

Lesson Six

“I Am the Resurrection and the Life”

Jesus is the source of life that never ends

John 11:11-27

Worship

Responsive Reading (Psalm 16:8-11)

A: I have set the Lord always before me.

B: Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

A: Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;

B: My body also will rest secure,

A: Because you will not abandon me to the grave,

B: Nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

A: You have made known to me the path of life;

B: You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Prayer:

Thanks to you, O Christ victorious!

Thanks to you, O Lord of life!

Death has now no power o'er us,

You have conquered in the strife.

Thanks because you did arise

And have opened paradise!

None can fully sing the glory

Of the resurrection story.

Introduction

In matters of death, resurrection, and eternal life, which of the following things do you struggle with the most?

- That death could strike at any time, and I need to be ready.
- Accepting the fact that I am going to die.
- Being confident about what awaits me beyond death.
- Facing the prospect of losing someone I love when he or she dies.

Death is sleep

Jesus' friend Lazarus was sick, and Jesus was asked to come to Bethany and heal him. Jesus purposely waited until Lazarus died, and then he went to Bethany. In the context of a death and a funeral, Jesus speaks words about the resurrection.

Read John 11:11-13.

1. What does Jesus call death in verse 11?

2. Sometimes people try to soften the harshness of death and speak of it as “sleep” only to keep friends and relatives from feeling uncomfortable. Is Jesus doing that here?
3. How are death and sleep alike for the believer?

Jesus used death as an opportunity

Read John 11:14-16.

4. Why was Jesus glad that he had not been with Lazarus before Lazarus died?
5. What good purposes can death serve?

Death leads to the decay of our bodies

Read John 11:17-19.

6. How long has Lazarus been in the tomb?
7. Why is knowing this fact important for understanding the miracle Jesus will perform?
8. What assurance is here for us if our bodies are violently destroyed in death?

Death may tempt us to doubt

Read John 11:20-24

9. Which of the following describe Martha’s attitude in verse 21?
 - Despairing
 - Blaming
 - Sorrowful
 - Wishful
 - Angry
 - Second-guessing

10. Which of the previously listed attitudes would be sinful?

11. What tells you Martha was still clinging to her faith in Jesus?

12. What are Jesus' words of comfort?

13. We are often called on to comfort those who have lost a loved one. What effect do we want our comfort to have on them?

Believe that Jesus rose and will raise us up

Read John 11:25-27

14. Jesus says, "I am the Resurrection." What is the resurrection, according to the following verses?

- John 5:28-19

- Philippians 3:20-21

- Job 19:25-27

15. How is Jesus *the* resurrection?

16. "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." It sounds as if Jesus is contradicting himself. Explain what each phrase means.

17. Martha's confession of faith is rich and wonderful. What is she saying about Jesus by calling him—

- the Christ?

- the Son of God?
- The one who was to come into the world?

Summary

It has been said, “The death rate throughout history has remained constant—one per person.” Sooner or later all of us must face death. It is the ultimate problem of the entire human race. Humanly speaking, there are no solutions for it or for the eternal death that would follow.

But death does not have to end in eternal misery. Those who believe in Jesus are promised a new and perfect life after death, for Jesus has canceled the deathly debt of sin with his substitutionary life and death for us, and Jesus will reunite our bodies and souls in heaven. Jesus is the ultimate solution for death, because Jesus is the Resurrection.

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, when I think of my death, my sinful nature creates questions, doubts, and fear. Point me always to your Son, Jesus Christ, who overcame death for all by dying in their place and rising from the dead. Thank you for revealing him to me as the Resurrection. Amen.

For further discussion

18. Philosopher Blaise Pascal once said, “Being unable to cure death, wretchedness and ignorance, men have decided, in order to be happy, not to think about such things.” How does this tendency of human nature make the gospel about the resurrection less appealing for people? Why might our modern medical advances have a similar affect on people’s views about death and resurrection?
19. How important is the teaching of the resurrection to the Christian message? (See Philippians 3:10-11 and 1 Corinthians 15:13-14.)
20. Comment on this quote from C. Everett Koop, regarding the death of his son David: “In an effort to be comforting, so many Christians glibly say, ‘God will fill the void.’ Instead, we found that the void is never really filled, but God does make the void bearable.”
21. It is said that there are five steps that people go through when grieving a death or facing their own imminent death: (1) Denial, (2) Anger, (3) Bargaining, (4) Depression, and (5) Acceptance. How does Jesus’ promise of the resurrection address each one?

Lesson Six (LEADER'S GUIDE)

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Introduction

In matters of death, resurrection, and eternal life, which of the following things do you struggle with the most?

