

The Resurrection and the Life

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 February 2026

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Well, thanks, Kate and David, and to Graham and Diego and all the guys who helped move the baptism tank.! It is a lot trickier than it looks. Believe me, I've done this for enough years.

Folks, what a special passage we have. You need to get the Word of God, that passage open in front of you in John chapter 11. Whoever you are here this morning, whatever you think about the God of the Bible, come and meet Jesus.

So John chapter 11 on your phone, you can grab one of the Q Bibles round about you. So here is something to chew on this morning. See, to get us going, let me tell you about an observation that my friend once made about how we live our lives as human beings.

Try this one on for size, see if you agree. They said, isn't it funny how people in our world spend their youth trying to get riches? And when they're older, they spend those riches trying to get youth. Not looking at anyone in particular. I wonder what you make of that saying. The fact that £2.8 billion were spent on anti-aging products in the UK in 2024.

[1 : 03] A figure expected to rise to over £5.5 billion by the year 2033 would suggest that there's something in it. If you're looking for an investment this morning, Clarence. Here's another observation for you, one of my own.

This thing is always interesting. Isn't it funny how just a few generations ago, before our current one, a generation who were emerging from war, who had a sobering appreciation of the fragility and the uncertainty of life, death was a topic that people were up for talking about, and yet sex was the great taboo.

Isn't it interesting, just a few generations later, how that has totally flipped? How everyone wants to talk about sex, you cannot escape it in our highly sexualised culture, and yet no one wants to talk about death.

Again, what do you make of that? Our world offers us little by way of a grid through which to make sense of death.

For example, here's John Harris writing in The Guardian a few years ago. During the COVID pandemic, himself, a self-confessed atheist who ticks that no religion box in the recent census, he said this during COVID.

[2 : 28] He said, like millions of other faithless people, I have not even the flimsiest of narratives to project onto what has happened, nor any real vocabulary with which to talk about the profundities of life and death.

Again, what do you make of what he's saying? The fact that our lives, they have an expiry date, is the elephant in the room.

And as someone pointed out to me recently, how do you avoid an elephant in the room? You cover it in 10,000 post-it notes. Yeah, what is a post-it note?

Something I need to do. Right? How do we avoid thinking about this stuff? We get busy in our lives. Isn't that amazing?

I find it incredible how you could watch yesterday, and I did watch a little bit of it, the analysis of that Scotland game yesterday. And we're talking about it for hours and hours and hours, and statistics and variables and selections.

[3 : 36] A podcast for hours and hours and hours. Analysis coming out your ears. And yet isn't it interesting that people in our world today could not give you three sentences on what life is all about?

Really interesting time in which we live. Well, into our coffin-shaped conundrum steps Jesus in this passage.

And at a funeral of all places, Jesus flips the entire way of life as we know it. He flips it on its head.

Spoiler alert, a man comes back from the dead. Which means, C.S. Lewis was right, that Christianity, if false, is of no importance.

And if true, it's of infinite importance. The only thing that it cannot be is moderately important. So if you've got the text there in front of you, come and learn, whoever you are here today, come and learn three things about Jesus in this passage.

[4 : 48] Here's the first one. It's that we can trust fully in his perfect timing. Now, this is a thrilling bit of narrative, so come with me and see it. We pick it up at verse one.

We're going to go quickly here. Do you see how we learn that one of Jesus' friends, a man called Lazarus, is sick? Love that Jesus had friends.

Here's one of them sick. Lazarus lives in a town called Bethany. Lazarus has two sisters. Their names are Mary and Martha. Again, all these details show the validity of this episode, right?

Verse five, John wants us to know that Jesus, what, how did he feel towards them? He loved them. You see that? And by giving us that little detail right up top, John is telling us that everything that's about to unfold here flows from Jesus' deep love for these three.

Lazarus is sick. Prognosis, critical. Do you see it? And in desperation, the sisters send word to Jesus.

[6 : 04] Do you see that verse three? Come. We need you. You've got to get here. Now question, how would you respond to something like that?

Remember when my uncle, he died a few Christmas times ago, Christmas time 2023. He died on the, he had a heart attack on the 22nd of December, never came around.

Died on the 23rd. We were, yeah, we were opening presents from him on Christmas day. Really weird. Really weird. Thing is, as soon as I heard that we weren't talking days, we were talking hours and we were talking, not hours, we were talking minutes.

