

John 11 “I Am the Resurrection and the Life”
Ezekiel 37
Psalm 16

July 19, 2020

The book of Kings was written to show Israel why the exile had to come.
There are three concentric stories about three dynasties – and three temples.

First, the book of Kings tells the story of the house of David –
with Solomon building the temple in Jerusalem.

Second, Kings tells the story of Jeroboam and the division of the kingdom –
with Jeroboam building shrines at Bethel and Dan for the northern kingdom.

Third, Kings tells the story of the house of Omri –
with his son, Ahab, building a temple for Baal in Samaria.

Those three stories then end in reverse order:

The house of Ahab is destroyed – and the temple of Baal is demolished by Jehu.
The northern kingdom is destroyed – and the shrine at Bethel is demolished by Josiah.
And finally the house of David is defeated –
and the temple at Jerusalem is demolished by Nebuchadnezzar.

The relentless theme of the book of the Kings is that Israel must die –
no prophet, no priest, no king can save them.

But at the heart of the book – in the middle of that third story (the story of Ahab) –
in the very center of the book of Kings –
you have the story of Elijah and Elisha.

Both Elijah and Elisha raise a dead son.
Elijah raises a Gentile woman’s son.
Elisha raises an Israelite woman’s son.
And the exact center of the book is the ascension of Elijah to heaven.

Israel is going to die.
But Israel’s hope is that *God raises the dead!*
And seats his servant at his right hand!

That’s the message of Ezekiel 37 as well.
The difference is that Ezekiel 37 says it bluntly!
You will know that I am the LORD when I open your graves
and raise you from your graves!

But that is why we also read the second half of Ezekiel 37 –

because the resurrection of Israel will also mean the reunion of Israel –
Jew and Samaritan (Judah and Israel) will be restored –
and the blessing of Abraham will come to the nations,
because the nations will know that the LORD is God!

And what Ezekiel promises is what Jesus does.

That's why we are singing Psalm 16 in response:

Psalm 16 is a song of the resurrection.

“my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure.

For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.”

Jesus is the resurrection and the life!

Sing TPH 16A

Read John 11:1-54

Notice at the end of the story that Jesus goes to a town called Ephraim.

He just said that he is the resurrection and the life –

he just raised a man from his grave (signaling that Ezekiel 37 is happening!) –

and then he goes to Ephraim

(which in Ezek 37 is the name for the northern kingdom of Israel).

Because Jesus is “gathering into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”

In his previous signs, Jesus has turned water into wine or multiplied loaves.

He healed an official's son, gave sight to the blind, and healed a paralytic.

Now Jesus goes after death itself!

The raising of Lazarus is the hinge of John's Gospel.

It is the final sign that Jesus performs as a prelude to his own resurrection.

It is the final challenge to the Pharisees and leaders of the Jews,

issued as a declaration of war against the power of death.

The light of the world has come,

not merely to illumine those who walk in darkness metaphorically,

but to shine his penetrating light even into the depths of the grave.

What will you do with Jesus?

1. “This Illness Does Not Lead to Death”: Lazarus and His Sisters (v1-6)

a. Mary – Who Anointed the Lord

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” ⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the

*Son of God may be glorified through it.”*⁵ *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*
⁶ *So, when he heard that Lazarus^[a] was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*

Verses 1-2 form a chiasm with Martha at the center:

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany,
the village of Mary
and her sister Martha.

It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair,
whose brother Lazarus was ill.

Of course, we haven't heard yet about Mary anointing the Lord.

She will do that in chapter 12.

But this is the same event that is spoken of in Matthew 26 and Mark 14,

In Matthew and Mark Jesus says that

“wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world,
what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”

It is so well known that John can reference the event before he tells us about it!

Everyone knows about this woman,

so John simply says—it was Mary.

But in verse three the sisters send word that Lazarus is sick.

They have seen Jesus heal the sick, so they are hopeful that he will come in time.

But Jesus delays.

He says, “this illness does not lead to death.

It is for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (4)

Jesus is about to reveal his glory.

