

CCH Easter Sunday Sermon 21st April 2019 John 11:25,26

“There are two things that are certain, death and taxes”, said Benjamin Franklin. Well, you’ll be pleased to know that I’m not going to talk about taxes today! But today, Easter Sunday, we are going to look briefly at one statement from Jesus about death, and how Jesus defeats it, and it’s there in bold on the handout...

Jesus said to (Martha), **‘I am the resurrection and the life. 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?’**

This is a **shocking** statement. Because it’s talking about one of the things that you are not supposed to talk about today: death. But Jesus is unafraid to talk about it, and so should we.

It’s a **relevant** because it although it comes a few weeks before the Easter story that we looked at just now, it speaks of resurrection-very relevant for Easter Sunday. But it’s also relevant because all of us (even young people) need to think about death which is coming to all of us. In fact this verse is the first phrase used in a funeral.

Shocking, Relevant..... But above all, it’s an incredibly **powerful** verse. It has the power to shine a powerful and hopeful light on the darkest and most scary pathway: the pathway that leads to death. A pathway that all of us will one day tread. And it shows that it doesn’t need to be a dark dead end, but if we follow Jesus, it can be a bright doorway to life.

Let’s look at the three sentences in turn, and those of you who like the Jason Bourne films will recognise the three phrases that I’m giving to the three sentences. They are from the first three of those Jason Bourne films acted by Matt Damon. (The Bourne Identity, The Bourne Supremacy and the Bourne Ultimatum).

So let’s start with the EASTER IDENTITY

Look at the first sentence. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life”. Now we won’t have time to look at the whole story in John 11, so I can give you a copy of John’s gospel afterwards if you’d like to take it home to read the full story. But to cut a long story short Jesus is at a funeral. A friend of his, Lazarus, has died. And there are two sisters left behind. Mary and Martha, and they are both grieving.

And Jesus has been talking with Martha about her brother, Lazarus. And Martha says in v24 (in line with the beliefs of a good Jew in those days) that she believes that her brother Lazarus will live again one day in “the resurrection”. That was the general belief that death isn’t the end and that one day all who trusted God would one day rise and come to new life with God. You may come from a religious background where you believe in life after death, you may not.

But Jesus says something amazing. He doesn’t say, “I can **point** you to the resurrection and the life”. He doesn’t say, “I can **promise** you resurrection and life”. He doesn’t even say, “I can **prove** to you that there will be resurrection and life”. Though he does in fact do all of those things.

He **personalises** it: He says ***“I am the resurrection and the life”***.

Jesus is claiming to be the very embodiment of life after death, the one with the power of life in him. He says that’s who he is.

Who do *you* think Jesus is?

- Just a **fairy story** made up by his followers (but then what do you make of the 4 historical accounts about him)?
- Just a **nice idea** to help weak people who need a bit of support? (but then why have Christians been willing to die for their faith?)
- Or could it be that **he really is** God’s Messiah sent to rescue us from the death penalty which comes because of our sin?

▲ Now we live in an age where everything on our screens is designed to grab our attention, as urgent and important. Even now your phone will be storing up for you the number of messages waiting for you, or the hilarious video or family photo that someone has shared with you. But actually those things don't last and aren't that important. What could be more urgent and important than this? This is about life and death. And Jesus is claiming to be the key to it.

Well that all sounds nice, you might be thinking, but if Jesus really is the key to life and death, why doesn't he prove it? Something this big needs something big to back it up.

Well John, one of his closest disciples, who followed him for 3 years says that's no problem.... **First** Jesus proved it in this story in John 11, because in a few verses time, he goes right up to the tomb of Lazarus four days after he died, and called him out, and the dead man walked out, as alive as you or me! He stopped the funeral!

Secondly, as we remember today. Jesus' own tomb was empty, and people saw him alive three days after death. Jesus himself rose from the dead in a real time and in a real place. He really is the resurrection and the life. That's his identity. That's the EASTER IDENTITY. What does it mean for us?

Let's move onto the EASTER SUPREMACY.

If I am a gardener, I will be able to sort out your garden.

If I am a mechanic, I will be able to sort out your car.

If I am a computer programmer, I will be able to sort out your computer (maybe!)

If Jesus is the resurrection and the life, he will be able to sort out your death problem. And that's exactly what he promises in the second sentence. **The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.**

Wow- what a claim. We have a couple of doctors in our church. But none of them would claim to be able to stop death. They might be able to delay it for a few decades. Thank the Lord for our doctors and for our NHS.

