill son asking his mother what death was like, if it hurt. "Kenneth," she said, "you remember when you were a tiny boy how you used to play so hard all day that when night came you would be too tired even to undress, and you would tumble into mother's bed and fall asleep? "That was not your bed - it was not where you belonged. "And you would only stay there a little while. In the morning, much to your surprise, you would wake up and find yourself in your own bed in your own room. "You were there because someone had loved you and taken care of you. Your father had come -- with big strong arms -- and carried you away. "Kenneth, death is just like that. We just wake up some morning to find ourselves in the other room -- our own room where we belong -- because the Lord Jesus loved us."