

Christ the Lord of Life

John 11:1-53

What is the thing which no man can conquer? It is death.

People have tried to escape death by insulating themselves with wealth. People try today to prolong their lives, but even the proudest man on earth acknowledges that he cannot outrun death. Even if he lives 40 years longer than average – death will capture him. You could say that death is the one thing man cannot beat.

He has conquered the soil of the ground. He has beaten back the barriers of the ocean, and the mountains. He has beaten gravity. He has conquered much regarding human sickness and ailments. He has discovered the principles of God's universe, and harnessed them for his own technology. He thinks he is invincible. But he cannot beat death. There is no death vaccination. There is no pill which prolongs your life by five years every time you take it.

This is why Paul says, 'Death is the last enemy.' It is the biggest enemy, which still lays waste to all our achievements. Whatever you might achieve, whatever you might gain, you will at last come under death's power. Solomon, the wisest of them all, thought long and hard about these things and wrote in Ecclesiastes. He said, 'A rich man stores up all this wealth – and then death comes, and he cannot do a thing with it. And that which he worked for, gets split up amongst fools and lazy people who didn't work for it.'

A wise man learns and learns and gains much wisdom. In the end, though, he dies just like a fool dies, and it does not appear that his wisdom profited him at all. An industrious man builds and develops and creates great industry and yet death will also take him - another man will take what he has sacrificed for, and developed, even if that man is relatively simple or even lazy.

Solomon looked at this and said, 'A living dog is better than a dead lion.' It seemed pointless.

If death is the greatest and last foe, then the one who conquers it would be the greatest man who ever lived. The one who beats death, and provides the cure for all, would certainly be worthy of our greatest appreciation and honour, if not our worship.

This miracle is intended to show you who that person is. That there is a person who took death by the horns, struggled with it, came under it, and came up victorious.

It is Jesus Christ – the resurrection and the life.

If you have ever studied the Gospel of John, you will know his purpose in writing was not so much to give a detailed account of the life of Jesus, as it was to prove one point – *Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and you should believe in Him*. And so, while there are 35 recorded miracles in the Bible, John selected just seven of them. Seven signs which would prove Jesus was the Son of God. John selected miracles showing Jesus could raise the sick even at a distance; Jesus could make a lame man walk; Jesus had power over creation and could make water into wine; He could still the waves of the water during a storm; Jesus could feed 5000 people, and Jesus could give sight to the blind. But, as we read in **John 11:1-53**, this was the last miracle John recorded before Christ's death, and it was in some ways the conclusion. This was perhaps the greatest sign Jesus did. He did raise others from the dead, but not when

they had been dead for four days. And if people were not convinced that Jesus was the Son of God after hearing of Him raising Lazarus, nothing would convince them.

I. Jesus Christ is the Lord of Life.

i. He does not have to hurry – He can delay and it will be to His glory.

Now something odd happens here. John takes pains to show us that Jesus was not cold towards Lazarus. Verse 3 describes him as, ‘The one you love’.

Verse 5 repeats it. And then verse 6 tells us, not that because of His love for Lazarus, He made haste and hurried to the place where Lazarus was. No, it says the opposite. Jesus loved Lazarus, and when he heard he was sick, He delayed. How could He do that? He could do it because He was, and is, the Lord of life.

In verse 4 He could confidently state what the consequences were going to be.

If you are the Son of God, you do not have to hurry to stop Lazarus from going over the edge, because just as you can heal him from sickness, you can also recover him from death. Neither one troubles the Lord. So in fact, He delays so that death will come, and the miracle will cause greater glory to God and greater faith in Him.

Imagine, you are the son of an Arab oil sheikh; you do not have to rush to the petrol pumps when you hear there is a shortage looming. The oil in the ground belongs to you!

We can trust His delays in our lives. If He could delay in Lazarus’ life to the point that Lazarus died, and He brought him back, His delays will work out for His glory and our good as well.

ii. He does not have to worry about what men will do to Him.

Bethany, where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived was about three kilometres from Jerusalem. By this time, the hatred for Jesus was peaking amongst the Pharisees; and Jerusalem was the centre for the Pharisees and Sadducees. To go to Bethany would be like George Bush walking near the Gaza strip unarmed!

The disciples are worried when Jesus says they will go there. After all, he had healed a nobleman’s son from a distance. He had healed a centurion’s servant from a distance. Why couldn’t He just speak the Word again this time?

