

Easter Sunday 2026: I AM the Resurrection and the Life

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[0:00] Let's pray. Father, in John 12, there is a group of people who say we wish to see Jesus.!

But this time, it was different. This time, the lines on the patient monitor no longer showed an upward trajectory like it had previously.

All those numbers, blood pressure, oxygen saturation, turned increasingly negative until finally, that Friday morning, he slipped away from us.

And even though I don't think you could say that my father and I were particularly close, he being the classic silent Asian dad who wasn't big on physical expressions of affection and who hardly made any conversation, there's no doubt that his death really hit me.

No longer would my dad be there at the dinner table, happily chomping away at his favorite dishes.

No longer would he keep asking me to help him fix his watch, as I often dutifully did.

[1:36] No longer would he be there to watch my three children play and grow up and graduate. And he felt all so senseless, so unwelcome, so wrong.

You see, my friends, no matter how we try to dress it up, death is not natural. Sometimes people will say death is just a part of life.

It is its natural end. We see that, don't we, by how sometimes a death certificate will distinguish between death by natural causes and death by unnatural causes.

Of course, from a medical point of view, we understand the need to make such distinctions. It helps health professionals communicate to us that there was no outside intervention that caused the death.

It wasn't a bullet or an earthquake. But the truth is, all death is unnatural.

[2:45] As one theologian puts it, it is a festering wound, a waylaying of plants, a ghastly mark on the beautiful handiwork of the Lord's cosmos.

And that is certainly what Christianity teaches. Look all over the Bible, and what do you find? Death is named as a curse.

Death is said to be sin's wages. Indeed, death is personified as an enemy. This is not something natural.

How could it be? And so we are right to feel that it is horrible, it is dreadful, it is something that should be gotten rid of. But the question is, how can something as big and final as death be overcome?

For death's dark dominion is incredibly absolute, isn't it? It touches every era of history. It touches every existing human culture.

[3:54] It touches every place on this planet, no matter how remote. This has always been our world ever since Adam and Eve first sinned against God.

And what people have done is to employ different strategies. Some have simply tried to make their peace with it. Many centuries ago, a group of philosophers called the Epicureans argued that death was simply the cessation of sensation.

It's the moment we stop feeling anything at all. And so they said, oh, we shouldn't be afraid. Life is just feeling until we feel no more.

So death is really nothing to us. It sounds almost reasonable, doesn't it? Until you're the one sitting at the bedside.

You're the one watching those numbers fall. And you realize this is not nothing. This is loss. This is us being made worse off.

[5:09] Others have tried to go all in to fight death. You may have heard of Sam Oatman, the CEO of OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT.

He is one of the most powerful and influential figures in Silicon Valley. And a few years ago, he quietly poured \$180 million of his own money into a biotech startup called Retro Biosciences, whose sole mission was to add 10 healthy years to the average human lifespan.

He has since committed to hundreds of millions more. And he is not alone. Amazon founder Jeff Bezos has bankrolled a company called Altos Labs, which is dedicated to reversing the biology of aging.

Peter Thiel, the billionaire co-founder of PayPal, has founded the Methuselah Foundation, whose stated goal is to make, and I quote, 90 the new 50.

Now, these are not fringe figures. These are some of the most brilliant and driven people on the planet, and they are throwing everything they have at the same ancient enemy.

[6:29] And yet for all their brilliance, death has not yet blinked. Its dark dominion stands unchecked.

So we are back to the question, how can something as big and final as death be overcome? And that is exactly the question that hangs over this little town of Bethany as we open John chapter 11 and come to our first scene.

You see, here we are in a different culture and a different place. But we share so much in common with this family.

In verse 1, we are introduced to Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, a brother and his two sisters. And like many family homes, Bethany was probably sometimes filled with laughter, sometimes filled with arguments, and no doubt, plenty of love too.

And notice what else we are told about them. Verse 5, Jesus loves them. He loves Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

[7:44] These are not strangers to him. These are people he knows and is close with. And his love for them is not a secret. In verse 3, the sisters name Lazarus as the one you love.

Later on in verse 36, their family friends say the same thing. Jesus loves them.

And my friends, if you are someone who says you trust Jesus today, you can have full assurance you are in the same position as them. Do you know you can call yourself someone who is loved by Jesus?

Do you know you can say the exact same words as the Apostle Paul in Galatians 2 verse 20? Maybe the life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Maybe that's not how you normally think of yourself, but it is true if you confess Jesus as your Savior and Lord. So that makes what happens next both so natural and so confounding.

