

John 11 (Part 1) :1-44 • “I am the Resurrection!”

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The Gospel of John. We are in the 11th chapter. And this is the last book that we're finishing to complete our third pass through the Bible. Each pass takes about 10 years. And so here we are in John chapter 11. You ready?

We're going to start with prayer this time. Father, open our spiritual ears, open our spiritual eyes. Help us to see and hear your voice. We want to be led by you. We want to be led by the Spirit. We want to hear from you. We want to see you working, speaking, instructing through these verses. And we ask you to help us to really just tune into your voice today. And we thank you, Father, for your word. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

It begins in chapter 11 by saying, *"Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha."* So, as we get into this section of John, we learn that Lazarus was well known to Jesus along with his sisters. All we're really told about Lazarus is that he had fallen ill.

But we're also told that Lazarus and his sisters lived in the village of Bethany. And that is an important statement for John to make. You would think, why is it all that important to tell us where they lived? Well, it's very important because you'll remember that the last chapter ended with some near violence.

Jesus had made the claim that He was equal to God. And that, the Jews believed, was blasphemy. So they picked up stones to kill Him. But were told that He escaped them, and they left the area. They needed things to kind of calm down a little bit. So Jesus and His disciples went across the Jordan to the area where John had kind of begun his baptism ministry, John the Baptist.

And there they stayed for a period of time, just kind of let things cool down. But the reason that it's important for us to know that Lazarus and his sisters lived in Bethany is that Bethany is just two miles away from Jerusalem. And that means to go back to Bethany, which of course we're going to read in a moment He will be asked to do, will bring Jesus and His disciples back into the line of fire.

Back into the danger zone of where they had recently been threatened. And so this is a very important statement to make. Before we move on, one other quick note. Lazarus has the same name as one of the sons of Aaron, the brother of Moses, because the Hebrew form of Lazarus is Eleazar. And so that's the way the people would've referred to him. They wouldn't have called him Lazarus. Because that's the Greek form of the Hebrew name Eleazar, and it means God is my help.

To give us a little more background, John says in verse 2, *"²It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill."* Now we remember that story, but if you were just reading the book of John for the very first time, this would be a rather confusing point because it hasn't happened yet. It'll happen in the next chapter. So John is kind of taking us out of chronological order with that comment, but it helps us to know what's going on here.

It says in verse 3, *"³So the sisters"* (and of course that's Martha and Mary) *"sent to him, saying, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.'"* So assuming that the message probably took some time to get to Jesus, we're told in verse 4:

"⁴But when Jesus heard it he said, 'This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.'"

⁵Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' ⁸The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?'" (ESV)

This doesn't make any sense to them at all. They were just in danger in Judea. Now Jesus is saying, hey, we got a note from Martha and Mary. Lazarus is sick. Let's make our way back to Judea. And this doesn't make a lick of sense to the disciples. And we forget sometimes how traumatizing it probably was for these guys.

I don't know if anybody's ever picked up stones to kill you, but I can imagine. Here's these guys who were standing right next to Jesus at the time, and this is a big deal, to have people want to kill you. And the Jews were good at it. To hear Jesus say, let's go back to Judea, they were a little alarmed at the whole idea. But I want you to take note of how Jesus responds to their alarm, because this is important for us to see.

Verses 9 and 10, *"⁹Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?"*" And of course he's referring. . . whenever you're dealing with a country who is fairly close to the equator, they have 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of darkness there.

We read verses like this here in Eastern Oregon or Western Idaho, and we're like 12 hours. Is that all they get? During the summer we're so used to these incredibly long days, but yeah, that's the way it was there. And so He says, *"Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."*

Well, Jesus isn't talking about simply deciding to walk somewhere during the day and not to walk somewhere at night. He's using this in a figurative sense. He's talking about the difference between walking in the safety of the will of God and the wisdom of God versus walking in the danger of our own wisdom and our own will. And this is really what Jesus is saying. He's making a statement here. In fact, I've heard people say, and I think they're deriving it from what Jesus says here. I've heard people say there's no safer place to be than in the will of God. And I believe it. And I think that is the essence of what He is saying.