John is the only gospel that does not record the transfiguration of Christ,
where Jesus appears on the mountain with Moses and Elijah.

In John's gospel, Jesus reveals his glory through the signs that he performs.

The raising of Lazarus functions as the transfiguration in John's Gospel,

including the confession of Martha in verse 27,

which sets up the raising of Lazarus,

parallel to Peter's confession in the synoptic gospels before the transfiguration.

2. “Lazarus Has Fallen Asleep”: Jesus and His Disciples (v7-16)

a. Thomas – Let Us Die with Him

But having waited two days, Jesus says to his disciples,

“Let us go to Judea again.”

⁷ *Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.”*⁸ *The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?”*⁹ *Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.*¹⁰ *But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles,*

because the light is not in him.”¹¹ After saying these things, he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.”¹² The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.”¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died,¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin,^[b] said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

The disciples are not at all convinced that this is a good idea.

Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?

This doesn't sound like a good plan!

But Jesus knows what he is doing.

It is not yet his hour.

“Are there not twelve hours in the day?”

[an hour – in the ancient world – is one-twelfth of daylight.

Every day has twelve hours – every night has twelve hours.

They didn't have mechanical clocks –

so the sun *always* goes down at the twelfth hour.]

But then Jesus adds:

“If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble,
because he sees the light of this world.

But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles,
because the light is not in him.” (9-10)

It is still day.

It is drawing nigh to the eleventh hour,

but it is still day.

Jesus has one more sign to perform before the night falls.

As long as Jesus is doing the will of the Father,
he has nothing to fear from the coming night.

So he says to his disciples:

“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.”

The disciples completely miss the point.

“Lord, if he has fallen asleep he will recover”!

But Jesus gently explains:

“Lazarus has died.”

But then he adds,

“And for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.

But let us go to him.”

Thomas understood what was at stake.

Thomas is more famous for his doubt later in John's gospel.

But here is the one disciple who seems to get it – at least a little!

Turning to the other disciples he said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

He didn't understand Jesus' purpose,

but he knew that his place was behind Jesus.

You understand far better than Thomas what Jesus was doing.

Will you also follow Jesus?

This is John's point.

In spite of the fact that the disciples miss the point of what Jesus is saying,
they still follow him,

because they know that he has the words of eternal life (6:68).

What about you?

Will you follow Christ both in life and in death?

So the twelve come with Jesus to Bethany,

and discover that Lazarus has been dead for four days.

Even if Jesus had left immediately, he would have been too late.

But Jesus wanted to make it perfectly clear that he *wanted* to be late.

He did not come as soon as he heard that Lazarus was sick.

He waited.

He wanted to make sure that Lazarus was good and dead.

In later Jewish thought the soul of a deceased man stays around the body for three days..

Only once the body starts to decompose does the soul leave permanently.

Something like that seems to be at work here.

3. "I Am the Resurrection and the Life" (v17-27)

a. Martha – You Are the Christ

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles^[c] off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life.^[d] Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

In verses 20-37 we come to the center of the narrative:

three times in these verses we hear people saying that Jesus could have healed Lazarus.

Martha says in verse 21 "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Mary says in verse 32, "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

And in echo of their mournful rebuke, the Jews say in verse 36,

"Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man
also have kept this man from dying?"

Jesus responds to the sisters,
but he does not speak to the Jews.
He is finished with them.
There will be no more debates with the Jews in John's Gospel

But we hear in verse 19 that many of the Jews had come to console Martha and Mary.
Apparently their family was well-connected to the leadership in Jerusalem,
and even though it is well known that they are disciples of Jesus,
the Jews bring their condolences personally.

But when Martha hears that Jesus is coming, she goes out to meet him:
"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."
But with her rebuke she adds words of trust and confidence:
"but even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."
Jesus says plainly to her:
"Your brother will rise again."
And she says, "I know...he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."
Martha understands the comfort of the gospel.
She believes that God will indeed raise up his people at the last day.
There is only one problem with her view of the resurrection:
she does not connect the resurrection with Jesus.
She's thinking in terms of standard, faithful Old Testament eschatology:
at the last day God will judge the nations,
and faithful Israel will be justified, and their enemies will be condemned.

