

John 11: 17-44 I Am The Resurrection & The Life

We are at the fifth out of the 7 I AM statements found only in John's gospel. John really loves the number 7. This miracle we've just read is the 7th and last sign chosen by John for his account. The first one was at a wedding and this last one the seventh is at a funeral. He has lots of 7s in his book of Revelation. (Lampstands, stars, seals, trumpets, spirits, dwarfs) (only kidding about the dwarfs)
Let's remind ourselves of the I am's we've covered so far.

John 6:35 I am the bread of **life**. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

John 8:12 I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of **life**.

John 10:9 I am the gate, whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture.

John 10: 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his **life** for the sheep. Each week we have been asking **Who is this man?** And each week we notice we're not the only ones. The crowd and even the disciples are asking the same thing. We also see the opposition intensifying. They realise that this man is saying that he is the I Am. The one who revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush.

But wait a minute -that was none other than God himself. It's clear that Jesus is claiming to be God revealed in human flesh as we sing at advent. He had already told them before Abraham was, **I Am**. John 8v58

Jesus is living up to his name of Immanuel- God with us.

In chapter 10v31 they picked up stones to stone him to death. When Jesus asks, 'For what good work are you stoning me?' they reply:

v.33 'We are not stoning you for any good work, but for blasphemy, because you a mere man claim to be God.

Oh they get it all right and the opposition is about to get even worse. If they thought those 4 IAMs were bad, number 5 that we are looking at this morning is downright outrageous. It's either the saying of a complete madman or maybe Jesus is who he says he is.

Background

We are in chapter 11 this morning if you want to open your Bible and follow on. It's the middle chapter of the 21 chapters of John's gospel. Look at chapter 12v1. '**Six days before the Passover**' -his death.

The last 10 chapters covers 6 days the first 11 almost 3 years of his ministry.

Let's you see the nature of the gospel accounts. The greater space is given to Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection as without these you haven't got the gospel. He's just another teacher, someone no longer with us.

Jesus is no longer holding back and telling people not to say who he is (like he did at the start of his ministry) No more 'My time has not yet come' speeches. No -very soon he will set himself to go to the capital Jerusalem and this time, there won't be any slipping through the crowds. His time will have come. We are on location at the little village of Bethany just a couple of miles from Jerusalem. It is Jesus' home from home when he is in Jerusalem. This is the home of 3 adults. Lazarus, and his sisters Mary and Martha. Like most families, they are all different -especially the girls. Martha outspoken, Mary quieter.

Now tragedy strikes the family. Lazarus takes sick and the girls send word to Jesus, v.3 '**Lord the one you love is sick.**' They leave it with him to decide what to do, and no wonder as he seemed to be able to heal every disease. Why he had even raised 2 from the dead. Jairus' daughter Mark 5 and the widow of Nain's son. (Luke 7). These 2 had just died when Jesus intervened.

But this story is different. Just when we think we know what Jesus is going to do, this happens. Jesus doesn't send the messengers back with good news of healing like he did with the centurion's servant in Luke 7 and he doesn't head back immediately to Bethany. No.

Jesus stays where he is...in fact he deliberately stays put for 2 more days. During this time the one the Lord loved dies and the sisters go through the anguish of losing their brother. (and notice how John goes out of his way in v.5 to tell us that Jesus loved them too.) This was no callous act of someone who didn't care.

The Bible is such a real book. This isn't Lalaland-somewhere out of touch with reality. It deals with the situations we all face, the heartaches, the disappointments, the times when we feel God is not listening and of course it doesn't shy away from the tough stuff, sin and its effects, sickness and death. So what are we to make of this delay of Jesus?

It seems that some things in life are more important than our comfort, even our physical health. You ask, 'What is more important?' That what happens should bring glory to God. V.4

Charles Swindoll in his study Bible is very helpful here. 'We must learn early in the Christian life that the Lord is never late, though he often delays. There's a difference. When you are late, it means you should have been somewhere earlier. But when you decide to delay, it means that you purposely plan to come late. When Jesus seemed to be saying no to the sister's invitation, He was not late in arriving as they thought he was. He purposely delayed the timing for a reason-He knew it would be for the better.'

v.17-19 Jesus arrives at the home

They discover Lazarus has already been in the tomb 4 days. It's clear now he has been making sure Lazarus is good and dead.

The Jews buried their dead the same day, (because of the climate) and mourned for 30. The first seven days were pretty intense and they hired professional mourners to keep up the intensity. We can learn a lot from them that they took their time to grieve their loved ones with their friends. I remember after I buried my mum, 3 days later the door shut on my classroom and I was alone with 34 kids. I felt numb.

There have always been many superstitions about death and it seems today people make up what they think are comforting things to say but usually there's no reference to God or what the Bible teaches.

'**There's one more angel in heaven**' is a popular one, but the Bible teaches we don't morph into angels when we die. They are separate beings.

Jimmy Greaves the prolific English footballer of a bygone age died a few weeks ago. (buried on Friday) I know I must be old because I had him in my football card collection as a kid. His captain at Spurs Alan Mullery said he was such a nice bloke that no one would refuse him entry into heaven.

Is that the basis for entry into heaven? Remember last week John reminding us of the good shepherd, who gave his life for the sheep. No need for that if being a good bloke gets you in. This is Godless, secular, humanism.

As Jesus told the Pharisees, 'You are wrong because you don't know the Scriptures.' Matt 22v29

I Corinthians 15 is a great place to go to find out what God says will happen to us.

