

“I Am the Resurrection and the Life” // John 11:25–26 // “I AM” #4¹

Introduction

Happy Easter, Summit family and friends! I hope you're excited to be here. If you're not a Summit regular--a guest, so to speak, I especially want to welcome you. But I hesitate to call you a guest because I don't want to think of you as a guest, because when we have guests over to our house, we have an expectation that at some point you're gonna leave. But we don't want you to leave, so I'm not gonna consider you a guest. I'm going to consider you 'future family,' you just don't know it yet. I hope you come back--we're here every week. I don't always dress like this: I do this in honor of my mom who thought I owed it to her to at least dress up for church on Easter. But we're here doing this every week, so I hope you'll come back. And you chose a great week for your first week, btw, because I have some very good news for you today!

Today signifies something absolutely outrageous that Christians actually believe--that an actual flesh and blood man was placed in an actual grave for 3 actual days and then walked out of that grave and actual other people saw him, touched and ate with him and then he ascended in front of their actual eyes with his` actual, resurrected body into heaven, and that he's actually coming back one day

because he's the Lord of heaven and earth. That's a crazy bold claim; it was crazy back then; it's crazy now. But, there's actual, good reasons to believe it, and if it's true, it changes everything.

(And speaking of unbelievable, not only is Jesus alive this weekend, NC State is still alive. That's a different kind of miracle, but amazing nonetheless. You say, "What about Duke?" I mean, y'all, of all weekends to be cheering for the Devil, this is not the one! Just kidding. Congratulations to them, too.)

We throw around the word 'miraculous' pretty loosely today. But a dead man, whom everybody saw die, walking out of a grave after 3 days, and then after 40 days ascending before their eyes into heaven, that's as miraculous as it gets. And it's an outrageous claim. But if it's true, it changes everything. You see, if Jesus' resurrection actually happened, your sins can be forgiven, disastrous decisions you've made that derailed your life don't have to define your life anymore, and death is not the end. If the tomb is empty, anything is possible.

I heard a **story about an elderly couple** who went to the Holy Land together, and they were one of those older couples that just constantly fought and bickered. The man, especially, would just talk about and complain about his wife to whoever was around. Well, sadly, while they were in the Holy Land, the man died. So, the wife went to a local undertaker and asked if he could help her ship his body back to the U.S. He said, "Sure, ma'am, but it'll cost you around

¹ Works consulted: Tim Keller, "Out from the Grave, March 2, 2014, Redeemer Presbyterian; Tyler Staton, "I am the Resurrection and the Life", February 5, 2023, Bridgetown Church; Joby Martin, "Lazarus", May 14, 2023, The Church of Eleven22; David Jeremiah; [Andy Stanley](#); Josh Moody, *John*

1–12 for You; Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*; Grant R. Osborne, *John: Verse by Verse*; Tim Keller, "Message after 9/11," in *Tim Keller: His Spiritual and Intellectual Formation* (Audible edition), and others as noted throughout.

\$7,000... But,” the undertaker said, “I COULD bury him right here in the Holy Land for only \$250.” And she said, “No, it’s OK. I’ll ship him back.” The undertaker said, “But ma’am, I don’t understand. A lot of people love this option. I mean, you could bury him right here in the Holy Land, the land of Jesus and the Apostles and the prophets, and save over \$6000!” And she said, “Yeah... but 2,000 years ago a man was buried here, but he didn’t stay dead, and I just don’t think I wanna take that chance.” Just kidding. That’s not a true story. But it does raise the question: How is **an empty grave in an obscure place in the Middle East 2000 years ago relevant to us?**

John 11, if you have your Bibles. For the last several weeks here at The Summit, we have been looking at the 7x in the Gospel of John that Jesus takes the loftiest name of God in the Old Testament--I AM (or, Jehovah)--and claims it for himself. What makes these claims so significant to us is that each time Jesus takes the name of God, he applies it to one of our most acute places of felt-need. For example, to those who are hungry, he says, “I AM the bread of life”; to those in darkness, he says, “I AM the light.” To those who feel lost, he says “I AM the door.” Every “I AM” claim Jesus makes in John starts with a human problem. And today, we come to what is undoubtedly the ultimate human problem: DEATH. To which Jesus says in **John 11:25, “I am the resurrection and the life.”**

- Death, or fear of death, would have to be among our most acute felt-needs. Death is one of those ever-present realities for us that we can sometimes manage to ignore, until we can’t.
- But as the death rate in our country is holding steady at 100%, it’s something eventually we face. Eventually, death takes from us everyone and everything that we hold dear. Maybe some of you

have felt that this year. Jesus’ claim addresses that we’ll get to that.