What Jesus says next reorients the entire Old Testament doctrine of the resurrection.
"I am the resurrection and the life."
You cannot think about the resurrection without seeing Jesus.
All that the Old Testament said about the vindication of faithful Israel
was about Jesus.
He is the one who would be raised from the dead.
His resurrection *is* the vindication of faithful Israel,
because he *is* Israel.
And so he says "whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,
and everyone who believes in me shall never die.
Do you believe this?"

Because Jesus *is* the resurrection and the life.
What does it mean that Jesus is the resurrection and the life?
Jesus fleshes this out in the following words.
I am the resurrection:
"Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."
In the resurrection, the believer passes through death into everlasting life.

So in that sense resurrection is easy to understand.

I am the resurrection means that those who believe in Jesus
will be raised from the dead.

But also, “I am the life.”

“and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”

Her brother is lying *dead* in the tomb.

What do you mean, Jesus?

My brother believed in you – and he is dead!!

No, Martha, listen again:

“everyone who *lives and believes* in me shall never die.”

I am the life.

The life that I give is eternal life!

Because I am the Son of God –

and the Father has given the Son to have life in himself!

And so the one to whom I give life will never die!

Martha’s response is interesting.

She doesn’t seem confused or surprised.

In fact, she makes the same confession of faith

that Peter makes at the transfiguration of Jesus in the synoptic gospels:

“Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God,
who is coming into the world.”

Martha may not yet understand all that this means,
but she gets the point.

Jesus is God’s anointed one—the Messiah—who is going to make everything right.

Even her brother.

She is still thinking that everything will be right on the last day.

And she is right.

What she has not realized is that the last day has come.

All that Israel was expecting to happen at the end of history,

is about to happen in the middle of history.

And Lazarus and his sisters will have a front row seat.

4. “Where Have You Laid Him?” (v28-37)

a. Mary – “If You Had Been Here...”

²⁸ *When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”* ²⁹ *And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.*

³⁰ *Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.* ³¹ *When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.* ³² *Now when*

Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³ *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved^[e] in his spirit and greatly troubled.* ³⁴ *And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”* ³⁵ *Jesus wept.* ³⁶ *So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”* ³⁷ *But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”*

Comforted, Martha now calls for her sister.

Not wanting to let the Jews know that Jesus has come,
she tells Mary privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”
Jesus was wanted by the leaders of the Jews for blasphemy,
so it would not be a good idea to get too close to them.
So Mary rose quickly and went to Jesus—
but the Jews followed, “supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep.”
But when Mary came to Jesus,
she fell at his feet, saying
“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”
—the same words of reproach her sister had used.

This time, however, Jesus does not reply.

He knows full well what he has come to do,
but still he is “deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled”
as he sees them weeping.
The word for “deeply moved” carries the overtones of anger and not just grief.
The eternal Son of God truly became a man,
and he felt the whole range of emotion that we feel.
And though he came to awaken Lazarus, he could not but be outraged—
both over the misery and grief of this broken world,
and over the unbelief of the Jews.

His hour is approaching—and Jesus is beginning to feel its weight.
All he says is “Where have you laid him?”
They replied, “Lord, come and see.”
Jesus wept.

Notice that, for Jesus, grief and outrage are not opposed to each other!

As one commentator puts it,
“the same sin and death, the same unbelief, that prompted his outrage
also generated his grief.
Those who follow Jesus as his disciples today do well to learn the same tension —
that grief and compassion without outrage reduce to mere sentiment,
while outrage without grief hardens into self-righteous arrogance...”
(Carson, 416)

But the world does not see this!

So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

But some echoed the grieving rebuke of the sisters:

"Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man
also have kept this man from dying?"

They recognize that this Jesus could work miracles.

But they do not believe!

They do not trust in him.