When you are walking in the will of God, the wisdom of God, the direction of God, you have nothing to fear. When you step out in your own wisdom or the wisdom of the world, or you begin to lean upon your own understanding as it relates to how to do, where to go, and so forth, hey, all bets are off.

There's a very real danger that exists because you have stepped out from under the banner of that protective covering of walking with God, walking in the midst of His will. And so Jesus speaks of it in terms of walking during the daylight hours and traveling during the nighttime hours. Back in those days, walking at night was fraught with dangers. And so is the case when we walk according to the wisdom of the world or according to our own understanding of how a situation should be addressed.

Verse 11, *"¹¹After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him."*" There's where Jesus uses that euphemism for death, which Paul also uses very liberally in his epistles as it relates to death. *"¹²The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover."*" If he's sleeping, that's the body can recover.

"¹³Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus has died, ¹⁵and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' ¹⁶So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'"" (ESV)

Got to love Thomas. I got to tell you, by the way, there are some people who think that this is a statement of boldness on Thomas's part. Let us go with Him and we'll just die with Him. I don't think so. I have my doubts about that, honestly. Because later on in the gospel of John, we find out that Thomas wasn't necessarily the kind of guy you had referred to as a bastion of faith. You'll remember that Thomas wasn't there when Jesus first appeared to the disciples after His resurrection on resurrection night.

And when the disciples all excitedly told him, Hey Thomas, you know the Lord. We saw the Lord, He's alive. What did Thomas say? I don't believe it. And I won't believe it unless I see the scars and so forth. So Tommy isn't a real big on faith sort of a guy. So I personally don't think what Jesus has suggested about going back to Judea made a lick of sense to Thomas.

It's like, that is the dumbest thing I've ever heard in my life. So, alright, fine. I guess we're going, let's just all go and die. I think that's kind of what Thomas is kind of saying. He's kind of resigned to the fact that we're all going to get nuked when we go there. So, well, let's just go and, all right, what are we? Well, I, no, so there you go.

You know what's interesting about Thomas, though? I can relate to the guy. I got to tell you, in all honesty, there have been times that I have heard some things from the Lord in my heart or even through the word that haven't made a whole lot of sense to me. And I'm willing to bet you probably can agree with that.

Has the Lord ever told you anything that just didn't make sense? Most of what He says doesn't make sense in the eyes or ears of the world. But we have to remember something, and Paul mentioned this in his first letter to the Corinthians. We'll put it up on the screen for you:

1 Corinthians 1:25 (NIV84)

...the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom...

And the only reason he calls it the foolishness of God is because man sees it as foolish. But the fact of the matter is, it is wisdom to follow the word of the Lord. But there are times it just doesn't make sense in the midst of what you're going through.

So anyway, we go on. We read in verse 17 and it says, *"¹⁷Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days."* Now that might be significant. I learned something in this study through John this time that I didn't know before. I learned that there was a superstition among the Jews during this time that after a person died, the spirit of the deceased person would hang around the grave for up to three days waiting to see if it could go back and get into the body it just came out of.

Again, this is superstition, okay. There's nothing biblical or truthful about it. But the way the superstition went is that on the fourth day, it was considered impossible for life to return to the individual. In other words, death was irreversible. Isn't it interesting that Jesus waited four days to finally arrive there in Bethany, just in case this superstition had taken hold of the hearts of some people?

Verse 18 is where we're told that, *"¹⁸Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother."* What you're seeing in verse 19 is what is consistent with traditional Jewish culture. And that is the importance of gathering with a family who has recently lost a loved one.

Now, keep in mind, this is four days after Lazarus died. And this would be four days after burial too, because the Jews did not wait to bury people. They buried them on the day they died. That was their tradition. So this is four days after the death of Lazarus. And all these people are still gathering, they're still coming to Bethany to mourn with Martha and Mary.

Isn't that interesting? It's also interesting to me how these cultures change from place to place. As I said, Sue and I were raised in the Midwest. And in Minnesota, it's interesting that what they call the viewing at the funeral home is actually more well attended than the funeral.

People still obviously come to funerals there, but when someone passes there will be 200, 300, 400 people at the viewing at the same time. Because it is just culturally traditionally acceptable to do that. And then maybe a quarter to half of those might show up to the actual funeral.