[9:01] That's why I have called this scene death's deep disorientation. You see, there is a problem. Again, a really common one, verse 1.

Lazarus has fallen ill. And in a world where medical advances are nothing like it is today, that is no small thing. Death's dark dominion, once again, is threatening to make its presence felt.

But Mary and Martha are not worried just yet. They've got a resource better than even Sam Altman or Jeff Bezos. They know Jesus, don't they?

They know the one who has proven he can heal. And they love him and he loves them. So naturally, verse 3, they tell him they are a problem.

And that is the right instinct. That is exactly what we should do. You see, the Lord says we can bring anything to him, whether big or small.

[10:10] Because that is what it means to know him. If he really loves you, you can bring anything and everything to him. You don't have to get the exact wording right.

The important thing is you are going to the right person. And Mary and Martha get that, don't they? All they say in verse 3 is, Lord, the one you love is ill.

In other words, Jesus. You know. We're putting it in your hands. That's what prayer looks like, is to call on his name.

But that is what makes what happens next so disorientating. In response to this request, we are told two things. First, verse 4, when he heard this, Jesus said, this illness will not end in death. Which gets us all excited and upbeat. Because, all right, Jesus is going to go and do his thing, isn't he? Especially since verse 5, he loves them.

[11:25] But then, we read verse 6. So, when he heard Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was two more days.

Now, this is so shocking. Even Bible translators don't quite know what to do with this. You see, if you've got the older NIV, it will say, Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus, yet, when he heard that Lazarus was ill.

So, they try to soften it a little by saying, yet. But actually, the conjunction used is normally translated, so, or therefore, as in the NIV 2011.

In other words, Jesus delayed his going precisely because he loved them. Now, how does that make sense?

When my father was admitted to the hospital, my brother had just gotten on a plane heading to the UK from Malaysia. As soon as he landed and heard that my dad's condition was serious, what did he do?

[12:34] He scrambled to find the next plane back to Kuching. Within 24 hours, he was on another long haul flight. That's what you naturally do, don't you?

Especially for your loved ones. But Jesus, he does the very opposite for his loved ones. And indeed, because of his delay, Lazarus dies.

And we just cannot believe this. I mean, how can this make sense? Is Jesus just playing some sick game? Is he just not bothered? How can he say Lazarus' situation will not end in death and then just let him die?

And aren't those the questions we sometimes ask too? God, why are you absent? We went to you, but you were not there.

Why do you let this happen? Why are you letting death have the final word? Maybe on this Easter Sunday, some of you are asking those exact same questions.

[13:45] Something has happened in your life that just doesn't make sense. And you have gone to Jesus, but he doesn't seem to be there.

That was certainly how Mary and Martha felt when Jesus finally made his move, Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

There seemed to be no point anymore for Jesus to come. Indeed, when he finally arrived, verse 21, Martha said to him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

And a little later, when Mary came to greet him, verse 32, she says the exact same thing. Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

But you're too late. So why are you here? What can you do? That's the question at the back of their minds.

[14:57] That is the deep disorientation death has left them with. But here, I just want to pause and notice a couple of things. Did you notice that even in their grief, even in their disorientation, both sisters still go looking for Jesus?

They were brokenhearted. Yes. They had many, many questions. But they didn't withdraw. They didn't give Jesus the cold shoulder.

They didn't hide themselves from him. And Jesus never, ever rebukes them for what they say. He lets them express their pain.

My friends, that is what Jesus wants you and I to do. Even when Jesus feels absent, even when we have so many questions, Jesus says we can still reach out to him.

You see, typically, suffering does one of two things to us. It either drives us inward towards silence or outwards towards anger and distance.

[16:11] maybe one or two of you know exactly what I mean because that is what you are presently experiencing. But here, it does something else.

It drives them to struggle and wrestle even more with Jesus. It keeps them in relationship with him. Now, that wrestling is hard because even though Jesus does have a purpose in all of this, as we'll soon see, they can't see it yet.

And it is hard because Jesus is also teaching us he doesn't exist to dance to our tune. He doesn't feel the need to fit our assumptions and expectations.

But that is what faith in Jesus is all about. It means trusting him to do his thing not our thing. Faith is dependence not declaration.

Now, let's come back to our story. Jesus, as we have learned already, does eventually come. He arrives not on their timeline, not in the way they hope, but he is now present.