Indeed, the completely miss the point of who he is!

5. "That They May Believe That You Sent Me" (v38-44)

a. Lazarus – the Man Who Had Died

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.

³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." ⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

In verse 38,

Once again Jesus was outraged.

And now we understand why John chose a word that included the idea of anger!

His grief is not merely the ordinary grief over the passing of a friend,

his grief includes his anger at the hardened hearts of those who will not see.

He does not speak to the Jews.

He has nothing to say to them.

But he comes to the tomb—a cave with a stone against the opening,

and commands that the stone be taken away.

"I am the resurrection and the life....Do you believe this?"

Those words must have been echoing in Martha's head,

but she still doesn't get the point:

"Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days."

But Jesus turns to her and says, "Did I not tell you that if you believed
you would see the glory of God?"

So Martha relented, and they removed the stone.

Then Jesus prayed to the Father,

"Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

I knew that you always hear me,

but I said this on account of the people standing around,
that they may believe that you sent me.”
He still does not address the Jews,
but he makes it clear that this is directed at them.
They have sought to kill him,
but he will still pray that they will believe in him.
Indeed, what he will do next is designed to demonstrate that the Father sent Jesus.

Elijah and Elisha both raised children who had just died,
and the synoptic gospels tell of Jesus doing the same.
But John’s account of the raising of Lazarus is different.
Those were ordinary miracles, you might say.
They were designed to confirm the teaching of the one who performed the miracle.
But John puts the raising of Lazarus into a different category.
Lazarus had been dead for four days (he says that twice).
Lazarus had already been buried, and had been placed in his grave.
The raising of Lazarus takes us back to Ezekiel 37, and the Valley of Dry Bones.
The whole house of Israel was in exile,
and exile was portrayed as a kind of death—
the whole of Israel is dead and buried.
But God promises
“Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves,
O my people.
And I will bring you into the land of Israel.
And you shall know that I am Yahweh,
when I open your graves and raise you from your graves,
O my people.
And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live,
and I will place you in your own land.
Then you shall know that I am Yahweh.” (Ezek. 37:12-14)

It is not enough that Lazarus is dead.
Jesus cannot come to Bethany until Lazarus is buried,
because the point is to reveal the glory of God
in the raising of Lazarus from the grave.

“I am the resurrection and the life.”
The day has come when Yahweh is going to open the graves of his people,
and raise them up, place his Spirit in them, and restore them from exile.
And so Jesus says in a loud voice,
“Lazarus, come out!”
And the man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips,
and his face wrapped with a cloth.
Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

My sheep know my voice.

When Lazarus heard the voice of the Good Shepherd,
he could do nothing but obey.
He stood up, grave clothes and all,
and came.

John immediately moves to the response of the Jews.

Some believe, but others go to the Pharisees and tell the story.

So the Pharisees and chief priests gather,
saying “what are we to do? For this man performs many signs.
If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him,
and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

John calls our attention to their debate,

because the meaning of the raising of Lazarus
was understood best by Caiaphas, the high priest.

“You know nothing at all.

Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people,
not that the whole nation should perish.”

What Caiaphas was thinking is beside the point.

As high priest “he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation,
and not for the nation only,
but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”

Now the desire to get rid of Jesus has become a formal plot to put him to death.

And so Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews,
but went into the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim.

Remember that Ephraim was another name for the northern kingdom,
whose capital city was Samaria.

Caiaphas has just prophesied unwittingly that Jesus will gather
the children of God from the nations,
now Jesus is forced into exile in Ephraim.

In the next chapter the Gentiles will come to see him.

The resurrection of Lazarus is the final sign that Jesus performs before the Jews.

It is the final challenge that he sets forth before the authorities.

And behind the challenge to their authority is his challenge to the power of death itself.

In the raising of Lazarus we see the promise of what Martha had hoped in all along—
the resurrection on the last day.

Yes, Lazarus had to die again—his resurrection was only temporary—

but that temporary display of the power of the Son of God was rendered permanent
in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,
and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Do you believe this?”