

Sermon: "... The Resurrection of the Body..."

Text: John 11:21-27.

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Sermon Outline.

Introduction ~ "... The resurrection of the body..." that must mean we're coming close to the end of this sermon series on the Apostles' Creed. Maybe, we'll do a cookout here after the worship service when this series is finally concluded... Have we ever done a cookout after a worship service? It's been a while, hasn't it? Why not?

In this closing section, the Apostles' Creed takes up a couple of 'Quid mea' life issues. Chicago guys like me ask 'Quid mea?' questions... not in Latin, of course. 'If I do what you're asking me to do, what's in it for me?' 'Where's mine?'

In terms of the Christian faith and the Apostles' Creed, that question runs like this: "If I believe in your Jesus, what's in it for me?"

In this phrase, the Creed takes up the existential question faced by every human being on the face of the earth. Each human being must come to terms with the reality of death. Each one of us must come to terms with the 100% certainty of our own death one unexpected day. Like the Apostles' Creed, the Christian faith tackles this issue head on.

*One thirty-something placed these thoughts about their coming death on their Internet blog:*

"The thought of my eventual death consumes me. Every night when it gets late and I have no distractions my mind inevitably drifts to my certain death. ...I simply cannot come to terms with the fact that the one thing I have absolutely no control over whatsoever is the thing that will inevitably strike me down forever and I will never be again and I will simply rot away into the ground, most likely to be forever forgotten -- not that it matters because, from what I'm told, I won't be around to see it.

"Everyone knows this to be true. But obviously, not everyone worries about it, at least not like I do. How do you people do it? How do you simply come to accept that this will all come to an end, you don't know what ... is going to happen, and that to be realistic it's a good chance that you're just going to be what you were before being conceived: absolutely nothing? I just don't get it. And the worst part is that, really, my life's probably only about 1/4 complete. I don't dare try to guess the state I'll be in when I hit 50."

*I can't help but notice that the materialist viewpoint – the view that says this physical world and all that comes from it is all there is – that*

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*materialist perspective really is not helping this person answer the human-existential question in a meaningful. This guy is certainly not alone here in post-modern America.*

Hey, did you hear the one about the drill sergeant and the raw recruit?



In boot camp, a drill sergeant had just chewed out one of his recruits; and as he was about to walk away, he turned back to the recruit and said, "I guess when I die you'll come and dance on my grave."

The recruit replied, "No sir, Sergeant! I promised myself that when I got out of the Army I'd never stand in another line!" ...

latrine duty for a month!

My own death as a person – that is the existential question faced by every human being. Each human being must come to terms with the reality of death. *If I believe in Jesus, what does that do for me as I face the prospect of my own death?*

Our text is the brief report of a key conversation with Jesus Christ, a conversation about that most human question. The Gospel of John is unique for its reports of the extended, one-on-one conversations Jesus of Nazareth had with ordinary people like you and me, people like Nathanael, the Woman at the Well, Nicodemus.

Lazarus, Mary and Martha were close to Jesus as His disciples. Their home in Bethany, a few kilometers southeast of Jerusalem, was always open to Jesus as a place of rest and refuge. Lazarus has died and has been dead four days. When Jesus had received word about Lazarus' illness, Jesus had waited up in Galilee for two days before heading to Jerusalem, a two-day trip. *It means that Lazarus died about the time Jesus received word of his illness.*

Martha initially engages Jesus about the timing of it all. Jesus tells her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha misunderstands Jesus to mean the traditional Jewish perspective about a resurrection in the distant future.

But Jesus declares to Martha something very different: God's power to transform mortality and death into resurrection life through Jesus. Martha really misses the meaning of Jesus' words... until Jesus raises her brother Lazarus from the dead. I can't help but feel this brief conversation is the Gospel each person needs in coming to terms with his or her own death. The key idea is this:

■ Jesus moves you forward and upward beyond your own death. As a disciple of the risen Jesus, your life points forward to a resurrected life. The risen Jesus and His resurrection are your future as a believer in Jesus Christ. As a Christ-follower, the resurrection of Jesus is a photograph of your future. If you believe in Jesus, that's what's in store for you. Jesus moves you forward and upward beyond your own death.

✧ In our text, Jesus shares with Martha... and with you and me... three amazing specifics about the gift of resurrection life.

I. The first specific about the resurrection life Jesus gives you is its deathless quality – deathlessness.

A. Moments after the conversation reported in our text, Lazarus will be raised from the dead. Technically, we refer to it as a resuscitation ... because Lazarus lived to die again, a second time. That same thing is true of the Widow of Nain's son and Jairus' daughter and all the other people Jesus brought back to life. They all died a second time.

Lazarus lived to die again, a second time. But without a doubt, that second time was entirely different than the first. That second time, Lazarus knew the power of Jesus to reverse death.

B. Throughout the ancient world, there was a spectrum of belief with regard to the possibility of life after death.

1. One ancient perspective is remarkably similar to the thirty-something blogger I mentioned a moment ago. They found this expression on a grave marker of a well-to-do Roman woman: "I was not. I was. I am not. I care not."
2. Many Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul. The soul, the disembodied human spirit, would survive on forever in a kind of shadow existence. This belief went hand-in-hand with the dualism of Plato and others who believed that the body along

with the entire material world was evil. And since that was true, anything that set you free from the body just had to be a good thing.

[If you're thinking from a biblical worldview, you recognize this idea as a blunt denial of the goodness of God's creation and of God's creating man as an embodied spirit in the image of God.]