I find this part of the country, sometimes there are viewings, but they're not nearly as popular in this part, and I don't know why. It's just the way things are. And then more people come to the funeral. Well, anyway, in Jewish culture, people gathered and they didn't just gather to hang out and have a sandwich.

They gathered to weep. And it was an expression of respect and honor to the deceased person. To not just show up, but to show up and wail. And if you were a person of some financial means, you would hire people to come and wail for days by the grave of your loved one. Can you imagine being a professional wailer? That's what you do to earn your living. You go and you wail. It sounds pretty strange to us, but it was, again, it was considered this expression of honor and respect.

So people are gathering. There's a large crowd at this time. Verse 20, *"²⁰So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house."* And then we have this following conversation between Martha and Jesus and we're going to kind of focus on this this morning.

"²¹Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.' ²³Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' ²⁴Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' ²⁵Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?'" (ESV)

I want you to stop there for just a moment. First thing that we see from this passage is that Martha is a woman of faith. She says to Him, even now I know that whatever you ask God, God will give you. And it sounds like she's saying to Him, I believe that you will raise him from the dead right here, right now today. It sounds like that, doesn't it?

When I read it at least that's what it sounds like to me. But I don't think that's what she was saying. Because when Jesus actually gets to the point of going to the tomb and then telling them to roll the stone away, Martha objects. And she says, and we'll see this here later on, she'll say, Lord, are you sure you want to do that? It's been four days. There's liable to be quite an odor.

So you get the sense here that Martha really isn't saying, I have an expectation that you're going to raise him today. I think what she's saying is she's simply expressing her faith in Him. Whatever happens. And I'll be honest with you. I think that takes more faith than putting your faith in a specific point or desire.

I've prayed for a lot of things that I wanted, whether it's the salvation of a family member or you name it, anything you and I might pray for. But what about those times when you don't know what God is going to do and you simply say, Lord, whatever you do, I trust you. I don't know what you're going to do, but even if it's not what I want you to do, I trust you.

I got to tell you, I think that takes more faith. I really do. Because essentially what you're doing is you're agreeing with the way Jesus prayed when He was suffering at Gethsemane. When He first laid His request before the Father saying, if it be possible take this cup from me. But then He said, but your will be done (Matthew 26:39).

And that takes faith. Because you see, when we pray, we pray with a particular object in mind. We want God to do something. Have you ever noticed, people, that God doesn't always do what you want? You ever noticed that? Anybody? I mean, sometimes it happens that way. What are you going to do at that particular point? When God doesn't respond the way you've asked Him to respond? Are you willing then to step back from your request and say, but Lord, I trust you. Whatever you do, however you do it, I trust you.

We're going to run into this here again in just a moment when Jesus speaks with Mary. But either way, Jesus responds to Martha's statement of faith in verse 23 by saying, *"Your brother will rise again."* So He tells her, your brother will rise again. Notice how Martha responds. Martha says, *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."* And that response by Martha tells us that she knew about the resurrection on the last day.

She knew there was going to be a resurrection of the dead, and she embraced it. She understood this as a truth from God's word. And she said, yeah, I understand that my brother is going to rise from the grave one day. And all that's good. And all of that is correct. But Martha is making a fundamental error here as she is talking with Jesus.

And I believe that this is an error that is made by many Christians. Maybe even most Christians at one time or another. And the error is this: it is reducing our faith to a doctrinal equation. I've seen this done by many people and it often happens among discussions that have a theological bent. And particularly theologians like to reduce our faith many times to a doctrinal equation.

It even happens among apologists from time to time. When you're talking to a theologian or an apologist and you're talking about what you believe, they'll often come back and say, 'oh, then you are a . . .' and they give you a label.

You're of this religious tradition, you're a Calvinist or you're an Armenian, or you're this or you're that.

And I hate that. I really do. Because when you reduce things down to a doctrinal equation, you miss the most important part about our faith. And it's something that Martha is missing right here, right now. When she says, *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."* And that is why Jesus has to say, enough of your religious doctrinal equations, Martha, sweetheart. I am the resurrection. It is not a doctrinal equation. It is a person. It is Me. I'm right here. I'm standing in front of you.

