

Luke 24:1-12

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[0 : 00] Is death the end of the story? Today, as Christians, we celebrate resurrection. We testify to our conviction that death is not the end of the story. But is anybody listening?

We live in a society where fewer and fewer people believe that the resurrection of Jesus, recorded for us in the Bible, actually happened. And yet, curiously, many still cling tenaciously to some belief, however romantic or mystical, in immortality. On match of the day, a footballer will dedicate his hat-trick to dad, who died of cancer, but who is looking down on his boy as he plays the game that his dad loves so much. The contestant on X Factor will insist that Granny, who always believed in her when others didn't, is by her side as she enjoys her fifteen minutes of fame.

And we could multiply the examples. There is this sense in which men and women cling tenaciously to some notion, some idea, some hope of eternal life, of immortality. There's something in the human condition and who or what we are that rebels against the thesis that this is it. This is it. You live, you die, and it's all over. We rebel against this idea that the death is the final throw of the dice, the final full stop in the story of our fleeting existence on planet Earth. Somehow, we kind of know or certainly hope that the full stop that is death will be followed by the capital letter that begins a new word or paragraph or chapter of our existence. In the light of the Bible's message, this ought not to surprise us. The writer of Ecclesiastes identifies the source of this human trait when he declares that God has set eternity in the hearts of men. But do our hopes for immortality of any foundation of any foundation in reality. The Easter message is one that addresses this profound human longing. The empty tomb declares in rich and resounding tones that death is not the end. Jesus Christ was crucified. He died on Good Friday. He rose again, triumphant from the grave, on Easter Sunday. Death was not the final full stop of his life. And his resurrection opens the door for us to believe that death need not be the final full stop in our existence. Let's give some thought to immortality or to use biblical language, resurrection life. And as we give some thought to this matter, we'll do so considering words of Jesus addressed to Martha on the occasion of the death of her brother Lazarus. We read the verses that relate to that in John chapter 11. And this morning our focus will be exclusively on the words of Jesus recorded for us in verses 25 and 26. We read again, [4 : 08] Jesus said to her, Jesus said to Martha, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?

Now, the manner in which we want to consider these words is by noticing how Jesus, in what he says, touches on three core aspects of immortality or resurrection life. In these brief words, he touches on the source of resurrection life, or what we might call the source of resurrection life, but he also touches on the nature of resurrection life in the experience of the believer. What is that about? So, the source of resurrection life, the nature of resurrection life, but also crucially, Jesus refers to what we might call the key to resurrection life. How do we, in our own life situation, access this resurrection life that Jesus speaks of? So, that's the manner in which we want to think about these words of Jesus, the source, the nature, and the key to resurrection life.

First of all, then, the source of resurrection life. The words that we want to think about there are the ones that begin Jesus' declaration to Martha. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the resurrection and the life. These words of Jesus are nothing if not spectacular. The claim he makes is bold and outrageous. Even if you don't believe it to be true. Even if you don't believe it to be true, you can't deny that it is a spectacular claim. It is a bold claim that he makes. It is as if Jesus is addressing generations of human inquiry and responding to that stubbornly ever-present question as to where we can find immortality or eternal life. And where does Jesus point us? Jesus says, I am. I am. He doesn't point us in any other direction. He doesn't point us to some ancient text. He doesn't point us to some great discovery. He says, I am. This is where you are to find life,

resurrection life. I am. Look no further. I am. I am. I am. The resurrection and the life. Now, we need to dig a little deeper into this claim that Jesus makes. I think we can call it a twofold claim. Perhaps we could see it from more angles than that. But this morning I want to limit myself to denoting this claim or describing it and considering it as a twofold claim. A claim to be God and a claim to be life. These words of Jesus,

I am, I am, the resurrection and the life as a claim to be God and as a claim to be life. First of all, a claim to be God. The claim that we have that we're thinking about this morning is one of seven I am sayings of Jesus recorded for us in the Gospel of John. We don't have time to notice all of them, but we find them located very strategically, very significantly throughout the Gospel. Different occasions where Jesus expressed Himself in this way, revealed something of who He was by means of these sayings that began with the words, I am. On this occasion, I am the resurrection and the life. Each of these sayings individually, but very especially all of them collectively, are to be understood and must be understood in the context of the divine name revealed or explained to

Moses in Exodus. We have that recorded for us in the third chapter of Exodus. It was on the occasion when God had told Moses to go and to exercise that saving work of bringing the people out of Egypt, and Moses just really wasn't very sure about that at all. He didn't know if the people would take on board the task that he'd been given, whether they would believe him, and he was arguing with God.