One that pulls on the heart strings is Ed Sheeran's song Visiting Hours. Such a clever, sensitive song from a talented guy and has comforted a lot of people, but again sadly God is left out.

V20-27 Meeting with Martha

Martha goes out to meet Jesus but Mary stays at home.

V21 'Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.'

She is disappointed -you could have done something 4 days ago but it's too late now. Yet there is faith here too. v.22

During a time of grief, we go through a whole gamut of human emotions. There is denial, anger, depression and then acceptance. It takes lots of time and prayer to work these things through.

Jesus doesn't rebuke her. He tells her in v.23, '**Your brother will rise again**'

Now look at this. This is a lady from 2000 years ago with only the Hebrew Bible and she answers, 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.' How does she know?

She knows her Job, considered by many to be the oldest book. In chapter 19 v25-26 **'I know that my redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.'**

She also knows her Psalms, Daniel 12 v.2-3 and Isaiah has the most wonderful chapters 25 and 26, v.19 **'But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy.'**

V25 Jesus said to her, **'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.'**

Resurrection is a person...note the me (x 2) and the proviso only to those who believe. He brings it out of the pages of Scripture and puts it into a person. Himself. Who do you think Martha is going to raise up the dead at the last day? And not only that but who will give the life they live afterwards?

He is the redeemer that Job looked forward to. He is the one who can give us new life if we believe, otherwise we are still dead in our sins. And we don't have to wait until the last day to begin receiving this abundant life. We can receive it and enjoy it now. Eternal life begins the moment that a person puts faith in Christ.

Do you believe this? This is the money question for all of us.

You've read it, said it in a creed, heard it preached, but do you really believe it?

Martha gives the most wonderful statement of faith yet given in Scripture.

v.27 **'I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God who was to come into the world.'**

v.28-37 Meeting with Mary

Martha lets Mary know that Jesus is asking for her. She heads out to meet him and the other mourners follow her thinking she is going to the tomb to mourn there.

v.32 Mary falls at Jesus' feet and says, 'Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' The sisters had obviously been saying this to one another. It's the same words Martha used.

v.33 Mary is weeping and the crowd are weeping -the word in Greek is an audible wail. Look at Jesus' response. It is actually one of anger. He groaned in his spirit. Lit. The snorting of a horse.

Why this anger? He is angry at death. This wasn't God's design. That was life..to be able to flourish and glorify God.

v.35 **Jesus wept....** Literally burst into tears. Shortest verse and yet just the perfect length to convey this. Why did Jesus weep? I mean we know the end of the story and so did Jesus. He's about to raise Lazarus...so in about 10 minutes it is party time.

In the mystery of God becoming man, we see here his fully human side on display. Hebrews 4v15 **'For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses.'**

Look how sensitive Jesus is as he treats the sisters differently. He talks a lot to Martha, but he doesn't say anything to Mary, he just weeps. Many of us have felt the God of all comfort drawing close to us in our darkest hour. Read Psalm 139 to see how he feels about you.

V38-44 Meeting with Lazarus

Jesus is now_outside the tomb. v.39 **'Roll away the stone'**

Martha (the talkative one) and **the dead man's sister** (yes John again reminds us Lazarus is dead), says let's not do this. You see the Jews didn't embalm like some of the other nations. They wrapped the body in a sheet with a separate wrapping for the head and then placed lots of spices on top to keep the bad odour down.

Aw Martha you are so like us. We tell others what we believe and then when the heat is on, we doubt. It's great that John includes that for us.

He gently reminds Martha of what he can do.

v.41 So they took away the stone

In watching that stone rolled away from Lazarus' tomb, was he thinking that in just a short time, his body would be placed in a rock tomb and a stone would seal the entrance.

It's clear that Jesus spoke out loud for the benefit of everyone there. The disciples, Mary and Martha and the crowd -there's John's emphasis on the word believe, (x98) **'that they may believe that you sent me.'**

v.41 **Lazarus come out!** There's a great quote from an old country preacher. 'It's a good job he said **Lazarus** otherwise he would have emptied that place!' Would have been like the march of the zombies. I love v.44 The dead man came out! except that he wasn't dead -just wrapped up in the grave clothes. He must have hobbled out.

Jesus said, '**Unwrap him and let him go.**'

Notice that Jesus does what only he can do, (the raising of the dead) but he invites others to join in his work. He could have rolled away the stone in v.38 or asked an angel as will happen with his own tomb, and of course he could have removed the graveclothes but didn't.

He's still on the lookout for us to cooperate in his work today. If we are his followers, we have a life task from God and we find fulfilment by doing it!

If you read on later this afternoon, you'll see this was the point of no return. By raising his friend Lazarus from the grave, he was signing his own death warrant. Jesus gave Lazarus life at the cost of his own.

This is the message of the gospel. The only reason you have spiritual life is because another gave his life for you. As we heard last week, '**The good shepherd gave his life for the sheep.**'

As Paul stated to the Corinthians in 1 Cor 15:3-4 'that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that **he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures**'

If our death happens before the Lord returns, Paul lets us know that the souls of the dead in Christ, are living joyfully in the presence of their maker, awaiting the resurrection of their bodies. Death never has the final say. Jesus has and it is Come out!

D.L. Moody: 'One day you will hear I am dead. Don't you believe it. In that day I will be more alive than I have ever been before.'

Want to ask you kindly and gently this morning.

Have you made plans for the day of your death? I don't mean the stuff daytime TV throws at us...pension plans, write a will, funeral costs, inheritance tax etc.

I mean, Do you know the one who said 'I am the resurrection and the life? It's your choice and today is a good day to choose life. May God help us to do just that.