

STUDY NOTES

I am the resurrection and life John 11 v25

Jesus care for those who grieve

*‘Jesus said to her,
“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?”’*

John 11 v25-26

These famous words have a special resonance on Remembrance Sunday as we remember with thanksgiving those who lived and died in the service of others.

Perhaps you are here today as you remember someone in particular, someone precious to you and although no longer with you, still as important to you as when they were alive.

Perhaps you are here today as you remember no single person in particular but to recall with grateful thanks those who died and suffered so that we might have the freedom that we do.

Perhaps you are here today as you are every week and Remembrance Sunday reminds you of a loss in your own life, that perhaps not connected directly with wars provides an opportunity to reflect and give thanks for their lives.

Whatever the case these words of Jesus remind us of the personal nature of his care for those who grieve

1) Personal nature of Jesus care for those who grieve

Jesus said to her.... v25

Of the ‘*I am*’ sayings that we have considered so far in this series, this is the first to be spoken to an individual.

- Previously he had spoken to the crowd that followed him over the lake after the feeding of the 5,000 and he declared ‘*I am the bread of life*’ John 6 v35
- Later, on the eve of his arrest, he said to the disciples ‘*I am the true vine*’ John 15 v1 & 5 (Note imagery of the vine being related to Israel and how often they did not live up to being the true vine).

This is **personal**, as the root of our faith is personal, in that it concerns our relationship with Jesus. We maybe in a congregation today or part of a small group as we read these notes, but the core context of this particular ‘*I am*’ saying is fundamentally personal as it is addressed to an individual.

The ‘*her*’ (v25) is Martha, sister of Mary. Mary was more inclined to sit at Jesus feet and choose the better thing to do than Martha who was in the words of the AV ‘*cumbered about much serving*’ worrying more about the preparations for the meal she was getting ready for Jesus and his disciples. (Luke 10 v38-42).

This is Martha who is sister of Lazarus who with Mary had sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was very ill.

The close and personal nature of this family's relationship with Jesus is emphasised by John.

- The sisters message to Jesus stated '*the one whom you love is sick*' John 11v3.
- This particularly intimate relationships with Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus is also intimidated when Jesus eventually got there and just after this 'I am' saying. We read that Jesus wept (v35) on meeting Mary and seeing her (and her sister's distress) and some of the Jews who were standing around and observed his tears said '*See how he loved him*' John 11v36.
- Both of these observations echo John's editorial comment earlier in the chapter as he notes in v5 *Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*

Group and Personal Application

On your own in the group

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being high and 1 being low how close would you describe your relationship to Jesus and why?

2) The powerful nature of Jesus care for those who grieve.

The close and personal nature of the relationship between Jesus and this family makes the next statement all the more puzzling.

*Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick,
he stayed where he was two more days'*

v6

It seems to be a deliberate act on behalf of Jesus in delaying going to Lazarus and Martha and Mary. John highlights this.

Jesus said

*This sickness will not end in death.
No it is for God's glory,
so that God's Son will be glorified through it.*

John 11 v4

In other words there is something **more powerful and of greater significance** to be drawn from this incident than the feelings of those directly and immediately affected. As in the losses we remember with heartache through conflict, a mitigating factor, and one that is often given to provide some meaning to their deaths, is usually some bigger goal, a greater good that puts the loss of life into some larger context. Current arguments about the wisdom of our engagement in Afghanistan is nothing new as the rightness of previous conflicts that have involved considerable loss of life have been debated at the time and in retrospect.

In this case Lazarus 'death' and subsequent rising to life is put in the context of demonstrating the true nature of Jesus as one who has power even over death itself. His 'glory' will be revealed in his own death and resurrection that Lazarus death and 'resurrection' points too.

The power of Jesus is not just confined to the bigger picture but is also **personally powerful** which the very delay of Jesus in going to Lazarus illustrates. The poignancy of his delay is reflected when he eventually arrives in Bethany and Martha for ever the busy one, hurries out to meet him whilst Mary stayed at home.

*'Lord' Martha said to Jesus,
'If you had been here, my brother would not have died'.*

If Jesus had been there he could have cured Lazarus.

More tellingly if he had not delayed in coming he might have been here before he died.

As with all '*if onlys*' there is a mixture of regret, anger and blame

As Tom Wright movingly comments this is like one of our '*if onlys*' that so often surrounds grief.

- *If only* our loved one had not joined up with that regiment.
- *If only* he had taken the leave that was coming to him.
- *If only* they had not been in that place at that time when that happened.

Group and Personal Application

Perhaps in a moment of quiet reflection you can consider the '*if onlys*' that you sometimes live with in connection with the loss of someone you have loved.

If you feel able to you might like to share this with a trusted friend in the group or perhaps write it down in a journal so that you can 'own' the '*if onlys*' that you live with.

It is as if we want to change the past, so the present can be more as we would want it to be. Films capture this desire such as the *Back to the Future* series. Whilst these films are captivating we know that they are fantasy.

Jesus though turns towards the future not the past as being determinative of how we live in the present.

Your brother will rise again

John 11v23

Wright comments...

*Instead of looking at the past,
and dreaming of what might have been (but now can't be)
he invites her to look to the future.*

Jesus initial response is one that Martha can agree with.

Jesus said to her 'Your brother will rise again'

Martha answered

'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day'

John 11 v24

Like many Jews of her time she had a belief that one day God would bring about a vision of new heavens and new earth. (Is 65 & 66).