[8 : 42] And we pick up the reading at that point. Moses said to God, Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, What is his name? Then what shall I tell them? God said to Moses, I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites. I am has sent me to you. And when Jesus deliberately and pointedly speaks of himself as he does on this occasion and on these other occasions, when Jesus does so, employing the language of the divine name, he is making a claim to divinity. This morning we're not going to develop that in greater detail or even substantiate that in greater detail. We simply declare it to be so. And such a claim does, of course, serve as the necessary foundation to his claim to be life.

Who but God could claim to be the source of life itself? So, in these words, we have a claim to be God, but also this second element or aspect, a claim to be life. And Jesus does not claim to be only the purveyor of life, but to be life. I am the resurrection and the life. He is not just the one who has the power to resurrect, though he does, but is in himself the resurrection.

One of the features of the I am sayings of Jesus is the manner in which they point to who Jesus is, as opposed to what he can do or give. Of course, it is the case that what he can and does do and give flows from who he is. But the point of the I am sayings is for Jesus to ask us to go beyond what he does and what he gives to consider who he is. If we think, for example, of the very first of the I am sayings recorded in John's gospel, I am the bread of life. In declaring himself, in revealing himself in that way, Jesus is not just saying that he can provide bread of life, which he certainly can, but he is saying that he is the bread of life. And so, with this declaration, I am the resurrection and the life. Jesus' concern is that Martha and you and me look beyond the gifts to the giver. What Jesus is saying outrageously is, look at me. Look at me. Come to me. Believe in me.

This is the insistent plea of Jesus. Jesus turns the spotlight squarely on himself. If anybody else had done that, we would think it inappropriate. But Jesus turns the spotlight on himself and he says to Martha and he says to you this morning, look at me. Consider me. Consider who I am. I am the resurrection and the life. So, in these words, I am the resurrection and the life, we have a claim to be God, a claim to be life. But before we move on, let's notice a necessary implication of this twofold claim, which in turn is a claim is a claim to be life. And that is a claim to exclusivity. Jesus and Jesus alone is the resurrection and the life. Only Jesus, who is life, or the author of life, in the words of Peter in his sermon at Pentecost, only Jesus can grant life. Only Jesus can give resurrection life.

That exclusivity. That exclusivity that we're calling it is even more explicit in the following, I am saying, recorded for us in John's gospel. I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. So, in these words of Jesus, we have developed, we have touched on this crucial matter of the source of life, Jesus himself, the source of resurrection life, the one who declares, I am the resurrection and the life. If you crave life, resurrection life, then you must look no further than the person of Jesus Christ. And if you would offer life to others, you have none other to offer than Jesus Christ. But we want to think also, not only of the source of resurrection life, but also what Jesus says here in these verses concerning the nature of resurrection life. And I'm thinking

that in terms of the nature of resurrection life for the believer and the experience of the believer. [13:50] What we want to do is to explore the significance of Jesus declaring himself to be the resurrection and the life. I am the resurrection and the life. And what I want us to notice is how the significance of each of these words, resurrection and life, is used by Jesus and immediately developed by Jesus in a way that throws light on the nature of resurrection life. The question really is this, why does Jesus say, I am the resurrection and the life? Why the use of both these words? What is the significance of that?

Well, that has been variously understood. I'll mention three ways in which it's been understood very fleetingly, but I will also favor the third suggestion that is made and develop that as we consider this matter of the nature of resurrection life. Why then does Jesus declare in this way, I am the resurrection and the life. Some suggest that the two words are to be understood simply as synonyms, and Jesus is employing two words for greater emphasis. That's something that we often find in the Bible. Indeed, we ourselves do it. We'll use two words that we intend to mean the same thing, but by using two, there is that sense in which we're emphasizing what we're trying to say, and it's suggested that perhaps that is what we have here. It's also suggested, perhaps more commonly, that the words that Jesus uses reflect the chronology, if you wish, of resurrection life in our experience. There is a chronological order. First, resurrection from the dead, which is then followed by resurrection life.