Jesus’ answer seems to mean this – ‘Since I am the light, and I walk in the will of God, I will not stumble; I will not be taken by surprise, or fall, as if I am walking in the dark. I know exactly what I am doing, because I am doing the will of My Father.’

He was, and is, the Lord of life. He does not have to fear that someone might try to take His life.

When you are the CEO and sole owner of your company, you don’t fear that you’re going to get fired. You do the hiring and the firing. When you are the Lord of life, you do not fear that someone might take your life. That’s why just one chapter earlier, He said in

John 10:17-18 *‘Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father’*

When the Lord of Life is your Lord, the fear of death, should no longer be the paralysing thing it was. If you’re the son of the CEO and owner of the company, being fired shouldn’t be what you spend your time worrying about.

iii. He is not surprised by death.

When we piece together the time frame – we find something interesting. The messenger who came to Jesus must have taken about a day to reach Him. Jesus delayed another two days – that’s three days - and then set out to Bethany, which will take another day. When they arrive, Lazarus has been dead for four days. So it means that Lazarus actually died on the day when the messenger was travelling to Jesus.

But Jesus knows that Lazarus is dead when they set out. No one has told Him. No second messenger has arrived. But Jesus knows that Lazarus has died. Jesus is the Lord of life, and He is not surprised by death.

Very seldom can any of us say we were completely ready for someone’s death. Even when it is someone battling ill health or old age, and the end seems imminent, on the day that it comes it is still a shock. For none of us know.

But Jesus is the Lord of Life – He knows. He said that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father knowing.

A website on the Internet pretends to calculate the day of your death. You enter your date of birth, height, weight, smoking status, and it calculates when you will probably die of natural causes. For those of you who want to know, I will die on Wednesday June 29th 2050. But of course, that’s nonsense – we die when the Lord says so. We are immortal until He calls us home. He is the Lord of Life - He gives it, He takes it away.

2. Jesus Christ is the Lover of Life

Something comes out very plainly here. The Lord Jesus loves people. He loves life. You have seen already that Jesus clearly loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus. But it gets clearer when we see our Lord’s responses to the grief which death brings. Look at verse 33.

i. Jesus was angered.

That does not immediately appear. But the word ‘groaned’ is a word that is translated ‘warned’, ‘criticised.’ It refers to displeasure. Jesus was displeased as He saw this scene. Again, in verse 38, the same thing occurs. Why would Jesus be angry? He was angry to see what the serpent’s lies had produced. Here was the fruit of Adam and Eve believing Satan.

Have you ever felt anger when you saw a child suffering with illness, or perhaps when someone you loved died? You sensed that this is not as it ought to be. Anger in you wanted change. You wanted it set straight. And perhaps you directed your anger at the wrong place or person, and perhaps it went beyond ‘right’ anger. But what motivated it was your love for that child or person.

Jesus as the Lover of Life was angered to see what sin had done to His perfect creation.

ii. Jesus was troubled.

This word ‘troubled’ means ‘to disturb, to agitate, to make restless’. Jesus did not passively take in this scene; it agitated Him to action. Again, what was motivating Him to act? Love was the motivator.

Who has not seen the pain of someone and not been disturbed in spirit – wanting to do something – at the very least – to comfort them?

iii. Jesus was sorrowful.

Verse 35, the shortest verse in the Bible records God in the flesh, crying. Like a parent standing over the cancer riddled body of her son, the sorrow for the destruction and damage is heartbreaking. Sorrow is about loss. And the Lord Jesus, knowing what glory there was in Eden before man sinned, knew what had been lost. He knew this terrible harvest of death was the wages of sin.

If Jesus Christ did not love the world, He would not be angered over what sin brings, He would not be troubled over what sin brings, He would not be sorrowful over what sin brings. But He is the Lover of the Life He has made. That includes your life.

Jesus loves you. He loves you as a life He has made. He is grieved and angered and sorrowful over what sin produces in your life. In fact, He loves you so much, He would rather destroy you than let you remain filthy forever.

3. Jesus Christ is the Conqueror of Death

The fact that Jesus Christ is the Lord of Life, and that He loves life, leads us to the obvious conclusion that He will use His power to conquer death – that thing which destroys life. What does Jesus mean, ‘I am the resurrection and the life?’

i. He conquered death by dying and rising.

The Bible teaches us that there are three kinds of death. There is spiritual death. The Bible tells us in **Ephesians 2:1** that we are born dead in trespasses and sins. That means we are born into this world without the life of God. We are alienated from him, the way we are alienated from the dead. And just as a dead person has no power to love or live or revive himself, we have no power within us to revive ourselves, to get back to God on our own.