But look at the second sentence... Jesus is claiming 1) that there is life after death for those who trust him, and 2) that in a way, those who have new resurrection life believing in Jesus will never die.

That's not to say that they won't go through the death process, but they won't face the full death that lies beyond which is hell.

It makes a lot of sense doesn't it. If Jesus is the resurrection and the life, then he is supreme over death. THE EASTER SUPREMACY.

▲ I was talking with my father in law last week about death. He was saying that it's not easy getting older and getting closer to dying. He said like Woody Allen, "it's not that I'm afraid to die, I just don't want to be around when it happens"!

But we also talked about the hope of heaven, because he's a Christian man. He said "underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27)- another bible promise that is used at funerals. God has never dropped anyone yet, and he isn't about to! If you trust in Jesus he WILL get you through death and to a new heaven and a new earth on the other side.

▲ Do you know, apparently the Spanish used to pride themselves on being the furthest country going West into the Atlantic Ocean. They had written on their coins the words "*Ne Plus Ultra*"- meaning there's nothing beyond.

After many years when Christopher Columbus sailed to America and back they had to change their coins to "*plus ultra*"- there is something beyond.

Sometimes people say to me, there's no life after death- no-one has come back from there to show us. But someone has. Jesus did. He died, and then 3 days later smashed death in two and showed his disciples his risen body to prove it.

There **is** something beyond. Jesus has proved it. And so his promise is solid. "The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die".

THE EASTER SUPREMACY. This leads us to an obvious question, and it's there in that final sentence.

Finally, the EASTER ULTIMATUM

"Do you believe this?"

It's the question that Jesus asked Martha. And it's a question that Jesus asks all of us.

Do we believe all this?

Do we believe in his **identity**- that he really is the one with the keys to life and death? Do we believe in his **supremacy** (his power) over sin and death?

Martha responded in v27 positively. "Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who is to come into the world". (It's partly because of this story that we named our 3rd daughter Martha).

This friend of Jesus at her brother's grave is saying, I believe you really are God's solution to the world's problems- you are the Messiah (the Saviour-King) God's own Son.

How would you answer Jesus' question. **"Do you believe this?"**
Just think about it in your head now.....

What do you answer?

Jesus says to you "Do you believe that I am the resurrection and the life, the key to life now and beyond the grave?" How did you answer?

Maybe you answered NO

You think Christianity is great for other people, but you can't believe. You pride yourself on being an atheist. God is dead. Well how sure are you?

How do you know that you are not making a big mistake? If this verse is true, then God is not dead. And to reject Jesus is to reject the only one who can forgive your sins, and take you to new life.

Atheism is a gamble. And it's built on having faith that there is no God. Well it's more sensible to have faith in the facts that people saw Jesus after he died, they went fishing with him watching, they barbecued fish, they ate with him. **Jesus says "Do you believe this?"**

Maybe you answered, NOT SURE

You're just not quite sure what you believe about Jesus. You're not against Jesus, but you are not convinced enough to be sure. After all it all happened a long time ago. Well you can be sure. Why not make a decision to look carefully at Jesus Christ.

▲ One man Lee Strobel was a Chicago journalist and when his wife became a Christian, he wanted to prove to her that it was all based on make believe. And he investigated everything, talking to professors, psychologists, archaeologists. And in the process he was convinced that it was true.

Why not watch that film on Netflix or Amazon Prime, or we can lend it to you... "The Case for Christ".

Or why not read John's gospel, or sign up for the Christianity Explored course that we run. You can be sure. You can experience for yourself that Jesus is alive as he walks off the pages of the Bible, forgives your sins, and changes your life around.

But maybe you answered YES.

Yes I believe Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and I'm trusting Him with my life and death.

Well you've just admitted that there is something bigger than this life.

If life goes well, thank God. But if it goes badly, this isn't all there is.

If life is long, thank God. But if it is short, there is a new life to come.

Knowing Jesus Christ, and the power of his resurrection changes everything.

It tells us there is purpose in life. There is a direction in life. There will be a reckoning at the end of life. We are not alone floating meaninglessly into space on a ball of rock with no purpose.

It means our yesterdays are forgiven, and our tomorrows are filled with hope, because Jesus, the resurrection and the life is with us.

THE EASTER IDENTITY: 'I am the resurrection and the life.

THE EASTER SUPREMACY: The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

THE EASTER ULTIMATUM: Do you believe this?'

Let's pray.