And that, Christians, is where our faith should be grounded all the time. That's why I dislike all those labels. You're a fundamentalist, you're a dispensationalist. I'm a believer in Jesus. It's a person, not a doctrine.

There's nothing wrong with doctrines. You go to our website, we got a little link on there that says [what we believe](#). And you go there and there's this page and it gives you our beliefs. And it even lays out the scriptures. You call that a doctrinal statement of faith. And those things are necessary because people need to know where you're coming from.

But all the doctrine in the world won't save you. We're saved by the death of Jesus Christ. A person. A living, breathing person. And if our doctrine never comes alive in the person of Jesus Christ, then we're caught up in religion. And religion never saved anybody. Jesus saves people.

And this is the importance of what Jesus is saying to Martha when He says to her, Martha, I am the resurrection. Don't quote to Me biblical doctrines. I am a living, breathing Savior and I'm standing in front of you right now. And He goes on to speak of the reality of what it is to believe in Him.

He says there in verse 25, *"Whoever believes in me, though he die,"* He doesn't say whoever believes in this doctrine. He says, *"Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."* Speaking of eternal life that is ours in Christ. Isn't that beautiful? I mean, I love it when Jesus brings us back to Him. When just we come back to Jesus. We always have to do that.

Nothing wrong with learning what the Bible says, learning even what these various doctrines mean or whatever. There's nothing wrong. I'm not putting that down. I'm not saying don't study theology. I'm not saying don't be an apologist. There's nothing wrong with those things. But we have to keep Jesus the person

as the center of our faith. And so what Jesus is challenging Martha to do is put her faith in Him. She says, oh, I know he'll rise at the last day. No. Don't put your faith in a doctrine. Put your faith in Me. Because I am the resurrection.

Verse 27, *"²⁷She said to him, 'Yes, Lord; I believe that you are' (the Messiah) 'the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.' ²⁸When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.'"*

You can kind of tell from the response of Mary, which is in verse 29 here, that says Mary, *"when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him."* You can kind of tell that there was probably something in Martha's message that told Mary Jesus is here, and I think something big is about to happen. She doesn't say it, but you can kind of tell because Mary just jumps up and runs to Jesus.

And so we're told here in verse 30, *"³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there."* And that's probably where Jesus was, right near that area where the tomb was, because that would be outside of the city limits. And it says, *"³²Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'"*

Now I want to stop you there for a moment because you'll notice that Mary said the same thing that Martha said. Lord, if you'd been here, if only you'd been here. And we can't hear the intonation of their voice. We can't hear. We can't see their facial expressions. But I just have a sense that Mary was a little bit more of an emotional creature than was Martha. And that somehow, if you read between the lines, there's a sense of disappointment. Lord, if you'd just been here, if you just would've been here, we wouldn't be in this situation right now.

Have you ever been disappointed with God? I want you to think about that for just a minute. I think we all have. If we're going to be honest, I think we're all going to have to say 'yeah, I've been disappointed with God. Maybe didn't want to admit it. Probably didn't admit it to anybody. Certainly didn't say it to God, but I was.'

I believe it happens more often than we may even realize. Here's the point: although disappointment is common, if we leave it unchecked, it can really create problems. I mean serious problems. Because you see, disappointment can very easily turn to anger. And anger can turn to bitterness. And bitterness is a

poison that runs through our veins. And not only poisons us, but it poisons the people we come into contact with.

That is in fact, what the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 12. We'll put it up on the screen for you so we can see it together. It says:

Hebrews 12:15 (ESV)

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

Notice that many become defiled. Because it's not just you it affects. It affects those around you. But the reason we become bitter ultimately is because we conclude in our disappointment that God doesn't care.

I've had many people tell me, 'I don't believe God is listening and I don't believe God cares.' And that is an expression of honesty, which I appreciate. I mean, I would rather somebody be honest than veil their disappointment in spirituality or whatever. But when we are disappointed, we become convinced, and the enemy will try very hard also to convince you that God doesn't care.