[17:31] And when he comes, he begins to help us understand why he allowed Mary and Martha to pass through death's deep disorientation. Because he comes with both tears and truth.

And those two things together will begin to reframe everything that's just happened and reveal to us who he truly is.

And that is why I titled the next scene of today's story, death's divine deliverer. Death's divine deliverer. Let's look first at how he responds to Mary.

Let's pick up the story from verse 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.

When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Where have you laid him? he asked.

[18:37] Come and see, Lord, they replied. Jesus wept. clearly Mary is consumed with grief. But do you notice how Jesus responds to her?

Not with a, cheer up, don't you believe in me? No, look at verse 33. He was deeply moved. He was troubled. And then verse 35, Jesus wept.

And in his response, Jesus isn't just feeling personal sympathy for one family. No, the Greek words being used here carry real intensity, suggesting a kind of holy indignation or agitation, like a forceful groan from deep within.

For as Jesus looks at Lazarus' death, he sees a global tragedy, an instance of the world not being as it should be. He sees a world spoiled by death's dark dominion, the devastating fruit of humanity's rebellion against the law of life.

He hates what sin and death have done to his creation, and he hates that this family he loves is now touched by it. And he weeps.

[20:02] My friends, that is how Jesus feels about every bereavement and tragedy you suffer. He is not indifferent. Quite the opposite, in fact, he sheds tears, real tears.

He is with you in the pain. But that is not where Jesus stops. Because if all Jesus does is weep, then all he has given us is a moving example of one man's love.

Which is okay as far as it goes, but it really doesn't make Easter any form of good news. Not really. Because it offers a negative answer to the question of the Jews in verse 37.

Could he not keep this man from dying? it offers no solution to our big question. How can something as big and final as death be overcome?

But Jesus doesn't just offer tears. He now offers the truth about who he really is. And he is about to reveal to us he is death's divine deliverer.

[21:26] Let's go now to his exchange with Martha verse 21. Lord, Martha said to Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

Now, Martha is distressed, that's why she says what she says. But she's not accusing Jesus. She is lamenting but not blaming.

Indeed, even in her confusion and pain, she goes on to say something remarkable, verse 22. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.

In other words, Martha is saying, I don't understand why you waited. I have so many questions, yet I still have confidence you are a man of God.

And though her faith is faint, Jesus meets her exactly where she is, verse 23. Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again.

[22:30] And Martha hears this and goes, what? Sorry, Jesus, I don't get you. So she simply assumes the most theologically safe assumption or interpretation, verse 24.

I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. In other words, she is saying, yes, yes, Jesus, I know one day in the future, Lazarus will rise.

I believe that. And she does believe it, for she is a good Jew. And like all Jews, she knows her scripture. She believes God will raise all the dead on the day of judgment.

But notice what she is doing. She is placing the hope she needs today at a safe distance, somewhere in the future, somewhere abstract.

Now, isn't that sometimes what we do with Jesus? We believe in the resurrection. In theory, we believe God is good.

[23:42] In theory, we believe he works all things together. In theory, we don't know. But sometimes when we are staring suffering and death in the face, that becomes more difficult to believe.

But Jesus will not let us keep things abstract. He is about to make it very personal. Verse 25, life. I am the resurrection and the life, he declares.

The one who believes in me will live even though they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?

So let's unpack what Jesus is saying. And I think one helpful way to do this is to understand in this passage, there are two kinds of lives being referred to.

On the one hand, there is the life which simply refers to our existence and duration here on earth.

That is the kind of life that Mary and Martha are lamenting about in verses 21 and 32.

[24:53] That is the kind of life they wish Jesus had saved. So that's one kind of life. But there is also the other kind of life, the one Jesus is referring to in verses 25 and 26.

This is the life which isn't just about our biological existence, but about our life before God, with God, forever and ever.

It is the kind of life that is lived in unbroken fellowship with God. Life where there is now no condemnation, no suffering, no separation.

Sometimes John refers to this second kind of life as eternal life. Now let us just conduct a thought experiment.

Imagine Jesus had shown up in time and he was Lazarus. His fever breaks, the color comes back to his face, and everyone is so relieved and grateful.

[26:03] Everyone will be saying, wow, what a wonderful healer Jesus is. But here's the thing, no one will know Jesus' true identity.

