

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

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Jesus said: “I am the resurrection and the life”

Part 1

We have been looking at the seven “I am” statements of Jesus and this is the last one.

JN 11:25 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.

As always – context is really important to get the best out of what is in the bible – that means looking at the verses around what we read and how that relates to the rest of the bible. Also as always, we are looking for understanding from God as we read – remember Jesus described the Holy Spirit as the Counsellor, and the Spirit of wisdom – who will help us understand and remember what God wants to say to us.

The context of this “I am”

Jesus said it during the episode with Lazarus which is well known. It is all about life and death on first reading – which are of course really important to us too – as it was then. But it is actually about an even bigger and more important picture about who Jesus is and what that means for us.

We are going to look at this story and see what we can learn from it and apply that to ourselves and the way we understand life and God's plan for us.

So this episode is full of characters, emotions, reactions, power, compassion, love and hope and scoffing, doubt, faith and more – real life in other words.

JN 11:1 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."

So Jesus knew this family well - and we read elsewhere about Mary's devotion to Jesus and Martha's practical approach to his

visit to them when she got a bit annoyed with Mary. They were very different people – but a family – like any other. Like our families and the church.

JN 11:4 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 Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

Jesus saw the bigger picture – he knew what would happen in the end – and the reason for it. He still loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus. He didn't send word telling them off for not knowing the big picture. But also he wasn't going to do something less than the best even though it would have seemed the right thing to do. You can feel the unspoken pressure here. He loved them and he also knew what would best demonstrate that the Kingdom of God was near. How often do we think God ought to do something – and quick – when a better thing is what he has in mind?

JN 11:7 Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." ^{JN 11:8} "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" ^{JN 11:9} Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. ¹⁰ It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."

So Jesus wasn't going to be put off by earthly wisdom and walk in fear in the dark – his wisdom was heavenly and provided a much greater light to walk by. The disciples said perfectly reasonable things – but didn't see the big picture. Let's not be driven by fear and anxiety and "what ifs". Let's not live by the limited light the world gives – let's "walk by faith and not by sight".

JN 11:11 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." ^{JN 11:12} 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. ^{JN 11:14} 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." ^{JN 11:16} Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Jesus told his friends what was happening – it took a while for them to understand – like us. He knew that their faith would be built up more by following his plan. You can imagine Thomas saying what he did – an attitude of following but not understanding – like us at times. Probably not said though in the most helpful way as you can imagine.

JN 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. ^{JN 11:21} "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."

Clearly the family were well known and liked and many came – thus providing a ready made crowd of witnesses for what was going to happen. But at this point Mary and Martha must have been so disappointed and upset. Martha, practical as ever, couldn't resist pointing out to Jesus his big mistake but still had faith to hope for more. Again – this is like us at times – we don't understand why God has allowed bad things to happen – but we can follow Martha and cling on to that faith in Jesus which says – "your will be done"

JN 11:23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." JN 11:24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." JN 11:25 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?" JN 11:27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

Martha asked – Jesus answered. Not daring to hope in the face value of what Jesus said, she stated what she had been taught as part of her Jewish faith. Jesus then expands her vision in a massive way. In one sentence he summed up the fulfilment of that faith and then went on to demonstrate the truth of it. He develops a theoretical belief in something i.e. eventual resurrection of the dead, into a personal belief in someone i.e. him. Faith in a concept became living knowledge of the person who was going to make it possible. She did catch on – to her credit. It became personal for her – and it is for us. "Do you believe this?" is relevant for all of us.

JN 11:28 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.

Mary was quick to respond to Jesus's invitation. That is how he deals with us – he is calling us to him. Mary responded quickly – why delay – others will also follow if they see us being obedient.

JN 11:32 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." JN 11:33 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. JN 11:35 Jesus wept. JN 11:36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" JN 11:37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Clearly, Mary and Martha had had the conversation about how Jesus could have healed Lazarus and she repeats what Martha said. Note – he does not tell her off – even though it could be interpreted that she was blaming him. Rather he felt the pain of this family and friends – and was not afraid to show it. We mustn't think that God is distant and somehow cold and uncaring like a chess master moving pieces around the board to gain the ultimate victory. Jesus wept. The shortest sentence in the bible, and perhaps one of the most revealing. Whatever we go through, Jesus feels the pain. Even when we walk through the valley of death – he is with us. He endured the pain of the cross because he was both one of us, and God himself. We cannot somehow say that God is there aloof and we are here – he is with us. When God does not act in the way we expect, how are we going to react?

JN 11:38 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 believed, you would see the glory of God?"

Martha was practical as ever - but needed a reminder - as we do at times!

JN 11:41 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, put their faith in him.

Remember that Jesus had said it was going to be for God's glory that God's son would be glorified – glory and honour rightfully belong to him – and God demonstrated that in front of people for their benefit. They then had a choice – believe or not. God's heart is that people believe in his Son.

In conclusion –

In a sense, this one statement – "I am the resurrection and the life" - ties all the others together. If it wasn't for the truth of this statement, then the others don't really mean much.

God showed that Jesus was His son and verified everything he said by raising him from the dead.

¹⁵CO 15:14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified

about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

It wasn't just that Jesus was resurrected - so was Lazarus – but it was by Jesus's power and authority that Lazarus lived again. Jesus demonstrated he had the ultimate power over life and death. He didn't even have to go to the cross himself to show that – he had already done it.

But he did choose to go – he loved us so much that he laid down his life for us – his friends – friends who he weeps for. He demonstrated that even if he voluntarily surrendered his life, God his father would vindicate him in front of the world and death would be shown to have been beaten once and for all.

In his death he achieved something for us that has eternal importance

RO 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

And we can be sure of being raised to life again:

JN 11:25 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.

1CO 6:14 By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

What happens then is a whole other talk – we can do that next week in part 2.