But I want to remind you something about Jesus. He is God. And what you hear Jesus saying, you hear God saying. And what you see Jesus doing, God is doing. And the expressions that you have from Jesus in the scripture, that is God. The author of Hebrews in the first chapter says that Jesus is the exact representation of the being of God (Hebrews 1:3). And so that means you look at Jesus, you see God. You hear Jesus, you hear God.

What do you see Him doing here? Look at verse 33. *"³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled."* We'll talk about what that means in just a moment. *"³⁴And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see.""*

And then we come to verse 35, the shortest verse in the Bible. *"³⁵Jesus wept."*

There it is. What you see Jesus doing, that's God. So what is God doing at the time of your own personal disappointment? He sees your tears. He knows your pain. He knows your frustration. He sees your disappointment. And it's important for you to know that so that the enemy doesn't come along and try to convince you that God doesn't care.

He does care. Just because He doesn't give you what you ask for doesn't mean He doesn't care. It's because He knows best. And you and I may never see the reality of that wisdom this side of glory. One day I believe we will. And I believe we will actually come to a place of thanking Him for those many prayers that He did not respond to us with a yes.

And we will say, oh, I didn't see that. Thank you, Lord, that you intervened and you didn't give me what I asked for there. Because had you given me what I asked for, it wouldn't have turned out for the best.

It tells us here that Jesus and the Jews saw Mary weeping, then Jesus wept too. There's a big difference between the weeping of Mary and the weeping of Jesus. And John even uses different Greek words for the same English word, weeping or wept. The word he uses for Mary speaks of a loud sobbing, literally wailing. But the word that is used to describe Jesus, when it says in verse 35 that Jesus wept, it speaks of a quiet grieving.

It goes on in verse 36 to say, *"³⁶So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!'" ³⁷But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?'"* But then it says, verse 38. *"³⁸Then Jesus, deeply moved again,"* (and that's where we come back to that phrase) *"came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it."*

Back in verse 33, we read that phrase, Jesus deeply moved in His spirit and troubled. And now we come to verse 38. And again, it says, Jesus deeply moved. And I got to tell you that this is a challenging word in the Greek for the English translators to render for our English Bibles. And that's why there's a difference in various translations into how it appears.

Here in the ESV, it's deeply moved. But if you have a New King James, perhaps that you're looking at or on your lap, your Bible says something different. It says groaning in himself, because the Greek word actually carries the idea of a groan or a speechless noise. It's hard to even describe, which is why they have a hard time translating it. But it often carries the idea of anger. That's what's interesting. It often carries the connotation of anger. And so here we're faced with a question, knowing what we know as it relates to the interpretation of this Greek word. Was Jesus angry?

And before you answer or think you know the answer to that question, I have to tell you, I have to wonder whether Jesus was, in addition to expressing His grief in what these people were experiencing, that He's also expressing His own personal anger. And I'll tell you why. We've been making the point several

times over the course of the last studies that we've been doing, that death is an unwelcome intruder in God's original creation.

We've made this point several times. God didn't create death to be part of the human experience. It came about as a result of sin. It was never meant to be here. We also know that one day God is going to overturn death completely. He's going to obliterate it. And we're actually told that in the Word of God. But we're told something else about how God sees death.

Let me put it up on the screen from 1 Corinthians 15. It says:

1 Corinthians 15:26 (ESV)

The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Now that's really interesting because that tells us more than just death is going to be overturned. Paul could have just said, death will be destroyed. And it would've been fine. We would've had a perfectly good truth statement. But he went beyond it.

He said, not only is this thing death going to be destroyed, but you need to know and understand how God sees this thing that we call death. He sees it as an enemy. And when Jesus comes to the mouth of this tomb where His friend Lazarus is buried right now, He is facing down an enemy. And yes, I think very well, this could be an expression of anger.

This was never meant to be. This was never meant to be the part of human experience that is just taken for granted. And this is an enemy. But Jesus came also to show everyone that He had come to conquer that enemy.

It says in verse 39:

"³⁹Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days."

⁴⁰Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." ⁴⁴The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth." (ESV)

(Because that's the way they buried people.)

"Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'" (ESV)

It's amazing. Wouldn't it have been great to have been there? I got to tell you, I'm waiting for The Chosen to deal with this story. I'm sure they'll come up with a whopper of an explanation of how these things all weaved together. That won't be biblical, but it'll be interesting.