The second kind of death is physical death. This is where your soul and spirit are separated from your body and go to judgement, while awaiting the resurrection. There is no soul sleep taught in the Bible, the moment you physically die, you are in conscious torment in hell, or conscious glory in heaven.

The third kind of death is eternal death. This is if you are dead spiritually, and that never changes; you never receive the life of God, and then you die physically – you go into eternity to experience an eternal death. That is – for all eternity, you are separated from the source of life – God. You experience eternal separation and alienation from God in hell. Though you will be resurrected to receive a body, for your body will be judged as well, you will be in this body in an eternal lake of torment, darkness and fire.

While Jesus Christ came to conquer death, we must understand, that death is the judgement He imposes upon us. Spiritual and physical death He promised us if we sinned. Eternal death is His justice. And yet, His love sought to deliver us from death.

He did this by doing two things. Firstly, He died our death. On the cross, He experienced the physical and eternal death that is the wages of sin. Secondly, He rose from the dead, because He was so righteous. It was as if the grave rejected Him, saying, ‘You are spotless, vindicated – death has no claim on you, because you never sinned.’

The climax of this passage is **v25-27**. There Jesus says to Martha, ‘Martha, the resurrection is not some event which will happen apart from Me. I AM the Resurrection. When people will be raised up on the last day – it is I who will be doing it. When people receive eternal life, it is I who give it to them.’

Heb 2:14-15 *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

Rom 6:9-10 *knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.*

Now all who believe in Him will have those two things applied to them. His death becomes your death. What you deserve for sinning against God is experienced by Him, and God will not judge you twice. Then His resurrection life becomes your life. So you will never face eternal death. ‘If you believe in Me, though you died physically, you will live on, and the one who lives and believes in me will never die spiritually.’

Just like there is spiritual death, physical death and eternal death, so there is spiritual life, physical life and eternal life. You are born with physical life. On the day you receive Christ as your Lord and Saviour, He revives you spiritually – you are made alive with him. On that very day, you receive eternal life, because the life of Christ is eternal. And if you die physically, you go on living spiritually and eternally, because His life is your life. And on the day of resurrection, you will be raised to experience that eternal life in a glorified body.

ii. He conquers death by command.

V38-44 - A single command and Lazarus comes forth. Augustine said, ‘If Jesus had not said the Word, ‘Lazarus’, everyone in the tombs would have come forth.’ As much as God could say, ‘Let there be light’, and light appears, the Lord Jesus says, ‘Live’, and the dead live.

He can, and does, do the same thing today, except He does it with spiritually dead people. People who have no desire for Him, no love for Him; He calls them, and they respond. He says to them, ‘live’ and they live. Simultaneous to faith is regeneration – which is another word for resurrection. You are spiritually regenerated, resurrected, given new life, at the same moment you place your faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

It is after this miracle, that God pulls the covers off the Pharisees’ and Sadducees’ hearts. Here they sit, discussing Jesus. They acknowledge His miracles. They recognise He has raised someone from the dead. What is their response? ‘If we let Him go on, we are going to lose our positions. The people will go after Him, Rome will see it as a rebellion, and we will no longer

be in the positions of power we are in now.’ Their rejection was wilful. They knew He was performing miracles which signalled that He was the Messiah. But they did not want to bow before Him and lose their positions.

Now that kind of rejection might sicken you, but think for a moment if the same thing is not true in many hearts today, if not in your own. Many a person today hears of Christ’s miracles, they believe He did these things, they believe He indeed raised Lazarus from the dead. But, like the rulers of Israel, they do not want to believe in Him, because then they will lose their place. The rulers of Israel wanted their place of authority over the nation, but individuals want their place of authority over their own lives. And they fear, ‘If I surrender to Christ as my resurrection and my life, He will come and take my place as my lord.’ And that’s right – He will. But to deny Him that right, when you see He is the Lord of Life and the Giver of Life, is as perverse as the Pharisees. He loves you, as He loved Martha and Mary. He weeps over what death has done in your life, and will do if you keep rejecting Him.

And then for those who profess that you have trusted in Him. Is He really your life? Or do you think that eternal life is a destination you will one day get to, when you are done living this life your own way. Is Christ the Lord of your life? Has Christ conquered your old self – putting it to death, and continually strengthening you to keep putting it to death, so that His life might reign in you?

1Cor 15:55-57 *O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*