But I want to highlight another felt-need this claim addresses, because it’s something almost all of us have felt at some point, sometimes it goes along with death, and that is disappointment with God.

- I mean a deep, unsettling question about why God didn’t do something that you thought that he should have done. I mean, it just didn’t make any sense: *You prayed. You believed. You trusted in him. And you did all the things you were supposed to do.* But God didn’t seem to do his part. The person still died. The marriage still disintegrated. You didn’t get the job.
- And maybe you’re not even sure how to think about all this anymore. If God is loving, like you’ve always been taught, why didn’t he help *you* in your moment of crisis? Where was he for you? And yeah, you’re here this morning, but honestly, you’re not even sure how much you believe this stuff anymore.

When Ted Turner, media mogul and multi-billionaire (the man who founded CNN and TBS)--when Ted Turner was in high school, he was on fire for Jesus. Most people don’t know that about him, but he was. In fact, he felt called to be a missionary. But when he was 15 his younger sister, Mary Jane, aged 12, contracted lupus, a degenerative tissue disease, and for the next several years he watched as she basically wasted away. Ted regularly came home from school, sat by her bed, held her hand and tried to comfort her. He prayed for her recovery, but after several years of misery, she died. Ted's dad, Ed Turner, the family’s spiritual anchor, said, "If that's the type of God he is, then I want nothing to do with him." And when Ted saw his dad’s

faith crumble, Ted eventually lost his own faith. He said in an interview years later, “I was taught that God was love and God was powerful, and I couldn’t understand, if that was true, how someone so innocent should be allowed to suffer like that.”

That’s hard for me to read. But my guess is that there’s a number of you in here with questions of your own like that.

This story in John 11 starts with a question many of us have asked at some point in our lives: Jesus, if you really love me, like I’ve always been taught, **“Why didn’t you show up when...?”** or, **“Where were you when...?”** Or, **“How can I trust you after...?”**

Here’s how the story goes: Lazarus, Jesus’ friend, got sick. Now, Jesus loved everybody, of course, but he was especially close to Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. He had a deep, personal connection with them; scholars say it’s likely they had grown up as childhood friends. And they believed in him and even supported his ministry.

It quickly became obvious that this was no ordinary sickness--it was serious, so Martha sent for Jesus. You see, by this point Jesus had a reputation for being a miracle worker. He’d healed blind men, made the lame walk, even raised a little girl back from the dead once. But, it was also true that Jesus didn’t heal every sick person in Israel; in fact, he seemed to be rather selective in who healed--almost as if his agenda was not to end every disease, at least not yet--his agenda

seemed to be some things he wanted to teach about himself through these miracles.

And yet surely, they thought--surely--if Jesus would heal anybody, it would be his longtime friend Lazarus. So Martha sent for Jesus--*“Jesus, hurry, it’s urgent; our brother doesn’t have long; please come immediately.”* And they waited. And they waited. But Jesus never showed. And Lazarus died.

Maybe most confusingly, we find out that Jesus’ delay was **intentional. Look at vs. 5: Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.** *(Do those 2 sentences make any sense together?* You’d expect it to say, “Now Jesus loved Martha and Mary, so when he heard Lazarus was ill, **he immediately rushed there to be w/ them and make it all better...**” **But that’s not what it says.** It says “he loved them, *SO* he stayed.”

In fact, when his disciples saw that he delayed going, they couldn’t understand it either. And when they found out that Lazarus was dead, they were like Jesus, “What in the world?” And he said, vs. 15 **...for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.**

- **Here’s the central question of this whole story:** “Believe *what?*” What is it about himself that he wants them to believe?
- Get your mind around this: There’s something so important that Jesus wants them to believe that he is going to let one of his best friends die and let the hearts of that guy’s sisters be temporarily broken so that the disciples could understand and believe some things about Jesus.²

² I owe this insight to Andy Stanley!

