



"I Am the Resurrection and the Life"

This is the fifth of the "I AM" sayings of the saviour in the gospel of John, but we take it now since this magazine issue spans the Easter period. The words of Jesus in John 11:25-26 are almost invariably quoted at some point in every funeral service. So what do they tell us?

The Reality Of Life

The reality of life is that in the midst of life we are in death! This was the reality that faced Mary and Martha. Lazarus was dead and grief had invaded their once happy home. He whom they had loved so dearly was snatched from their presence and they were devastated. And that is a reality which confronts us all. Death and bereavement enter into all our homes at some point. And death is an ugly, universal and, more often than not, unexpected event which brings broken hearts and great distress in its wake. Of course death is but the ultimate of the troubles we face in life. When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden he was told that the perfection of the life he had known until then was finished. From then on he and his descendants would know trouble and strife – even from nature, with which he would now have to struggle by the sweat of his brow to make a living. The fact is that, through all of our life here on earth, we have to deal with various accidents, illnesses, difficulties, stresses, strains and troubles, eventually culminating in death. However much we might like to avoid or deny these things the reality is that they inevitably catch up with each of us.

The Resurrection And The Life

Into this world where death appears to wield undisputed sway, however, came one who described himself as *"the resurrection and the life on each of the three recorded occasions when our lord came into contact with death he challenged it, grappled with it and forced it to give up its prey. Jairus's daughter, the son of the widow of Nain and Lazarus all testify to Christ's regal power over man's 'last enemy' (1 Cor 15:26).* As D L moody quaintly phrased it: *"Jesus spoiled every funeral he attended".* When Jesus died on the cross, some of his last words were, *"it is finished!"* he did not say, *"I am finished."* This was not the cry of a defeated dying man, but the triumphant shout of a great victor. It was the cry of one who had completed his task and fulfilled his mission. It is important to note, therefore, that when Jesus said, *"I am the resurrection and the life,"* he didn't simply say that the of scriptures contained a promised resurrection of the dead. Rather, he made himself the central focus of that resurrection hope. In fact, his words are emphatic: *"I – even I – am the resurrection and the life."*

So one great lesson that we should learn from this is that there is no hope for resurrection – no hope for victory over death – apart from Jesus Christ. He isn't simply passing on the hope of resurrection to us. He isn't even just our example of what resurrection will be like. He is those things; but he's much more. He himself *is* the resurrection and the life. Remember that when Jesus said these words to Martha, it was before the crucifixion and the first Easter. Jesus claimed to be the resurrection in response to Martha's stated belief that her brother would rise on the last day. And what he was telling her was *"I'm not talking about some great mass resurrection at the end of the world. I'm the one who is going to raise the dead then **and now** because I am the resurrection and the life".* So Jesus was moving Martha's faith from a concept – the resurrection – to a person, himself. Resurrection is the victory over death, and Jesus Declares that he is the one who has the power to triumph over death.

But not only that, he is also "the life" – the one who is life itself and the one who therefore can give life to others. The lord Jesus is the principle of life! He is the source of life! He is god! The apostle

John (who saw these events) later wrote, *"and this is the record: that god hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his son. He that hath the son hath life: and he that hath not the son of god hath not life"* (1 John 5:11-12). As the "resurrection" he raised Lazarus from the dead – he got him up. As the "life," he sustained him with "life" he kept him up!

The Revelation On Life

Jesus Christ alone is *"the resurrection and the life"*. We clearly see that, not only in his miracles of raising the dead during the course of his earthly ministry, but supremely in his own rising again on the third day to live *"after the power of an endless life"*. As a result our whole lives can be characterized by hope.

First, Jesus presents hope concerning those who have died in him. He told Martha, *"he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"*. This is a hope that comforts us with respect to those who, as believers in Christ, have passed on before us. When death has taken away someone we love, our sorrow is real. We miss them and we long for their fellowship again. We genuinely grieve. Jesus himself knew what that grief felt like. But because Jesus himself is *"the resurrection and the life"*, our grief is experienced in the context and anticipation of future joy and victory. The apostle Paul wrote to his fellow believers in the city of Thessalonica, because many of their loved ones had died for their faith through persecution. He acknowledged their sorrow; and then he brought them tremendous comfort and assurance about their loved ones in 1 Thess 4:13-18.

Second, Jesus presents hope concerning those of us who live. He not only meant this hope to be a comfort to us when we lose a beloved one in the Lord by death. It's also meant to give us, who are living, hope even while we live. Jesus also told Martha, *"and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die"* (v 26). Literally *"...He shall in no way die unto eternity."* as Christians, we live our lives with the recognition that death may come to us at any time; but we also live with the recognition that death is in no way permanent. We will in no way die unto eternity. Physical death for the Christian should not be something which frightens us to our core. For those who believe in Jesus will simply go from life here to life in the paradise of God; it will be going from this world of sin and death to live in a world with neither sin nor death. And so, we live in hope (2 Cor 4:16-5:1).

Third, without Christ you never truly live. *"...Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die"*. There is a new kind of life that starts even now that does not run out even at death. Jesus imparts new life today. Christ did not come to improve our lives by giving us instructions. He came to impart new life by giving us his Spirit. Like Lazarus, we are dead, what the Scriptures call void of God's Spirit. Christ came to make us alive, securing forgiveness through His death and the operation of his Spirit to give us new life, a new heart with new loves and a new capacity to be all God envisions us to be as human beings made in his image.

Fourth, if our greatest enemy, death, has been defeated by Christ and subject to him, then all our lesser enemies are under his feet as well. Isn't it amazing how we will believe in the resurrection at the last day, yet really not trust Christ to help us in our trials today? What is there to fear? What can man do to us? If Jesus as *"the resurrection and the life"* could raise Lazarus from the dead and bring help and comfort to Mary and Martha in the course of their lives, can he not help you in the struggles, troubles and heartbreaks of your life today? With Christ you never really die. Without Christ, you never truly live. He is the resurrection and life our only hope in death; our only hope for life. Do you know him? Do you believe in him? The key to having this resurrection and life is to have Christ, the person, and not just to hold to a doctrine. Having made this great affirmation to Martha Jesus asked, *"do you believe this?"* well? Do you? Enough to believe in him?

Samuel Watson