I got in the car here and I went. It's what we do, isn't it? When you hear something like that, you drop everything and you go. Jesus hears that news, verse six, that someone that he loves is dying. And get your head around the fact that he says, I'm staying here two more days. And his reason, verse four, doesn't leave them in the dark.

[7 : 25] His reason, verse four, is that so his glory would be displayed. So that the disciples in this moment would learn something about him. That they would learn no other way.

So this God, this is how he works. This is Isaiah 55. If you know the Bible story, this God, his ways are so much higher than our ways.

His thoughts, his intentions are so much greater than our thoughts and intentions. And when things don't make sense to us, we can fall back on his steadfast and wonderfully good love towards us.

Because Jesus loves us, just like he loves Lazarus, Mary and Martha, he will use the darkest moment in their lives to teach them some of the deepest truths about him.

And from this, it gets me every time I read this. Because I underestimate just how committed Jesus is to me.

[8 : 38] And to you. And when it doesn't make sense to us, we can trust that he loves us. Some of you will have grown up.

You remember that hymn writer, William Cowper? He had that wonderful chorus. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace. Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face.

This Jesus, we can trust fully in his perfect timing. And then secondly, this Jesus, we can lean fully into his gentle heart.

So do you see how back in the story here, another 48 hours pass. Which means by the time Jesus and his disciples, they get to Bethany.

Lazarus has been in this condition. Four days. Now if you've been in one of these moments, you will know how slowly time goes.

[9 : 44] Four days. Four days. And when Jesus and his disciples get there, do you see how they encounter just the scene of deep grief?

People are here weeping. People are mourning. People are pouring out their souls. People are consoling each other. And slap bang in the middle of the scene are Mary and Martha.

Do you see? Who are utterly shell shocked. What has just happened. The painful reality that's just played out in front of them.

And when they eventually see Jesus, and you need to see this, isn't it interesting that they both make exactly the same point to Jesus? It's not a point that's meant to invite deep discussion. It's a point that's meant to convey deep pain. Do you see Martha makes it at verse 21, and then Mary makes it at verse 32. Just maybe put your finger on both of those ones.

[10:50] 21 verse 21 and verse 32. Do you hear it in their voices?

The emotion, the pain, the questions. Where were you, Jesus? In our darkest moment, you were a no-show. I thought that you loved us.

Maybe you were just making the whole thing up. Where were you if you had been here? You ever been there? If you had been here.

Well, isn't it intriguing that Jesus responds to their exact same question in profoundly different ways? Have you ever noticed this before? No. Same question.

Jesus doesn't do a cut, copy-cut, paste response. Could it be that Jesus perceives that Martha's biggest need in this moment is to know that he's in control?

[12:04] Whereas Jesus perceives that Mary's biggest need in this moment is to know that he cares. I wonder which one are you this morning?

Martha, who has some understanding, verse 24, of a resurrection that's going to happen in the last day. So she's got some concept of that.

She'll have got that, I imagine, from the book of Job, which you'll find in the Old Testament, a book all about suffering. What does Job cling to? He clings to the fact that my Redeemer lives. So Job is clinging to some idea of a resurrection life after this life in the end.

So Martha's probably picked up on the thread of that, and she says that. She says, I know he will rise again on the last day. Do you see it? Jesus says to her, though, I am, and we don't have time to do this today, but he's using the divine title of God for himself.

Put that in your back pocket if you want it. I am the resurrection and the life. So he takes the knowledge that she has about an event that's going to happen at the end, and if you like, just imagine taking a plug out the socket.

[13:22] He just takes it out of that, and he plugs it into him. All the aspirations, all the hopes, all the longings about God one day coming to make all things new, he takes it and he plugs it into him.

Martha, I've got him. That's what he's saying. I've got him. But do you see, verse 20, Mary, here's where we get Mary, and here's what I find fascinating about Mary, how when Martha hears that Jesus is near, she runs to him.

Do you see it? She runs to him. Jesus in the vicinity, going. Mary, on the other hand, she stays at home. Isn't that intriguing? Can I read between the lines a little bit?

That could it be that Mary is so disillusioned with Jesus, that she cannot bring herself to go to him? Verse 28, Martha returns, and she says to Mary, the teacher, again, it just tells you how highly they regard to Jesus.

The teacher is here. He's calling for you. Jesus knows. Do you see in this moment? He knows exactly what's going on in Mary's heart, and he's calling her to come to him.