- That death could strike at any time, and I need to be ready.
See Psalm 90:12. Younger people, especially teens, may struggle with this. Death seems a long way off. No one expects to die suddenly or tragically from illness or injury. Since the majority of one's lifetime still seems to lie in the future, being prepared for death doesn't seem like a very pressing need. Especially in our day, modern medicine leads us to take death less seriously, since so many people are spared from an early death.
- Accepting the fact that I am going to die.
Sometimes we just don't like to think about death. It is frightening. It is mysterious. It is the wages of sin, not part of God's plan from the beginning. In that sense it is not something "natural" for us.
- Being confident about what awaits me beyond death.

We know God's promises. We know about Jesus' resurrection. But we don't have visible proof of these things. They must be accepted by faith. God's Spirit convinces us through his Word, but sometimes we still wrestle with doubts.

- Facing the prospect of losing someone I love when he or she dies.

I don't really struggle with the first three, whether that's because I'm young and invincible or because I have confidence in my eternal life in Christ, I'm not sure. But this is the one that I struggle with. I'm not worried about my death, because I know there's nothing to worry about. But the death of someone I care about? Having to live here without someone I love? I hate to even think about it.

Sometimes our own death is easier to face than that of someone we love. When we have known a person for decades and when we have shared a very close relationship with him or her, we may not know how we could face life without that person. That person's absence would radically change everything about our lives.

This question is intended to get the class thinking about death and the troubling questions it raises in our minds. Death is our ultimate problem. Death and the sin that causes it is what Jesus came to save us from. Jesus' solution to death is the point of this lesson.

I think as Christians, it might be hard for us to think of death as our ultimate problem, because we so take for granted the fact that death has no more power over us.

I think as people, we maybe don't take death very seriously. We, as Christians, know better than anyone what is waiting after death for people who reject the Gospel, and it isn't good. And it isn't temporary. People who reject the gospel won't suffer for a little while, its for eternity.

Death is sleep

Jesus' friend Lazarus was sick, and Jesus was asked to come to Bethany and heal him. Jesus purposely waited until Lazarus died, and then he went to Bethany. In the context of a death and a funeral, Jesus speaks words about the resurrection.

Read John 11:11-13.

1. What does Jesus call death in verse 11?

Falling asleep

2. Sometimes people try to soften the harshness of death and speak of it as "sleep" only to keep friends and relatives from feeling uncomfortable. Is Jesus doing that here?

No. Jesus says Lazarus has "fallen asleep" because that's the reality of death for believers. He's not trying to soften the blow or protect the sensitivities of Lazarus' family. For believers, "falling asleep" is an accurate description of death.

3. How are death and sleep alike for the believer?

Revelation 14:13. Death is restful and peaceful, like sleep. Ephesians 5:14b. Death is something from which we will "wake up."

We hear this language also in Job 3:13, Matthew 9:24, Acts 7:60, Acts 13:36, 1 Corinthians 11:30, 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15.

Jesus used death as an opportunity

Read John 11:14-16.

4. Why was Jesus glad that he had not been with Lazarus before Lazarus died?

“For your sake, I’m glad Lazarus is dead, because you need a lesson in the end result of faith.” Jesus was glad for the sake of his disciples so that they might believe. Jesus was going to use this as an opportunity to show his disciples that he really was the resurrection and the life and grow their faith.

5. What good purposes can death serve?

- *When believers have been suffering great pain for a long time, death may bring an end to that suffering, answering the prayer “deliver us from evil.” Note: This is the case as long as we are leaving the time of our death in God’s hands and not taking it into our own hands by actively hastening our own or someone else’s death.*
- *For believers, death marks the beginning of their time in heaven.*
- *God may use death to exercise the faith of those who have been bereaved, and in doing so, use the experience as an opportunity for them to witness to others.*
- *God may use death to remind us of the shortness of our lives and the passing nature of this world and as part of his call to repentance.*

To clarify, death is not “good.” Death did not exist in the perfect world before the fall. However, God works all things for our good, so even death he can use to serve his good purpose, like the death of Lazarus that he will use to demonstrate his power and teach his disciples.

Death leads to the decay of our bodies

Read John 11:17-19.

6. How long has Lazarus been in the tomb?

Four days.

7. Why is knowing this fact important for understanding the miracle Jesus will perform?

Why is it important to know that Lazarus has been dead for multiple days? Because Jesus isn’t raising up a fully intact body. Lazarus was beyond “natural” means of revival. Jesus isn’t just going to restart Lazarus’ heart, he’s going to have to repair any decay, as well.

8. What assurance is here for us if our bodies are violently destroyed in death?

No matter what state our bodies are going to be in, Jesus will be able to take care of it.