Well, it makes sense. How can you know and experience resurrection life if you're still dead? So, first resurrection, then life. And so, it's suggested that perhaps this is what is behind the words of Jesus, I am the resurrection and the life. But another suggestion, and the one that I'm going to share with you and just develop a little this morning, is to elucidate their significance. Notice in the words that he declares there in these two verses. First of all, the word resurrection is explained or further developed in what he then immediately goes on to say, he who believes in me will live even though he dies. And the word life is further explained in what he then goes on to say, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Let me explain the connections that I'm suggesting that there are between the two words and what Jesus then goes on to say. First of all, the word resurrection, I am the resurrection. The word resurrection points to a future experience for the believer. It is an experience that will occur after our physical death. In a very real sense, resurrection, certainly physical resurrection, is impossible in the absence of death. You can't resurrect somebody who is alive. Hence, you have, in the words of Jesus, the recognition that we will die. That's what he says, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies. Jesus says, yes, you will die. That is part of the human experience. You will die. You will experience physical death.

At some point in the future, you cannot avoid that necessary eventuality. You will die. But I'm the resurrection. And you can be confident that though you will die, you will be resurrected in the future. [17:43] It's a present hope concerning a future reality. That Jesus is and declares himself to be then the resurrection points for the believer to our future experience of resurrection life. We will die, but we will be raised or resurrected to new resurrection life. That would be then the significance of Jesus declaring himself to be the resurrection. The significance for us as regards the nature of resurrection life for us. But what of the word life? I am the resurrection and the life. If we're saying that it's not just synonymous, that it has a distinct meaning or significance. Well, what I'm suggesting is that that word is also explained by Jesus in what he says in verse 26, whoever lives and believes in me will never die. In speaking of himself as the life and in the manner in which that applies to us as believer, Jesus brings us to our present. Whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Jesus is taking

Martha, and hopefully he is taking us also with her. He's taking Martha gently by the hand from the reality of future resurrection that she already believes in. She's already declared that she believes in that.

He's taking her from there, from that place, to the reality of present life, of that present life that grants to the believer immortality or eternal life, this resurrection life that is to be experienced by the believer in the here and now. Whoever lives and believes in me now will never die. Whoever lives and believes in me now enjoys now resurrection life. Not the physical resurrection that is a future hope, but spiritual eternal life now. Now, this way of understanding what Jesus says, the significance of the two words, resurrection and life, and the suggestion that Jesus himself then goes on to explain them in the words that follows, is very neat. It's maybe a little too neat, and I would be

quite happy if some maybe wonder whether it's entirely legitimate to make the connections that I've made. But I think it is a legitimate way of understanding what Jesus is saying, and what it does do, by the by, is resolve the seeming contradiction of Jesus in the same breath, speaking of believers both dying and never dying. If you read that, and you think, well, that's a bit strange. He's saying that you will die, and then he says that you'll never die. But if we understand it in this way, that Jesus, in speaking of resurrection, is speaking of that future hope, he's recognizing that yes, we will die physically, but there will be resurrection for us. But he's also speaking of the present. He's speaking of eternal life in the heat, and now that when we receive that, we can, in a very real way, declare that we will never die. So, we have then, or we're noticing this twofold nature of resurrection life, both the future reality of physical resurrection to new life on that great day, but also the present reality and experience of eternal life, resurrection life that Jesus gives to us to us today. In considering these things, we can't do so without posing the question, what about you?

Do you know this hope of future resurrection to new life? Has death lost its sting for you as you fondly contemplate future glory? But what about today? Is eternal life a current possession and experience for you?

Can you say with grateful confidence, I will never die? I have been granted eternal life by my Savior who rose from the grave, who declares to me and continues to declare, I am the resurrection and the life.

[22 : 13] So, Jesus, in the words that he addresses to Martha, speaks of, touches on this crucial matter of the source of resurrection life, he himself, the nature of resurrection life in the experience of the believer as a future, but sure hope, but also a present reality. But he also touches on this final aspect that we want to notice this morning, and that is what we're calling the key to resurrection life.