[14:42] Isn't that a wonderful thing? Jesus calls us to come to him with our pain, and our questions, and our prayers. He's big enough to take it. He knows what's going on in Mary's heart.

Mary, come. And in a flash, she's up and she's running. Do you notice how other people notice it? See how quickly she got up and ran? And she falls at the feet of Jesus, and the floodgates open, and it all comes bursting out of her.

And for the eggheads out there, what follows is the shortest verse in the Bible. Slip that in your back pocket for next time you're at a pub quiz, okay?

Shortest verse in the Bible, but make no mistake, it's one of the most profound. Do you see those two words? Jesus wept. Now, is that not incredible?

To Mary, he didn't say, come on, I've just told Martha that I'm the resurrection and life. Come on. Jesus wept. It doesn't say anything. Jesus wept. So as Jesus sees this scene, as he sees death yield its teeth, the death that's in our world, according to the Bible story, because of our sin, our rebellion against our creator, and the fracturing of that.

[16:10] Death is in our world because of our rebellion against our creator. Jesus sees this, though, and he is incensed.

So his tears here are not crocodile tears. His tears here are a love of, are a mixture of love, determination, and outrage. Jesus wept.

You're not so grateful for a Jesus like that. I mean, can you imagine if he was stone cold at this point? Like some kind of James Bond from above, sent on a mission with instructions from M, not to get too emotionally involved, attached to people, keep your distance.

Because if your heart goes out to somebody, it might hinder your ability to make decisions and calls. Are you not so glad that Jesus is not like that? We do not have an arm's length, Jesus.

His tears are proof of the truth that this is not the way it was supposed to be. And I wonder whether our problem as human beings is that we've got so good at pretending that it is.

[17 : 26] And personally, I blame Elton John. I blame that song, The Circle of Life That Moves Us All, because the thing is, I tell you what, see, when I was here at my uncle's bedside, the song, The Circle of Life That Moves Us All, that was no comfort for me whatsoever.

We kind of make our peace with this idea of death is just this natural thing that happens. And the Bible would say, not at all. Jesus gives us permission here to know what we instinctively know to be true deep down at every funeral we attend, as we watch every friend who's going through horrendous suffering, as we've tried to process every tragedy that we ourselves has lived through, that this isn't right.

And we need to allow, often, the Bible's language to wash off on us. Death, according to the Bible, is an unwelcome intruder in God's good creation.

Paul would call it the last enemy. Do you see, our world doesn't know how to properly mourn. And yet here is Jesus giving us a model of how to process our grief.

He gives us permission to join him in his tears and know that this is not right. We can, can't we?

[18 : 58] We can so often just skip over that mourning process that happens when something like this goes on in our lives. And Jesus here invites us to stop and enter the depths of grief.

Join him in his tears and know that this is not the way that it was supposed to be. And then here's the third thing about Jesus.

We can rely fully on his powerful words. So you've got to see this. Verse 43. Jesus, in the spirit of defiance, he calls for the stone in front of Lazarus' tomb to be rolled away.

Have you got a KJV Bible there? I love how the Old English puts this. She says, Lord, by this time surely he stinketh. It's great, isn't it? But get your head around what's going on in this moment.

Verse 43. Do you see it? Jesus speaks into a tomb. He says, Lazarus, come out, which is, has to be the strangest thing ever to have witnessed that.

[20 : 11] Here's that scene in Frozen. Is it Frozen 1? where Christoph introduces Anna to his troll friends who in that moment are just little stones and you get, is it Olaf says, he's crazy.

That's this moment, isn't it? It's utterly bizarre that Jesus would speak into a tomb. But I tell you what, it's more than bizarre. It is potentially hugely insensitive.

Talk about things that you don't say at a funeral. And yet Jesus seems to be deadly serious.

Can I suggest none of us would want a God who didn't care? Can I equally suggest that none of us would want a God who couldn't do anything about it? And here's what we need to understand what's going on in the bigger Bible story, very much in keeping with how it started at the beginning. With God breathing life into Adam. And Adam becomes a living being. Jesus speaks.

[21 : 25] Where does he speak? Into the darkness. Into the chaos. Into the black pit of despair. He speaks and he breathes life into Lazarus.

Do you see it? And the man who was verifiably dead, which is presumably why Jesus waited four days, in case you're wondering that, to help everyone in this moment see that Lazarus didn't need resuscitation.

Lazarus needed resurrection. Lazarus in this moment, his hands and feet still bound with cloths.