And, btw: Who is the “YOU” Jesus is thinking about in that sentence? It’s not just “you,” the disciples there in that story. It’s also “you,” people at the Summit Church today.

- He’s going to let the events in this story go down a certain way for those of you who have ever had a moment where you said, “Where are you, God? Why haven’t you come?”
- He’s doing it for you, believers, who are trying to hold on to faith even though you’re pretty disappointed in God right now, and he’s doing it for those *of you who’ve lost your faith, who used to believe in God until the bitterness of life just crushed it out of you.*
- *He let this story play out a certain way, so that YOU might believe.*

Here’s how it goes down: By the time Jesus finally gets there, Lazarus has been dead for 4 days. He’s long since been put in the grave. Martha hears that Jesus is on his way, and she runs out to meet him, and when she sees him she verbalizes that thought so many of us have had when we’re disappointed with God: **21 Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.** “Why didn’t you show up, Jesus? You could have shown up. We did what we were supposed to do; we’ve been loyal to you; when others departed from you, we stayed faithful to you. **“Why didn’t you show up for us?”**

Have you ever asked that? I know you have. Listen, Jesus doesn’t condemn you for feeling that way. He says, “I know you felt that way.” How this story goes down is your answer.

Tim Keller, who pastored for years in NYC, preached on this passage the Sunday after terrorists flew planes into the twin towers on Sept 11, 2001 killing almost 3000 people in their community. Dr. Keller said

that Jesus in this story shows us 4 things about himself that he wants us to hold onto in any tragedy. *Tears, anger, truth and grace:*

1. Tears

- **When Jesus saw the grief of Mary and Martha, he wept.** Vs. 35 is the shortest verse in the whole Bible. It says simply, **35 Jesus wept.**
- When I was in youth camp, you could always earn points for your cabin by memorizing verses, and you could choose the verses. My friend and I had a list of “top 10 shortest verses organized by length,” and this verse was always first.
- *(Listen, y’all know that the little number divisions in your Bibles between chapters and verses were not originally in there—when the Apostle John first wrote this down it was all one flowing manuscript. It’s interesting to me that whoever determined the verse numbers thought that these two words belonged in their own verse; that what happened here was so significant that these words needed to stand alone. And I agree with that.)*
- The Son of God, who placed the stars in the sky, wept with two broken-hearted sisters.
- To be honest, Jesus’ tears here are almost a little confusing to me, here, however. You see, Jesus knew that in 10 minutes Lazarus would be out of the grave and everyone would be reunited and rejoicing. **(Vs 4** tells us he knew that was the outcome before he ever left for their home).
- I mean, if you and I were together, and you were brokenhearted about something, but I knew that in just a matter of seconds whatever you were upset about was going

to be fixed, I'd say, "You don't need to weep! It all turns out ok!"

- I've been totally into March Madness this year, but so many of the games I'm interested in have taken place when I had some prior obligation. It's like my kids' school is not even aware there is a March Madness. So I set my TV to record the games, and I tried to get home w/o finding out. But I don't know what it is, I must just have a face that says, "Please give me your unsolicited opinion about the game"--but I just can't make it home without somebody saying something, getting a text or seeing a big old smile on somebody's face and knowing what it's about. I've told people: "Don't look at me. Don't smile. Don't frown. Just, avoid eye contact altogether." But somehow I always find out. But here's the thing: one benefit of knowing that the team I want to win has won, when I'm watching the play back later and the other team goes on a run, I'm like, "It don't matter. DJ Horne will make some ridiculous 4-point play." Or at some point DJ Burns is gonna start doing that ridiculous thing he does where he just backs up that defender to the rim...just back it up, back it up.
- ***So, why does Jesus weep with Mary if he knows that in 10 minutes the whole issue is going to be resolved?***
 - "So that you may believe." It's because Jesus wants you to understand how he feels about you, in your pain. Even when Jesus knows the pain is temporary, he knows what it feels like for you, and he weeps with you.
 - Let's be honest: 1000 years is not that much different to Jesus than 10 minutes. Which means Jesus can already see the beautiful resolution to your story, he can already feel that beautiful moment when you are reunited to lost loved ones

and all the sad things in your life become untrue, and he wipes away every tear. **He can feel that like it's already here, but in the moment, the Son of God still weeps with you.** And that's because his heart is knit to yours. He feels deeply what I feel, much like I feel deeply what my kids feel, even if I know their pain is temporary.