3. Even within Judaism, there was a spectrum of belief. Josephus, the Jewish historian of the Roman Wars, reports the following:
  - a. The Essenes – held to something very much like "the immortality of the soul."
  - b. The Sadducees denied any life after death. 'Once you're dead, you're dead; and that's all, folks.'
  - c. The Pharisees held to the resurrection of the body. But their concept is close to a bare retread of this present life. It's pretty close to what happened to Lazarus, a retread of this present, mortal existence. It's closer to what happened to Lazarus than what happened to Jesus that First Easter.

C. Jesus shares with Martha that resurrection life is marked by its deathless quality. By the power of God, your life, your body, your person, is placed beyond death forever. Unlike Lazarus... and totally like the resurrected Jesus, you are unable to die ever again! If you are a Christ-follower, Jesus moves you forward and upward and ultimately beyond the reach of death forever.

In our text, we do not see, taste or smell anything that smacks of the rank denial of death. We witness all-powerful death being conquered and overthrown by Someone more powerful.

As a disciple of the risen Jesus, your life points forward to a resurrected life.

II. The second specific Jesus shares is total transformation.

A. John the Apostle clearly intends that you and I compare Lazarus' resuscitation with Jesus' resurrection. That comparison takes us a step further, a step beyond simply not being able to die ever again.

Lazarus is still a weak human being. In His resurrection, Jesus of Nazareth has moved well beyond the limits, frailties and weakness of human existence as we know it now.

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In the resurrection appearance in the Upper Room, for instance, Jesus is still the same Jesus; but He now has powers and capabilities beyond the limits of human life as we know it. The resurrection of Jesus Christ points us to the reality of transformation, the permanent removal of limits and weakness into total freedom to relate to God and to God's created order. Total freedom to relate to God and to God's created order... think of that for a moment. The resurrection of Jesus Christ points us to a whole new order of human existence. The Bible labels it, "resurrection life."

C. In our comparison between Lazarus and Jesus, Lazarus might represent only the simple quality of deathlessness. The Greek word for this is *αθανασία*. Raised from the dead, Lazarus is closer to Jewish expectation.

But Jesus, in His resurrection, is far above and beyond all that. In resurrection life, there is transformation, the gifting of new power and abilities. Limits and weaknesses are replaced with total freedom to relate to God and to the whole of God's universe, seen and unseen.

D. So, you see, this phrase, "...the resurrection of the body...", links up with the basic terms in the Apostles' Creed:

1. On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead.
2. The risen Jesus will come back to earth from heaven.

When Jesus returns, at His Second Coming, all those persons who belong to Jesus will be raised and transformed and freed forever into the experience and joy of resurrection life.

Because you follow Jesus as His disciple, Jesus moves you forward and upward beyond your own death.

III. The third specific is the gift of that life already, ahead of your death, because you belong to Jesus.

A. Perhaps you already knew it, but there are two or three different words for "life" in the ancient Greek language: *βιοβ*, *ψυχη* and *ζωη*.

*βιοβ* refers to biological and therefore mortal life; and *ψυχη* to the psychological life of the self. But *ζωη* refers to the kind of life only God has in Himself: uncreated, self-existing, pre-existing life.

Resurrection life is *ζωη*, and not *βιοβ*. *ζωη* is the word used in our

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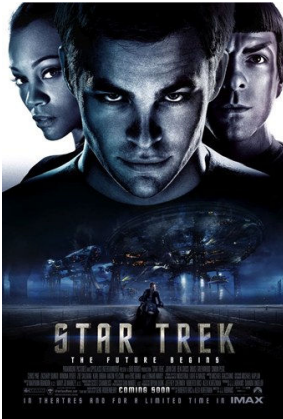
text. Jesus declares that eternal life is a present, "now" possession to each person who lives and believes in Him.

B. At this point, John picks up his basic about eternal life being more than just a future hope. Eternal life is a present experience, a present possession, for the true follower of Jesus Christ. The logic of it all is simple:

- Jesus, in His Person, is already, even now, the resurrection and the life.
- Each disciple is now united by faith to Jesus' Person.
- Therefore, each disciple has eternal life even now.

Friend, the conclusion must follow if that middle term is true of you as a person. Are you a Christ follower? Are you united by faith to the risen Jesus. Have you chosen to belong to Him? Have you invited Him into your life?

Conclusion ~ I often use a favorite one-liner to capture all of this. The regulars here know what it is... The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a photograph of your future if you are a believer in Jesus Christ. As a Christ-follower, the resurrection of Jesus is a photograph of your future. That's absolutely true.



But these days on Google Video and YouTube, people are watching their favorite Movie Trailers. People spend hours watching those movie trailers. Movie trailers are what they show you in the theater, to whet your appetite for that film coming out later this summer or in the fall. I like to think of all the resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ as God's "Movie Trailer" for the future.

I realize I need to update that one-liner I always use. So repeat after me... out loud. Can you manage that?

But I need each of to plug in your own name at the right spot. Can you do that? The screen will help you...

"The risen Jesus  
is God's "movie trailer"  
for the personal resurrection  
of [your name] \_\_\_\_\_

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as a follower of Jesus Christ."

As a Christ-follower, the resurrection of Jesus is the movie trailer of your future. If you believe in Jesus, that's what's in store for you. Jesus moves you forward, upward, beyond your own death, and into His resurrection life.

Yes, the risen Jesus and His resurrection are your future as a believer in Jesus Christ.

Jesus says to you and me, "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?" "...And do you believe in Me?"