In explaining the future and present nature of resurrection life, there is a common thread or theme that we find, and it is the theme of believing. In both of the statements that Jesus makes concerning what we're suggesting is this future hope and also this present reality, in both there is this recognition that there must be this matter of believing. I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies. And then he goes on, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. And then, as if to ensure that the message hasn't been lost, he closes with a question, do you believe this? Belief is key. We might call it to, we might call it the key to resurrection life in the sense that it opens the door in our experience to resurrection life. This is about how we respond to

Jesus, to the one who declares, I am the resurrection and the life. This is about how we can not only ponder on or admire abstract truth, but also experience resurrection life. To put it simply, but also very biblically, you've got to believe. You've got to believe. And what is this believing all about? Now, without wishing to overanalyze this demand of Jesus to believe, it is the case that Jesus himself very intriguingly, very curiously, touches on two overlapping but distinct aspects of biblical belief for saving faith in the words that he addresses to Martha. Two ways of understanding, perhaps that's not the best way of putting it, but two overlapping aspects of saving faith that Jesus touches on. And we can notice the distinction in the words that he himself uses. First of all, notice the question that he poses to Martha, do you believe this? And my focus here, and what I draw your attention to, to just give some thought to, is that little word, this. What's the significance of that? When Jesus says to Martha, do you believe this? What's he referring to? Well, clearly he's referring to what he has just said, the facts that he has declared. He has declared as a matter of fact that he is the resurrection in the life. And he's saying to Martha, do you believe that? Do you believe that that's true? Do you believe that what I've said is true, that it's accurate, that it really is so? He's also spoken of what is involved in experiencing resurrection and eternal life. And he's saying to Martha, do you believe this? Is this something you believe? What I've said, do you believe it? Now, that's a very important question. And I pose the question to you. Do you believe the facts that constitute the gospel? Do you believe that Jesus is the eternal Son of God? Do you believe that he died on the cross for sinners?

Do you believe that he rose again? Do you believe these things to be true? Do you believe it to be so when Jesus declares, I am the resurrection and the life? Do you believe this? So, that's one element of biblical faith. But there's also, in the words of Jesus, what we might call another manner in which Jesus speaks of or deals with the matter of belief. And we find that in the words that he addresses there before the question. In verse 25, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live. And then in verse 26, we find that repeated. Whoever lives and believes in

me. In the question, the way it's addressed, the way it's expressed is, do you believe this? These facts, this declaration I've made, do you believe it to be true? But in the declaration itself, it's dealt with in a different way. The language used is different. Jesus says it's important to believe in me. [27 : 08] This construction of believing in Jesus, this grammatical construction, do you believe in me, is, so it would seem, to be found only in the New Testament. It is a distinctly Christian gospel concept. And it implies personal trust and commitment that goes beyond an intellectual assent to something being true, though that's important, to a personal commitment to the person of Jesus Christ. Do you believe in me? Do you rest in me? Do you trust in me? We are to believe in Jesus.

We are to rest in Him and in Him alone. We are to cling to His person and His righteousness. We are to trust in Him as our Savior, as our Lord. We must believe in Him. We must believe this. We must believe the facts. But we must also believe in Jesus. We must continually, and this of course applies to those of us who by grace and grace alone are already believers, we must continually put our trust in Jesus, the one in whom we enjoy resurrection life. We do have to be careful, and in identifying these overlapping aspects, that's one way of putting it. I'm not sure if it's the best way of putting it, but we do have to be careful not to artificially divorce these two aspects of belief. They are, in a sense, two sides of the same coin. It's interesting in that regard how John himself presents these two aspects as inextricably intertwined when he explains the very purpose of this gospel that we are reading from. In chapter 20 and verse 31, notice how John expresses himself. But these are written, all that he'd written concerning Jesus and all that he had done, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, if you wish the facts, that you would believe this to be true. But then what does he say? And that by believing you may have life in his name. So, there you see these two aspects there. They marry, and they must never be separated. Is death the end of the story?

Well, what do you think? How do you respond to these words of Jesus? I am the resurrection and the life. Have you discovered in Jesus, the one who is indeed the author of life, the source of life, the one who is life, and who can give life, who can give to you that hope of resurrection life, that though you will die, as we will all die unless he comes before you, you will rise again. You will be raised again on that last great day. And what about today? Have you discovered in Jesus the one who grants to those who believe in him? Eternal life, resurrection life, in the here and now? Is death the end of the story?

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? Let us pray.
Heavenly Father, we pray.