- And I can tell you from experience that sometimes this is a great consolation. To know that I have a Savior who has entered into my pain; that the tears in my eyes are matched with tears in his. What a friend we have in Jesus! All our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry, everything to God in prayer!

Tears. *Here's the 2nd word...*

2. Anger

- vs. 33 says, "When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled." (That word for "deeply moved," in Greek, is *embriMAōmi*. We translate it as "deeply moved," but scholars say that that's not a great translation--the problem is there is no great English translation; it means, 'he got indignant;' some scholars say the best translation is 'snorted'; like an animal snorting in anger right before it charges.
- Jesus moves toward the grave and, in vs. 43, he shouts at death with a loud voice.
 - John Calvin said that this is Jesus entering the ring "...like a wrestler preparing for a contest with a hated foe. The violent tyranny of death which he came to overcome now stands before his eyes."

- If you were writing the soundtrack for this story, this is where you'd stop playing the sweet "What a friend we have in Jesus" instrumental and start playing the Rocky theme. Or "Avengers Assemble," for you millennials.
- Jesus the friend, has just become the mighty warrior, because when it comes to death, I didn't just need a weeping friend, I also needed a conquering hero.
 - And, BTW, can I just add here--it's ok for you to be angry at death. To feel hatred at suffering and cancer. Jesus did. The world is not supposed to be like this, and you're not supposed to ever get used to it. Don't whitewash these Hallmark Channel realities as "a necessary rhythm of life," Or, "Well, we all have to say goodbye sometime." Stoics always want to say that about life--but when you're standing beside the grave of a child, or a wife cut down in the prime of her life, there's something that rises up in you that says: "This is not right!," that emotion is valid. Anger in the face of injustice and suffering is *right*.
- Jesus is about to go into battle with the most hated, most dreadful enemy ever known by mankind, and in so doing he's going to offer something no other religious leader, or political leader, or scientist, has ever been able to offer.
 - I mentioned this last week--it's become accepted wisdom to say that all religions are basically the same; they all generally lead to the same place; they may teach different names for God and encourage different rituals, but the core of them is all the same.
 - But Jesus promised something that no other religious or political leader in the world has ever been able to promise, much less make good on, and that is to erase death.

- I remember a few years ago hearing the tragic story of a grandmother who was home babysitting her 2 year old grandson when, apparently, she looked out the window and saw that he'd gotten out of the house and she saw him stumble into the deep end of the pool. She went after him to rescue him. But tragically, 2 hours later, they pulled the bodies of both the grandmother and grandson out of the pool, because, you see, the grandmother hadn't been able to swim either. **We deeply admire the grandmother's desire to save her grandson, but the truth is that those who would do the rescuing can't have the same problem as those who need to be rescued.**
- Moses, and Abraham, and Buddha and Mohammad, and George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln, and (*insert your favorite politician's name*) all taught some great things, but the truth is, they all died. And I'm not trying to be catty about that, but none of them ever overcame death, or even claimed to be able to overcome death.
- Only one Person in history has ever gone into the darkness of the grave and walked out by his own power. And now he's standing there in front of Mary and Martha saying, ***I AM the resurrection and the life.***
- And he says to them, "*Do you believe this?*"

Which leads me to the 3rd word:

3. Truth

- Jesus makes a promise in this verse. Vs. [25] "I am the resurrection and the life. 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?"

- Of course this doesn't mean that no Christian ever dies. I mean, the whole point of this story is that Lazarus believed in Jesus and he died. Twice, in fact. After being raised here in John 11, Lazarus died again one day. I mean, Lazarus isn't somewhere hanging out alive in a cave like that Knight Templar in Indiana Jones' *Last Crusade*. He died again.
- Which, BTW, I love how John Crist says this, "We love to talk about how awesome this story is for Mary and Martha, and us... but you know who this story wasn't awesome for? Lazarus. Lazarus has been dead for 4 days, which means he's been in heaven for 4 days. He's moved into his mansion. He's getting the furniture arranged in there like he wants. He had a bum knee that used to hurt but it's all better now, and he's started playing basketball with Abraham and Obadiah and King David, who had a wicked jump shot, every afternoon. When suddenly there's a knock on the door and when he opens it there's a rather sheepish angel standing there who says, "Yeah, Lazarus, we gotta send you back. We don't normally do this but, the Big Guy says it's special circumstances..." Lazarus was a follower of Jesus, and he died twice--which doesn't sound awesome. So Jesus' statement clearly doesn't mean that no Christian ever dies.
- What Jesus meant is that for his followers, death would not really be death--not in the final sense, not in the eternal sense. And one day, like Lazarus, his followers are going to wake up from death like they're waking up from a bad dream.
- I love the imagery of a dream--we're not talking about some pie-in-the-sky consolation that God gives us for our troubles; we're

talking about God actually undoing the damage that our sin caused. It all becomes untrue!