And Lazarus would still have died. Maybe not that week, or even that year, but eventually.

and when that time comes, Jesus wouldn't have been there to heal him, and death would have had the last word after all.

For no mere healer, no matter how gifted he is, can defeat death. He can only ever postpone it. He can buy you time, but he can't give you life, especially the second one, which death cannot touch. And in the end, if death's dark dominion remains, how much help can that be in the ultimate scheme of things? And that is why Jesus doesn't simply go on a healing mission.

[27:15] Because he loves Mary and Martha too much for that. That is why earlier in verses 14 and 15, he said, Lazarus is dead and for your sake I am glad I was not there.

I mean, wow, what a thing to say. And at that time it sounded so insensitive. But now we know it's because he loved them too much to give them only a healing.

For did you notice how he finishes that sentence in verse 15. The whole purpose of his delay is so that you may believe. That is the whole point.

Jesus delays, then goes to do what he is about to do so that Mary and Martha and the disciples and you and I reading this 2,000 years later would come to know that Jesus is not merely a healer.

he is the resurrection and the life. That's why he waited. That's why he let Mary and Martha sit in death's deep disorientation because he loved them and he loves us too much to leave us thinking that a healer is all we need when what we really need is to trust in Jesus as death's divine deliverer.

[28:50] he transforms death into sleep and he will be the one to wake these sleeping ones up as verses 11 to 13 puts it. Which brings us to our final scene for today death's decisive defeat.

You see it's one thing to declare I am the resurrection and the life and it's another thing to back it up. So now Jesus goes to do just that.

He goes to the tomb he prays then with a loud voice he cries out Lazarus come out and just like that a dead man walks out.

He might still be wrapped in grave clothes but he is alive and breathing. Death's dark dominion has now been shattered.

The ultimate enemy is forced to release its grip. And Jesus provides undeniable evidence that he is exactly who he says he is. And as verse 42 makes clear this miracle is so that we may believe.

[30:04] So that we may know he is the resurrection and the life. So that we know in him and only in Christ alone can we receive that second kind of life.

Eternal joyful unbroken fellowship with God. And I want you to see one other thing. Did you notice how in this passage Lazarus and Jesus are moving in two opposite directions?

Lazarus very obviously is moving from death to life. But did you notice Jesus is moving in the exact opposite direction?

Have a look at verses 7 and 8. When he tells his disciples he is going to Judea where Bethany is basically they tell him are you crazy?

That's where your opponents try to stone you and kill you. But Jesus says I'm going anyway because I've got to wake Lazarus up.

[31:11] In other words in going to bring Lazarus from death to life Jesus is at the same time getting ready to go to the place where he could very well die.

And in fact if we were to read beyond our passage today past verse 44 we will see that even more clearly Jesus is definitely heading towards his death.

life. And that is important because in the end how is it Lazarus or any of us can ever enjoy that second kind of life?

Only if John 11 is followed by John 19 and 20. Only if Jesus first dies and is himself raised to life defeating death once and for all.

Otherwise Lazarus and all of us will remain under death's dominion. And that my friends is exactly what happens.

[32:12] That is the good news of Easter. Not mere healing and deliverance from disease but new life freed from the penalty and power of sin.

Easter tells us death is dead love has won Christ has conquered and all who trust in him can be raised with him. So today let me ask you the same question Jesus asked Martha.

Do you believe this? There's some of you here today who are not Christians and maybe you have some questions about how it is possible Jesus really did rise from the dead because that's fair enough.

That's an incredible claim isn't it? And I didn't really touch today on why it's rational to believe Jesus rose from the dead. Well if that is you I'm happy to introduce you to some material for you to read up on as mentioned in the bulletin.

But perhaps you already accept that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. And if that is you then right here right now as you ponder the reality of death let me ask you do you not just accept this intellectually but trust Jesus as death's divine deliverer.

[33:44] Because if you do then death's dark dominion over you is already broken not because you have fought it not because you have made your peace with it but because the one who defeated it once for all on that first Easter morning has said to you I am the resurrection and the life and I love you.

So will you respond to my invitation? And if you already do believe this do you live as someone who knows this is the end of the story because if the end of your story is that second kind of life then the scary chapters in the middle don't have to break you you can face your grief your failure and even your mortality with a steady heart knowing your hope is secure for your king has already walked out of the grave and he is calling your name to follow him do you believe this let's pause for a moment to ponder then let's pray heavenly father this

Easter morning!

Amen