

I AM THE RESSURECTION AND THE LIFE

JOHN 11:1-7,11-26ⁱ

Rev. Matthew Williams

Friends, I am elated to be with you here on this glorious day of resurrection. Christ is risen! Hallelujah! Today, I'm excited to be sharing with you the final sermon in our series, "I AM..." This series is designed to help us understand more about Jesus Christ, who he is, and what he is done for us. Throughout the series we have discussed several different topics including how Jesus is "the Bread of Life," and we learned that means that we sustain our spiritual lives through Jesus Christ alone. We also discussed how Jesus is "the Gate" and "the Good Shepherd." We understand that we come to God through Jesus Christ. Furthermore, once we're part of God's Kingdom through Jesus Christ, we need to listen to Jesus Christ to guide us and direct us all the days of our new given life. Then, we discussed how Jesus is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." We learned that that describes how Jesus is intimately united with God, and when we live that way, united with God, we are given new life. Then, friends, we discussed how Jesus is "the Vine," and we learned that we are intimately, profoundly, and enduringly connected to Jesus Christ. Then, last week we discussed how Jesus is "The Light Of The World," and we have seen that there has always been this dichotomy of light and dark of good and evil, but Jesus is the light. Darkness can never extinguish the light, and as people who walk in the light, we are given an amazing, godly gift of grace.

We also started a second journey last week through Holy Week. We started by discussing Jesus' triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. We prayed our way through Monday and Tuesday. We ended up preparing for our feasts on Wednesday. On Thursday, we held individual love feasts in our homes to reflect on God's love in our lives, and we washed each other's hands as we remembered the importance of being in service in the world. On Friday, we humbled ourselves as we remembered the suffering that our Savior went through. On Saturday, we waited with expectation of what was to come.

Today friends, on this Easter morning, we will be celebrating what God has done. Jesus Christ is Risen! Praise God!

Today, we are going to be focusing on the final I am statement of Jesus: I Am The Resurrection And The Life. This is an important topic as we move through our understanding of who Jesus is. After all, we wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for this glorious act of resurrection. Now, I know it may seem a little strange to be examining this particular piece of Scripture about Lazarus rather than Jesus' resurrection. However, I felt that the story this Scripture has to tell for us is just as important as any of those typical Easter Sunday Scriptures.

As we dive into the Scripture for today, we find that Jesus has been alerted to Lazarus's illness. He is aware that Lazarus is sick, and Jesus being who Jesus is, was aware that, soon, Lazarus was going to die. Rather than immediately traveling to go see Lazarus and heal him, Jesus decided to wait. Jesus was going to use Lazarus as an example of God's glorious power in this world. We then see that Lazarus does indeed perish. And, in fact, by the time Jesus arrives at Bethany, we learn that Lazarus has been dead now for four days.

Interestingly, in rabbinic understanding, there are two different periods after death that are significant to the Jewish people at this particular time in history. The first three days after a person dies would have been known as the "days of weeping." During these three days, it was believed that the deceased's person's soul was still close to the deceased's body. Therefore, it was believed that the living would still be able to have some kind of connection with the dead. The second phase of grieving in this time would have been known as the "days of lamentation." These fourth through seventh days after death were especially difficult for grieving family members because it was believed after the fourth day when the bodies started to decay, the soul was now gone forever. There was no way for the family to connect with this person any longer. They were gone forever.ⁱⁱ

As we continue in the Scripture, we see that Jesus visits the tomb of Lazarus on the fourth day after his death. Therefore, we should understand that the people on this day would have lost their hope of any kind of possible reconnection with Lazarus. Lazarus, by the conventional wisdom at the time, was gone forever. However, God is not limited by convention. God has the power to do all things. This is where we see God's glorious power being demonstrated.

In verse 25, Jesus speaks to Martha saying,

"I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?"

Jesus was offering her a new kind of belief. Jesus was offering a chance at a second life after a person was gone. Now, for Lazarus, if we were to continue reading on, we would discover that he is risen back into physical life. That limitation of the fourth day is decimated. God is in control. Clearly, these individuals who surrounded Jesus and Lazarus at this time were full of faith in what Jesus could do.

We see from this passage, that resurrection was not limited to just Jesus Christ. Rather, the resurrection from death was open to all people. As we reflect on the Scripture that was read earlier in the service today from Matthew chapter 28, we are reminded that Jesus had victory over the grave. Jesus was not held down by the power of death, and we have been learning throughout this entire series that when we are connected to Jesus, when we fill our lives with his spiritual bread, and we go through his "gate" and are led by the good shepherd, when we are united with God and live in the light, this kind of new life is available for us.

This is certainly a different kind of Easter than anything that I've ever experienced before. It is very strange not to be gathered with multitudes of people on this day. It is strange not to be surrounded by beautiful music reverberating from the pipe organ behind me. It is strange to not be able to greet one another with a warm embrace. It is strange to be preaching in front of the computer screen. These limitations, however, have nothing over the power of God.

We learned many years ago God overcame the power of death. God overcame the thing that, perhaps, causes us the most fear in life. Death has no power over us any longer. So, as we gather in our homes today to celebrate the amazing thing that God has done, I encourage you to remain filled with hope. Jesus is the resurrection. Jesus has overcome all of the odds. And because of that, Jesus brings all who love him into new life.

Now, I have been paying attention to the news. I'm aware that health officials and the media are saying that the weeks to come are going to get worse and worse with concern to this COVID 19 crisis. In fact, doctors believe that next week will

probably be the peak week of illness and death here in the state of Pennsylvania. But as Easter people, the people who believe in the power of Jesus Christ, I encourage you to not be afraid. We remember from an earlier sermon in the series that when the disciples were facing uncertainty and the possibility of death, Jesus reminded them to be not afraid and to keep their hearts fixed God.

This Easter morning, I encourage you to be the people that proclaim to the world the good things that God is doing and no matter the outcome of what will happen with the evil that in the world. We must remember that the darkness can never extinguish the light. Many years ago on Good Friday, the evil of the world attempted to extinguish the light of Jesus Christ. God, however, would not allow that. Today friends, is a day of great rejoicing. It is a day of great hope. It is a day that we remember that God is in control of all things. Be not afraid because Christ is risen! And remember, the best of all is... God is with us!

Amen.

ⁱ All Scripture, unless otherwise noted will be derived from the New Living Translation. Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (Jn 11:1-7,11-26). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱ Freeman, J. M., & Chadwick, H. J. (1998). *Manners & customs of the Bible*. North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers.