

This morning, we turn our attention to another one of Jesus' *I AM* statements--can I invite you to turn in your Bible to John 11? That's page 1668 in the Blue Bible. Let me encourage you to follow along as I read to you one of the most brilliant stories about Jesus. If you came this morning, hoping to find some hope, you will find it in our text.

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) 3 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

4 When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, 7 and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

8 "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. 10 It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."

11 After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." 12 His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." 13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. 14 So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is

dead, 15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16 Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18 Now 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.** The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."*

28 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?"

38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." 40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. 46 But some of them went to the

Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation."

49 Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! 50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." 51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. 53 So from that day on they plotted to take his life."

The irony in this account is so thick you could cut it with a knife. Because Jesus gives life, His enemies plot His death. Can you hear the Temple leaders talking, *If He's going to keep raising the dead, then Jesus is going to have to die! First the dead boy from Nain, then Jairus' little girl in Galilee, and now this? Less than two miles from Jerusalem? If Jesus keeps raising the dead, everyone is going to want to follow Him...note the irony here, everyone that is but them.*

The last 4 weeks, we've been preaching through the *I AM* statements of Jesus--statements He made that revealed His identity--today we come to Jesus' fifth statement: **I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.**

I said a few weeks ago that as we read through John's Gospel, what we find is that Jesus' seven statements have a counterpart--John also identifies seven signs, seven mighty deeds. A *sign* tells us something, it points to something. *Signs* are all around us--they are meant to capture our attention. In the Bible, the number seven is a number that represents wholeness, or completion--the raising of Lazarus is the seventh and final sign.

What does the sign point to? To Jesus' identity of course! John wants us to see that Jesus is more than a man, more than a teacher, more even than a miracle worker, Jesus is the Master over life and death--not just Lazarus' life and death, but over yours, mine, the world's. This *sign* foreshadowed the greater sign that was still coming: the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The Lazarus story is one about death and life, and while Lazarus is clearly in view, Jesus occupies the centre of this narrative. Jesus is Master over Life and Death. Death is the one great foe that no one can refuse, that is, except for Jesus--to Jesus, death is like a sleep from which one need only be awakened. **IN JESUS WE FIND RESURRECTION AND LIFE.**

With this in mind, the question I hope to answer this morning is: *what does it mean for us to face the grave with Jesus at our side?*¹ I'll keep coming back to this question throughout my message, but what I'd like to do is walk through the 4 movements of John account, in order to shed light on Jesus' identity. In the first movement...

1. Jesus receives word that Lazarus has Died (vs. 1-10).

The story begins with two sisters, Martha and Mary, sending word to Jesus that their brother was sick; they refer to Lazarus as the *one Jesus loves*. Later, in vs. 5, John tells us that Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus--Jesus knew these three well, He had likely visited them in Bethany many times, perhaps they were His home away from home?

But curiously, Jesus doesn't drop everything and go to Bethany--He stayed put for another two days. Many have wondered why--didn't John say that Jesus loved this family? Verse 14 gives us a hint. We're not told *how* (so we can assume by the Spirit), but Jesus stayed put because He knew that Lazarus had already died. Lazarus died on the day the messengers were sent, Jesus spent two more days where He was, and then it took a day to get to Bethany; when Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been in the grave 4 days.

But Jesus was emphatic that Lazarus' sickness would not end in death (vs. 4); he was merely "*sleeping*" (vs. 11). The Father had revealed to Jesus that He had something special in store for Lazarus--a resurrection. While God didn't orchestrate Lazarus' death, He determined to bring glory to His Son through this occasion.

When Jesus told the disciples that He was going to Bethany, they protested--travelling so close to Jerusalem could be the end of them all.

¹ Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John*, 325. Burge asks a form of this question that has had me thinking all week.

The previous Fall, a crowd had tried to kill Jesus during the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn. 8:59). A few months later during the winter Hanukkah Feast, they tried to kill Him again (Jn. 10:31). This trip to Bethany happened sometime after Hanukkah but before the upcoming Passover Feast where Jesus was crucified.²

Jesus was a person of incredible courage; fear never stopped Him from doing the Father's bidding. In verse 9, Jesus asked, *Are there not 12 hours of daylight?* In other words, *"I have all the time I need to do what the Father has asked of me--I will not die before the appointed time."*

Avoiding difficulty and pain is a high value for almost everyone I know, including me. When we dream, we dream of an untroubled life; when we choose, we tend to choose the path of least resistance. But not Jesus. What drove Jesus was His commitment to the Father's will and a complete trust in the Father's plans.

Do you know that the same can be true for us? We have the same 12 hours of daylight. In other words, we have all the time we need to accomplish what the Father has given us to do--no more and no less. To quote William Barclay, "There is enough time, but there is not too much time."³ Like Jesus, we will not live a second more, or less, than God has determined. When this truth is embraced, we can let go of the need to grasp and control our lives.

The second movement in the Lazarus story begins in verse 11; here Jesus begins to frame the subject of death in light of His identity.

2. Jesus Frames Death In Light of His Identity (vs. 11-35) In vs. 11, Jesus refers to Lazarus as being "asleep". In vs. 14, Jesus speaks plainly because His disciples do not pick up on the metaphor--Lazarus had died--but when you are facing the grave with Jesus at your side, death is no more than an afternoon nap.

It's hard to overemphasize the difference Jesus makes. In the ancient world, just like our own, the fear of death was rampant--death was resisted at all costs--it still is. We live at a time, where we have done our best to deny death, and this has taken a number of forms.

(a) First, we go to outrageous lengths in our medical system to prevent death. My wife works in the ICU and she regularly tells me stories of people who are kept alive on machines for months--people who have no hope of recovery, and no quality of life--they are kept alive because they or their loved ones are so fearful of death.

(b) And second, we do our best to keep death quiet. People rarely see death anymore--not so long ago, it would be normal for a person to die at home, surrounded by their loved ones. Today, death happens almost exclusively in hospitals or hospices, and the only ones to see death are paid professionals.

² Burge, 314.

³ William Barclay, as quoted by Morris, 481.

When we talk about someone who has died, more often than not, we try to stay away from even using the word “death.” We’ll say things like, “*so and so passed away*,” or, “*so and so has gone to a better place*”--I sometimes want to ask, *They’ve gone to a better place? Are they on vacation, or, have they died?* I’m not trying to be irreverent, I’m merely illustrating that even when we talk about death we try to avoid the subject.

The story of Lazarus draws us in--not just into his story but into our own. Lazarus died, and death awaits us all--but again the question is, *what does it mean to face death with Jesus at our side?*

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet Him. As they talk back and forth Jesus tells Martha that her brother will rise again. Martha was an orthodox Jew, and she believed in resurrection. She believed that at the end of the age--on what was known as the Day of the Lord--God would return, He would judge sin, and He would set up His kingdom on the earth; God would rule without rival throughout eternity.

Jesus said to Martha, “**I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.** *The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.*” Jesus made the audacious claim that the hope of resurrection and eternal life could only be found in connection to Him. Jesus then followed this audacious claim with a pressing question: *do you believe this?*

There’s no way around death, each of us will face the grave, the question is: *will we face the grave with Jesus at our side? Will we place our life in the hands of the One who claimed demonstrated mastery over life and death?*

illus: this June it will be seven years since my mom died of cancer--she was a young 59. My mom died well--it’s something I’m very proud of, proud of her--she died the same way she lived, full of faith and hope in Jesus. When my mom was initially diagnosed, she was told that she might have 6 months to live, but God graced her with an extra 12 months.

And in that 18 months, do you know how many times my mom and I talked about death? Dozens. The subject of “death” became a natural part of our conversation--not in a morbid kind of way, but we talked openly about our human frailty, our fears, what we were living for, and what we were looking forward to after death. Two weeks before my Mom’s death, she told me that she was ready to die.

My mom knew what was waiting for her the moment she died--her confidence stemmed from a life lived with Jesus. She knew Him, she knew what He had promised, she trusted Him. Because Jesus died and rose again from the dead, my mom knew that she would be raised too.

Think about it--Lazarus died, was raised, and then lived another decade or two or three before he would have been laying on his deathbed for the second time. Knowing what Lazarus knew, do you think the second time around felt a little different than the first? Do you think his faith outweighed His fear--*Jesus is resurrection and life--the grave will not have the final word.*

My mom died at home--she died with my dad, my brothers, and our wives all crowded around her bed--it remains one of the most significant moments in my life. We stood around the bed, asking Jesus to take her, blessing her, and crying, lots of crying.

Anyone who has ever walked through the stages of grief will tell you that anger is a normal part of the grieving process. When a person we love dies, at some point, we typically will feel angry. We might be angry at them--*if they took better care of themselves, how could they leave me like this?* Sometimes, when a loved one dies, we are angry with ourselves--*I never told them how I really felt, we didn't reconcile our broken relationship and now it's too late.* We might be angry at God--*why didn't you heal them?, why didn't you stop this?, how could you allow this to happen?*

In verse 33, we read that when Jesus saw the people weeping, "*he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.*" Many scholars feel like the English translation is too weak. What has been translated "*deeply moved*" is typically translated as "outrage, fury, or anger."⁴

Does it comfort you to know that death makes Jesus angry too? Gary Burge writes, "Jesus is angry at death and the devastation it brings."⁵ But He isn't just angry, He is profoundly saddened, He's moved by our grief, pain, and loss. Jesus' anger is complemented by His tears. He is angry and sad all at the same time--just like us.

What does it mean to face the grave with Jesus at our side? We know it doesn't mean there's no place for our grief--Jesus stood at a grave and wept--Jesus feels what we feel. But the difference is that Jesus is not powerless in the face of death; His love, His power, is stronger than the grave. And at this point in the story, Jesus acts, "*Where have*

you laid him?," He asks. And at this point we come to the third movement in the story.

3. Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead (vs. 38-44). There was a stone covering Lazarus' grave, and Jesus called for it to be removed. In a loud voice Jesus called out, "*Lazarus, come out!*" And Lazarus obediently came out, grave clothes and all.

It's a little odd if you think about it--it's taken 42 verses of buildup to get to this point, to get to the actual resurrection, and in two verses it's all over. Jesus speaks the words, Lazarus comes out, and Bob's your uncle. As important as this sign is, John wants to make sure that we see what this sign points to--it points to Jesus, the Master over Life and Death, the One who holds eternity in His hands.

In the 4th movement, beginning in vs. 45, we see that some put their trust in Jesus, and others plot His death.

4. Some Believe, Others Plot His Death (vs. 45-53). The High Priest, Caiaphas, was instrumental in plotting the death of Jesus. Non-biblical historical sources confirm that Caiaphas was the high priest in Jerusalem between 18-36 A.D--in fact, "recent archaeological work has uncovered the burial box of Caiaphas. It is on display in the Israel Museum located in West Jerusalem."⁶ This is just one of many examples where the Bible has been proven to be historically accurate.

⁴ Burge, 318.

⁵ Burge, 318.

⁶ Burge, 321, footnote #22.

And Caiaphas speaks more than he knows, he says of Jesus: “*it is better for one man to die for the people than that the whole nation perish.*” What Caiaphas didn’t know, what He couldn’t have known, was that Jesus’ death and resurrection would die break the power of sin and death.

When we face the grave with Jesus at our side, the penalty of sin has been paid for us--He has made a way for us to be reconciled with God. With Jesus at our side, and the Holy Spirit within us, we can live today with boldness and courage--there is enough time to do what God has given us to do--God doesn’t under-resource us.

When we face the grave with Jesus at our side, the fear of the unknown has been broken--the future has already been decided for us--resurrection awaits us, eternal life awaits us. When we face the grave with Jesus at our side, we are not alone--when we close our eyes in this life, we wake up and Jesus is still with us--it’s just that we will see Him so much more clearly.

Do you believe this? Have you placed your life in His hands? Have you invited Him to forgive your sin and lead your life? Resurrection and Life are found in Him and no other--let me invite you to turn to Him today.

Pray

Benediction: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, “*And regarding the question, friends, that has come up about what happens to those already dead*

⁷ The Message.

and buried, we don’t want you in the dark any longer. First off, you must not carry on over them like people who have nothing to look forward to, as if the grave were the last word. Since Jesus died and broke loose from the grave, God will most certainly bring back to life those who died in Jesus.”⁷