- Tim Keller used to say that about *once every year or so, he'd have a recurring nightmare that his wife said she felt very flattered by. In this nightmare, he said, his wife dies. Something has happened to her, Tim said, and in my dream I'm desperately trying to figure out how to go on in life without her. My wife says she is flattered because the recurrence of this dream means that her death is obviously my greatest fear. "But let me tell you something really weird," he said: "I almost like having the nightmare now... Because the first minute after I wake up is so unbelievably great! To wake up and say, 'Oh my, it was only a bad dream. Everything bad I thought I was living through has come untrue.' It is not like I'm awakened just to have someone give me something to make the pain better. It's not like when I awake someone says, "Sorry your wife died. Here's another wife." (Like a consolation) No. In waking up, the dream itself becomes untrue. It is a wonderful feeling to say, "It is morning. It was only a bad dream!" Dr. Keller then says: "Do you know what Jesus Christ is saying when he says, "I am the resurrection"? He is not saying that he will give us a nicer place, like some kind of consolation for the pain. No, he is going to make everything that happened in our pain seem like a bad dream. He'll make everything bad come untrue. **"Jesus Christ is not giving us consolation, he's giving us resurrection."***
- For those who live and believe in Jesus, this is what he promises. Jesus then asks the question to Martha, and to us: **Do you believe this?**

- **Billy Graham said shortly before he died:** *“One fine day you will hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don’t you believe it. I’ll be more alive than ever, I will just have changed addresses.”* (PIC)
- **Do you believe this?**

In v 38, Jesus goes on to raise Lazarus; it’s an incredible scene. Jesus prays to the Father, vs 42, and says, “Do this, Father, so they will believe that you sent me,” and then Jesus yells Lazarus’ name down into the grave, and suddenly there was a commotion down there, and Lazarus walked out. ***I mean, can you just imagine that moment?*** African American Pastor Charles Blake famously said, “It’s a good thing Jesus used Lazarus’ first name; otherwise every dead man in that cemetery would have come out.”

(BTW, one little detail you might overlook--John points out that this happens on the 4th day after Lazarus has died. The reason that is significant is Jews believed that the spirit hung around the body sometimes for about 3 days just to make sure there wasn’t a misdiagnosis. But on the 4th day, when decomposition had really set in, and the body really started to stink, that was when the spirit was gone for good. IOW, in the Jewish mind, Lazarus was not just dead, he was dead, dead. Really dead. Mega dead. And yet, Jesus calls him back to life like he’s waking somebody up out of a nap.)

Jesus then says, “Take off his graveclothes,” and they all rejoice and marvel at Jesus’ power. **And you might think the story is over, “Yea, Jesus!” But it’s not.** See, **in vs 45**, the real story begins. The Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, they hear about this miracle and they call an emergency session, and in that session they decide that this is the final straw--they’re not sure what happened here, if it was

a trick or Jesus is raising the dead by the power of Satan, but this miracle, they figure is going to give people false hope and give Jesus way too much authority. **[53] So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.** This marks the turning point in the Gospel of John where Jesus starts his march to the cross, and in less than 2 weeks, they will have killed him.