And I love John kind of just throwing adjectives at this one to help us understand what's going on in this moment because it's bizarre.

Lazarus hobbles out. You see it? Lazarus hobbles out. There's your adjective. That's the verb, isn't it? Hobbles. And Jesus says, unbind him and let him go.

And so here's your top story on the Bethany News at 6. Lazarus lives. Lazarus lives. See, as wonderful as this moment is though, Lazarus one day will die again.

[22 : 44] It's not like he obtains immortality at this point, from this point on. But boy, would life have been different after this. Yeah?

For Lazarus, for Mary, for Martha, for those onlookers, boy, would life have been different. You know, people, I've had people ask me, and I'll put it to you, if there was one world event that you

would have loved to have been at in your lifetime, what would it have been?

It's a great question, isn't it? Collapse of the Berlin Wall, would love to have been at that one.

Signing of the Declaration of Independence, would love to have been at that one.

Airdrie winning the Scottish Cup in 1924, you're all thinking it, we'll say it. But here's mine, Lazarus' second funeral.

Lazarus' second funeral, because I don't imagine the sense of grief felt by all those who would have attended would be any less.

[23 : 54] but boy, I imagine the atmosphere of hope would have been fever pitch. And here's why we can have so much more confidence even than that.

That level of confidence can be ours today. Because what was wonderfully foreshadowed here with Lazarus was a day that was coming not so long after this one.

When another stone would be rolled away from another tomb and another man who was verifiably dead would walk out.

As Jesus leaves that tomb having verifiably been dead, dead on the cross, dying there for the sins of all those who would trust in him.

Jesus dies. On the third day Jesus rises. But unlike Lazarus, Jesus rises and he's now ascended to the right hand of God the Father.

[25 : 05] Unlike Lazarus, Jesus will never die again. And do you know what that means? That means if your hope is in him today, that your life, and this is what we've witnessed today is Tamsin's life as she's gone down and as she's risen.

The old her has gone, the new her has come. What is it about the new her? The new her is totally united to Jesus. Totally united to Jesus in his death and in his resurrection.

The only way that Tamsin can die again as it were spiritually is if Jesus dies again. And that's not going to happen. Jesus holds her, Jesus holds us, and he calls us to live in the confidence of his resurrection victory.

And so the same question that Jesus asked Martha right there is the one that he asks us today. Do you believe? You know, just as we close, we started with an observation about life.

Can I make one more? And I'll leave you with this thought as we leave this passage. It's about people in our world right now, stuff that's been playing out this week. And it got me thinking.

[26 : 27] You know our world is full of right now. It's full of people with lots of power. And no love for people. Because you've got lots of power and no love for people, what are you tempted to do with that power?

Not to serve others, but to serve yourself. people in our world just now with all sorts of power. I mean, that's what is right at the heart of the Epstein files.

People with all sorts of power, but abusing that power, not to love people, but to serve themselves. Our world is full of people like that. But the flip side is also true. You've got people in our world now with all sorts of love for people, great intentions, but they've got no power to do anything about those great intentions and love for people.

Do you know what the wonderful thing about John 11 is, is it shows us here. When it comes to perfect power and perfect love, Jesus is both.

And he invites us to know today that if our faith is in him, see in our weakest moments, when we're facing death right squarely looking at it in the face, we can know with confidence that we're held by the strongest and most loving of saviors.

[27 : 55] You know, so grateful for Jesus. He is the resurrection and the life. Let me pray. Oh, our Father, thank you so much for your word.

God, and I pray that you would fill our hearts with that sense of awe as we take in Jesus.

Father, help rid us of the self-confidence that so naturally comes to us and fill us with a renewed love for and confidence in Jesus.

Father, I pray that whatever is going on in our lives today, that by your spirit you would remind those of us who are struggling perhaps to know that the Lord Jesus is in control.

Fill us with that sense, that knowledge that he is. And perhaps others of us struggling with the thought that he cares. Again, would you be bringing that perfect knowledge of his perfect love and commitment to us?

[29 : 06] So, Father, we thank you for this morning. We thank you for Tamsin. Thank you for hearing her story about how she has come to know Jesus for herself, to find her all in all in him.

And Lord, I pray that this would have been such an encouragement, not just for her, and her family and her friends, but for us as a church family.
Would you renew in us that utter confidence that there's none like him? And we pray these things in his perfect and in his strong name.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.