And that's not to say that's a bad show. I enjoy watching. You just got to remember that's not your Bible. The back in the seventies, they did the Jesus of Nazareth movie. It was like a 6 hour. And they actually did this scene really well, I thought, where Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. And the people just kind of freaked, a lot of them just kind of fell down and just amazed.

But to hear Jesus, with that authority, *"Lazarus, come out."* And what's interesting about that, you might remember back in an earlier study here in the book of John, Jesus said that's going to happen one day for everybody. Do you remember that? It's back in the fifth chapter. I'll put it on the screen for you:

John 5:28-29a (ESV)

Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out...

So you see, Jesus is kind of giving us a preview of coming attractions, as it were. And we're seeing in the raising of Lazarus, a single demonstration of what is going to one day happen. But this of course, reminds us of something that's very important that Jesus said. When He spoke to John in the very first chapter of Revelation, John beholds this vision of Jesus and it blows him away. Look on the screen, it says:

Revelation 1:17-18 (ESV)

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I'm alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."

That's a very significant statement. I want you to think for a moment about what a key does. It opens doors, but it opens locked doors.

It opens doors that are locked to you and me, otherwise closed. You know, like prison doors. And I think that's kind of what Jesus has in mind when He talks about having the keys of death because we, the human people, speaking for all

of us, we look at death and it's a pretty fearful thing. I mean, I don't think there's anybody who's really looking forward to that day, unless you know you're wracked with pain and you can't wait to be set free from that.

But for the rest of us, we know it's going to happen, but we're not terribly excited about the reality of it. But more than that, it becomes this huge fearful thing that we need to be set free from. Let me show you what the author of Hebrews says from Hebrews chapter 2, verses 14 and 15. He says:

Hebrews 2:14-15 (ESV)

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, (that means we just were human and we're subject to death) he himself likewise partook of the same things, (that's a way of saying He also became a man) that through death (and that means His death on the cross) he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Now, this is a fascinating passage because we're being told here that we are slaves to the fear of death. We literally are born into that slavery. A slavery to fear that one day this big monster awaits us, called death.

But Jesus, through His death and resurrection, says, you don't need to be afraid anymore because I've got the key. And that door that was locked, that kept you in slavery, I'm here to unlock it, And bring you out from that fear. So that you'll trust in Me.

I think it was Spurgeon many years ago, and I'm not quoting this, I'm paraphrasing this loosely, okay? He made a statement once, though, and he said, for the unbeliever, death is a penal response to sin. And that's really the only way you can look at it. But for the believer in Jesus, it is simply God calling them home. That's it. That's what it is for you and me. Death is God bidding us to come home. And when you're done using that body that you're living in right now, that's what you're going to do.

You're going to find yourself walking through a door into His presence, into His arms, and that'll be it. And you will be very much alive on the other side. Let me tell you right now. It's one of the delights that I have had over the years of doing

a funeral for a believer. I got to tell you, doing a funeral for a believer is delightful. Not because we're happy they're gone, but because we know where they are.

Doing a funeral for an unbeliever is a cheerless event, let me tell you right now. Because they have simply suffered the penal consequences of sin. But our destiny is life eternal through Jesus Christ. He earned it for us on the cross. And we receive it by faith. By faith. Not by being a good person. Not by doing good things. But by faith. We are saved by grace through faith. This not of ourselves. It is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). Amen.

Let's stand to pray.

Father God, we thank you so much for giving us this time today to just hang out in your word and to learn and to grow and to see what you've said in the scriptures that we can lay hold of. And there's a lot here, Lord. And we need to lay hold of it. We need to, by faith, grab on to these words and trust in you, Lord, even when we don't get the things that we pray for. Even when we're disappointed.

Even when we're discouraged, Lord, strengthen us to trust you. To put our hope in you. To know and to understand that you are God, and you know best and you love us, and you care. And you see every tear. And we thank you, Father, for all of these wonderful reminders because they build up our faith and help us to trust in you.

We thank you and praise you for your goodness through Jesus Christ, our Savior and our King. And all God's people said together, amen.

If you need prayer, come on up front.