It’s not accidental that John ties these 2 things together because he’s showing us that **to break up Lazarus’ funeral, Jesus had to commence his own.** *And that leads to our 4th and final word:*

4. Grace

- In order for *US* to never die, Jesus had to die in our place. You see, God had said back in the Garden of Eden, at the dawn of time, that the penalty of sin, the consequence of sin, was death.
- Sin separates us from God, and God is the source of life. I mean, imagine if earth rebelled from its orbit and began to drift off into space. Death would be inevitable. That’s what sin is like. It separated us from God, and put upon us the curse of death.
- **Let this (BOOK) represent my curse of death. (I asked our production team to find a book to represent my sin, and they chose this one, it’s the biggest book I’ve ever seen--not sure what that means.** It weighs 52 lbs, so this will be a short illus.
- This (hand) is me; this (ceiling) is God. Because I have sinned, because I have voluntarily chosen to walk away from God, this curse is now upon me. Here’s the thing: I may have times in my life where I feel closer to God, where life is going well; and other times where I don’t feel that way. But either way, whether I feel

close to God or far away, the curse of death always remains between me and God. No amount of religion can change that.

- The gospel--the central Christian message--is that on the cross God made Jesus, who knew no sin, to become sin for us. (TRANSFER) **God placed my sin upon Jesus.** As the prophet Isaiah said, “...*the punishment that brought us peace would be put upon him... so that by his stripes I could be healed.*”
- **Jesus can be the resurrection** for me because he first became death for me. He broke up Lazarus’ funeral by starting his own.
- I heard a story about a dad who was driving down the interstate with his little 3-year old daughter in the back in the car seat, when suddenly she began to scream, “Daddy, daddy a bee!” She was terrified of bees, and, her father knew, she was also deathly allergic to them. So the dad rolled down the windows and was trying to shoo the yellow jacket out. (Dads, we’ve all done this.) But it wasn’t working, and the dad was panicking, so he pulled the car over, got out and jumped in the backseat and trapped the bee against the glass with his hand. After a moment, he pulled his hand back and the bee flew away. The little girl started to scream again, “Daddy, daddy, the bee, the bee!” But the dad said, “Sweetheart, that bee cannot hurt you anymore.” And he opened his palm and showed her the bee’s stinger lodged in the palm of his hand.
- **On the cross, Jesus took the stinger of death into his hands so that when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, there would be no stinger left for me.**
- “Oh death,” Paul says, “where is your sting?” “Oh grave, where is your victory?” The stinger is gone because the grave has been

conquered. Jesus, by his death, put death to death, and now offers resurrection life to all who will believe in him.

Do. You. Believe. This? Which brings us back to what Jesus said that the whole point of this encounter was: **15 ...so that you may believe.** Believe what? That Jesus is who he says that he is, even when life feels confusing sometimes and you don’t know what he’s doing. In vs. 42, as Jesus is praying to the Father to raise Lazarus through him, he makes his aim even clearer. (Look at it) **42 ... (“Do this, Father) that they may believe that you sent me.”**

VAMP

Imagine you’d been one of Jesus’ disciples there that day and you heard Jesus pray that. You might say, “*Jesus, you’re telling us that you engineered this entire event just so we could understand... who sent you?*” And Jesus would say, unhesitatingly, “Yes.” And you might say, “*But Jesus, is understanding that such a big deal that it’s worth all of this pain and confusion and grief?*” And Jesus would say, “Absolutely.”³ Because, you see, the true knowledge of God is the most valuable thing in the world. Peter says it is more valuable than the richest gold in the world. The true knowledge of God, Jesus said in John 17--that is the essence of eternal life.

And so Jesus, through this story, gives us a picture of what the Father is like. (You see, the Gospel of John rule is: **“Like Son, like Father.”** Jesus said repeatedly in John, “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father.”) Whatever Jesus is like, the Father is like, because Jesus is the

³ I owe this insight to Andy Stanley

radiance of God's glory, the exact imprint of his nature. That means: What Jesus was to Mary and Martha, the Father is to us.

So, what Jesus wants you to **believe** from this story is that in your pain is that there is a Heavenly Father who stands beside you and weeps with you--and not only that, he was so angry at what sin and death had done to us that he wanted to deliver us from it. And the only way he could do that was by suffering sin's curse in our place. (And by the way, some of you are sitting there saying, "But J.D., you don't understand. My pain is my fault. I brought all this on myself." "My marriage is in shambles because of me." Or, "The kid hates me because of me." "I lost my job because of me." That doesn't matter--as it relates to how the Father feels about you. When the prodigal son had run away from the Father into the far country, the Father still stood at the gates every day looking longingly out in his lost son's direction, with broken heart and tears in his eyes. That's how he feels about you.)

