

The “I am” sayings of Jesus. 5 “I am the Resurrection and the Life” John Chapter 11, verses 1 – 27

This saying of the Lord Jesus Christ is familiar to most of us as the opening words of the Funeral service. Words I have used many times in a number of different churches. All of them with a grieving congregation waiting and hoping for words of comfort. We need to realise that this saying of Jesus is not just a “one off”. The truth of the Lord Jesus being “the Life” is there at the beginning of John’s Gospel. “*In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*” (John chapter 1, verse 4). It is also there in John 5, verses 25 – 29; Romans 6, verses 3 – 5; 1 Corinthians 15, verses 20 – 22; Ephesians 2, verses 5 – 6; etc.

John chapter 11, verses 1 – 4:- The teaching of Jesus is introduced in the context of the illness and death of Lazarus, a dear friend of the Lord Jesus. The one who had proved himself to be “The Light of the World” by giving sight to the blind man (last week’s study); now shows himself as the Life of men, the Overcomer of death. Jesus knows what he is about to do and gives the disciples a reason for the coming miracle. It is in order that God the Father may be glorified through the Lord Jesus Christ his Son.

Verses 5 – 6:- Notice that the love of Jesus for the whole family is emphasised. This love is then challenged by his own inaction by remaining where he was for two days. If we read on to the end of the chapter we find that by waiting and then coming and raising Lazarus from the dead Jesus stirred up such opposition as to make his own death certain. This was the measure of his love, not just for the little family at Bethany but also for the whole family of mankind.

Verses 7 – 16:- These verses cover the discussion between Jesus and his disciples over the Lazarus crisis. Was Jesus walking into a trap? He had narrowly avoided stoning (chapter 10, verse 31) and now he was deliberately going back to the same region. Verses 9 – 10 are a reminder that if we walk in his light then we will not stumble. As long as Jesus was walking in the will of his heavenly Father his enemies could not touch him until his hour had come. Then spiritual darkness would be permitted to close in on him for a brief time. See John chapter 13, verses 21 – 30 and Matthew chapter 27, verse 45.

Lazarus was dead and Jesus knew that the coming miracle would strengthen the faith of those who believed in him.

Verses 17 – 19:- Lazarus must have died shortly after the messenger was sent. It would be a day’s journey to where Jesus was. He tarried for two days and then had a day’s journey to Bethany. Even if he had set off straight away he would have been too late! The Jews who had come to offer their condolences were not the rulers but local sympathisers and friends of the family. However some of them acted as informers and carried the news of the miracle back to the authorities. (verses 45 – 46).

Verses 20 – 27:- Both sisters appear in this account in characteristic roles! Martha, the practical one goes to meet Jesus. Mary, no doubt wrapped in grief, remains at home. Martha makes a great statement of faith – verses 21 – 22. Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God could ask for whatever he wished and it would be granted by his heavenly Father. Martha believes in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus now corrects Martha’s imperfect faith by drawing her attention to his lordship over death. Challenged to believe this Martha makes the very confession for which this Gospel of John is written. “*Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God*”. See John chapter 20, verse 31.

Read verses 28 – 44:- Notice the reaction of the Lord Jesus to the family and friends weeping! My Bible says “*he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled*” (verse 33). The Greek word can mean “angry”. I have felt like this when taking the funeral of a baby, a “cot death”.. I remember crying out afterwards “Why Lord?” The reason for death and dying is human sin, the world is not as God meant it to be! Jesus sees the effect of life in a sinful world on this family of his friends and breaks out weeping (verse 35). He prays aloud to the Father (verse 41) as a witness to his person and authority and cries out the command to the dead “*in a loud voice*” (verse 43). Lazarus came out of the tomb still wrapped in grave clothes. The caring, loving hands which prepared the body for burial are now given the final task “*Unbind him and let him go.*”

This was not the first time that Jesus had given life to the dead. See Luke chapter 7, verses 11 – 17 and Luke chapter 8, verses 40 – 42 and 49 – 56.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life!

If you want to know what happened to the family at Bethany, read John, chapter 12, verses 1 – 8.