As Tom Wright comments

*'They shared the vision of Isaiah 65 & 66,
a vision of new heavens and new earth,
God's whole new world, a world like ours
only with it's beauty & power enhanced
and it's pain and ugliness and grief abolished'.*

Many people today, whilst not attending Church, would like to believe in a new life that is to come and have a hope for a new start for the earth.

- In 2000 David Hunt and Kay Hunt undertook research for the Soul of Britain Survey and found that despite the secularisation of society people were more spiritual if less religious than previously thought.
- In 2005 more in depth research in the Diocese of Coventry by Yvonne Richmond and written up by Nick Spencer suggested that Heaven, albeit a more platonic picture of dismembered souls than a Christian view of bodily resurrection, remained stubbornly popular.

For Martha her belief went a little further in that she shared the belief that all of God's people, both past and present, would be given new bodies to share in the life of this new creation.

Group and Personal Application

If you have a hope of heaven or life after death, how would you describe it and what evidence do you have for this in the Bible?

Jesus takes her and ourselves much further with his response.

Jesus said to her

I am the resurrection and the life.

John 11 v25-26

In other words the key is not in the past but in the future which **in the person of Jesus** is brought into the reality of Martha's present.

This is not some vague belief in a resurrection that is some distance away which is surrounded by images of clouds and angels and cerebrums. **Rather the key to all of this is that it is Jesus who brings the reality of resurrection life into the mess and muddle of our present situation.**

When Martha had responded '*I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day*' this was more to do with doctrine, when **the key is in the person of Jesus.**

'I am the resurrection and life.....

The Christian faith was described on this week's new TV series, Diarmaid MacCulloch's '*A History of Christianity*' (BBC Four), as essentially not a set of beliefs but more of a personality cult. This concentration on the person of Jesus is in line with John's overriding desire to concentrate on the person of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God....
John 20:31

That is what the '*I am*' sayings are all about.

Jesus emphasis that it is belief in him, not a set of beliefs, that is key to having 'life'.

As another writer comments

*Jesus is the resurrection and life;
apart from him there is no resurrection and no life;
and where he is, resurrection and life must be.*

Barrett 396

Jesus continues

*He who believes in me will live,
even though he dies;
and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*

John 11 v26

John uses the word '**life**' 44 times in this gospel. It is a key concept from beginning to end

*In him was **life**, and that **life** was the light of men'*

John 1 v4

*But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that by believing you may have **life** in his name*

John 20 v31

'Life' is not some reified aloof ideal, but rather that it is something of active involvement, a life expressed in the reality of this existence. It is not separated out into some form of dualistic thinking between body and soul, where what is really important is the soul. Rather the view of life here is that which is earthed in the reality of our circumstances. This is the Hebraic understanding of 'life'. The power of Jesus in this instant has to do with the power to change Martha's present circumstances and perceptions. As already stated the location of this *I am* saying in John's gospel points of course to the bodily resurrection of Jesus that soon follows as John leads from this incident into the triumphant entry into Jerusalem (chapter 12) and the events leading up to the death and resurrection of Jesus. This though has an impact in the present, in the way we live our lives now not just some vague hope for the future.

This 'life' is clearly **eternal** as it springs from one who is eternal in being present at Creation and bringing all things into being.

*He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things were made;
without him nothing that was made that has been made.*

John 1 v2-3

Jesus will also bring all things to a conclusion.

*I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the First and the Last,
the Beginning and the End*

Rev 22 v13

The bringing of eternal life is central to Jesus mission

*For God so loved the world
that he gave his on and only Son,
that whoever believes in him
shall not perish (the opposite of life!)
but have eternal life.*

John 3 : 16

The very power and curse of the fall, death, has been done away with (Rom 5:12-13) and the sole reason is Jesus and his ministry.

Group and Personal Application

In what ways does the assurance of eternal life affect the way you live your life in the present?

3) The provocative nature of Jesus care for those who grieve.

We have not yet completed the whole verse

*Jesus said to her
I am the resurrection and the life.
He who believes in me will live, even though he dies,
and whoever believes in me will never die.
Do you believe this?*

Jesus is often portrayed by John as challenging those whom he encounters as well as coming alongside them in their circumstances.

He does this ...

- to Nicodemus
I tell you the truth no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born again John 3 v3
- to the women at the well
Go, call your husband and come back John 5 v16
- to the women caught in the act of adultery
Go now and leave your life of sin... John 8 v11
- to Peter during the last post resurrection appearance
Do you truly love me more than these? (John 21 v15, v16, & v17)

There appears to be a deliberate test of Martha's faith before Jesus has undertaken the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. Here the 'I am' saying and the revelation of the true character and nature of Jesus as the Christ the Son of God **precedes** the 'sign'.

The challenge here, as it is though the whole of John's gospel, is to believe.

- Three times in these two verses John uses the word 'believe'.
- In his summary purpose for the whole gospel the action he desires is belief.

But these are written that you may believe....

John 20 v31

This is not some vague post modern relativism, where it is said it does not matter what you believe as long as you believe something. For John that would be utter nonsense and frankly I feel it is intellectual nonsense. The real source of care and comfort for those who grieve on this Remembrance Sunday is to be found in belief in Jesus being the Christ, the Messiah the Son of God who comes to us personally and powerfully provides a change to our present circumstances and our future hope through these amazing words.

I am the resurrection and the life

Group and Personal Application

So how would you answer Jesus provocative question?

Do you believe this?

Compare your answer to that of Martha's. (v27)