Jesus showed us how much the Father loves us--so much that he'd send his Son to take sin's curse in our place. **And now he promises that all who live and believe in him** will never die. Death, for believers, will never have that fatally bitter taste that it does for so many. It's like I often tell grieving families at a funeral, "A lot of people will say to you in the coming days, 'Oh, it's so sad you lost so-and-so this year.' But you haven't really lost them, you've just lost contact with them for a little while. And oh, btw, if you could just see them now, you wouldn't feel sad for them; they feel sad for you! But soon and very soon you'll see them again, and this nightmare will be over."

One day, soon and very soon, this whole veil of tears we call life will end in resurrection, and we'll see that Jesus wasn't absent after all. And we'll see that life wasn't meaningless chaos. Yes, sometimes Jesus seems to delay--because there are things he wants to teach us about God from our pain that we couldn't learn any other way.

And I know you say to that, "But why? Why do it this way?" I don't know if I can fully answer that. But I do know everything in our Bible teaches us that it is this way. **I've told you before:** It doesn't totally make sense to me why Jesus made the disciples wait until the 3rd day for his Resurrection. I mean--I get at least waiting until the next morning. If he died in the afternoon, give it a night to prove that he's dead; plus the imagery of the resurrection and sunrise works really well together. But why wait a whole extra day in the middle? **I mean, talk about a miserable day!** This Messiah whom the disciples had thought was the Son of God had DIED. They were devastated; they felt LOST. Why make them wait a full extra day in that condition before the Resurrection?

Again, I don't know the full answer to that, but I know, in part, it's because this is what our lives often feel like now. We live in that 2nd day of waiting. That's where we are now, where we say, like Mary and Martha, "Where are you, God?"

But see, there's an empty tomb in Jerusalem that assures us that he hasn't forgotten. We may feel like we're in a pointless Saturday of suffering, but Resurrection Sunday is just around the corner. And in the meantime, we know he stands by the grave of our disappointment weeping with us and praying for us, Paul says, with groanings and sighs too deep even to articulate in human words.

Let me be clear: I'm not urging you to believe this because it provides some kind of hopeful, happy, pie-in-the-sky ending for you. I'm urging you to believe it because there is an empty grave in Jerusalem that Jesus used to occupy that declares to you that your hope is justified. And, I'm trying to get you to see that Jesus orchestrated this entire story in John 11 with all its confusing twists and turns so that when you go through a time where it feels like God is absent from your life, you'll know that he's not, you'll know that he cares, and he'll be faithful to you just like he was to Mary and Martha.

So that brings us back to Jesus' central question: *"Do you believe this?" (11:26)* Because if you do, there's a promise attached: *...everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. (vs 26)*

Listen, this is a promise for everyone, Jesus did what he did for everyone, but you have to take it for yourself. You don't automatically get it. John opened his Gospel by saying: *"But to as many received him, to them he gave the power to become the children of God, to those who believe on his name."* (John 1:12)

This is like the thesis of John's Gospel. Every story he tells us is to urge us to receive Jesus for ourselves, because only those who receive Jesus personally get the benefit of these promises.

So, you ask, **"What does it mean to receive him?"**

- Well, it doesn't mean living a life that makes you good enough to earn the title, "child of God." That's not receiving, that's earning.
- And "receiving him" doesn't mean merely going through a church ritual like baptism or confirmation. Those may have their place,

but technically, they aren't receiving, those are accomplishing, going through a checklist.

- Receiving him means exactly what you think it means. It means you receive him like you'd receive a gift being offered to you. If someone offers you a gift, you open your hands and RECEIVE it.
- Or think of it like how a bride and groom receive each other on their wedding day. One says, in essence, "I want you in my life. Do you receive me?" And the other says, "Yes, I receive you. From now on, you and I go *together*. Where you go, I go. From this point onward, I belong to you, and you belong to me."

I don't know what you think it means to be a Christian. A lot of people think it means obeying the rules sufficiently. Or they think it means being regular at church. And sure, those are good things. But that's not the essence of what it means to be a Christian. The essence of being a Christian means having a personal relationship with Jesus. Receiving him personally, for yourself. Have you done that yet?

Have you ever let him come into your life and take full control of you? Have you received him personally? If not, or you're not sure, you can do that right now, today.

You can do that today. Right now.

- BOW HEADS TO PRAY....
- Now text "READY" to 33933.