Death may tempt us to doubt

Read John 11:20-24

9. Which of the following describe Martha’s attitude in verse 21?

- Despairing
- Blaming
- Sorrowful
- Wishful

- Angry
- Second-guessing

Martha, reasonably, is sorrowful, as would be anyone who lost a loved one. I wouldn't call her despairing, as she also professes faith in the resurrection and trust in Jesus. Blaming? Again, her expression of faith keeps me from thinking she blames Jesus, although she might be second-guessing his decision to delay his departure. But really, any of these feelings would not be surprising to hear that a person is feeling after a death.

10. Which of the previously listed attitudes would be sinful?

Any of these feelings might be considered "natural," but that doesn't mean that they are right or the fruit of faith. Reactions like despair, anger at God, blaming God, and second-guessing Him are the fruit of the flesh.

Despair over death rejects faith in the resurrection and impermanency of death. Anger at God denies the reality that that person belonged to God and God has every right to call them home if he wants. And we could come up with other things that are wrong with these reactions, but either way, we know that these feelings have at their root a lack of faith and submission to God.

But I thought this question was interesting because as sinful as these feelings might be, they are not outside the realm of forgiveness, and God can handle them. He's big enough to stand up to those feelings. This section of the study says, "death may tempt us to doubt," and I believe this question about which reactions are sinful is designed to help us explore the reality that faith overcomes all these feelings. We still live in the flesh, so we may very well feel them, but at the end of the day, God has defeated death, and the feelings of despair and anger and blaming have no power over that victory. When we feel those feelings, let us turn to God and trust His promises and faithfulness to them and to us.

Speaking of turning to God and placing our faith in Him...

11. What tells you Martha was still clinging to her faith in Jesus?

What tells you that Martha hadn't let the death of her brother get in the way of her faith?

Verses 21-22. She first says, "Lord, I know if you had been here, Lazarus wouldn't have died," because she knows the power Jesus has over illness and infirmity. Then, in verse 22, she says that she professes faith in the fact that every petition of Christ is heard by His Father, God in heaven.

(Jesus always connects His work to the Father, so it makes sense that Martha would also connect Jesus' work to God the Father.)

12. What are Jesus' words of comfort?

Verse 23, "Your brother will rise again." Good news for the faithful.

13. We are often called on to comfort those who have lost a loved one. What effect do we want our comfort to have on them?

The best comfort we can give is the promise of the Gospel, especially God's promise that death is not the end, that those who die in faith will rise again to eternal life. Also, the promise of a future reunion in heaven (2 Samuel 12:23; Luke 16:22), the blessedness of heaven (Revelation 7:14-17), and God's promise of love and support for those who are left behind (Romans 8:28-39).

And these comforts don't cause an immediate drying of tears of a complete removal of grief. We know that. But because God's Word is creative and does what it says, we can trust that His promises will support and strengthen faith and offer comfort and the peace that passes understanding.

Sometimes, the right thing to say is nothing, or simply to share in their sorrow (especially immediately following a death), but when something can be said, let it be the promises of God.

And not "it was God's will."

Believe that Jesus rose and will raise us up

Read John 11:25-27

14. Jesus says, "I am the Resurrection." What is the resurrection, according to the following verses?

- John 5:28-19

Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

(If Qs about works, read study note in TLSB)

- Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

The resurrection is resurrection to perfected, glorious bodies.

- Job 19:25-27

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!

When we are resurrected, it really will be our very same bodies.

15. How is Jesus *the* resurrection?

Without Jesus, there is no resurrection. He is the source of eternal life. It is through Him and His victory over death that we are raised.

16. "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." It sounds as if Jesus is contradicting himself. Explain what each phrase means.

Let's walk this out.

When Jesus says "even though he dies," he is referring to temporal death. Unless Jesus returns in glory first, we expect the day will come when our hearts stop beating and our bodies cease functioning and begin to decay. Even though this will happen, we look forward to the day when we will live again, when God gives life back to our bodies. Even at the time of death, our souls live on with God. We still live even though we have died.

When Jesus says whoever believes in him “will never die,” he is referring to spiritual death, the separation of our souls from God. Those who believe in God are in a right relationship with God, and as long as they have faith, they will never be separated from God. Again, even at death our souls go on living with God.

17. Martha’s confession of faith is rich and wonderful. What is she saying about Jesus by calling him—
- the Christ?

The First of all, the word “Christ” comes from christos, a Greek word meaning “anointed.” It is the equivalent of the word mashiach, or Messiah, in Hebrew. Mary is here confessing that Jesus is that anointed king, the Messiah, long-promised by God.

- the Son of God?

So, Mary confesses that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah, and here she says that he isn’t just some man sent by God to save them, but he’s God, himself. Not “a” son of God, “the” Son of God.

- The one who was to come into the world?

Mary’s confession culminates with these words. She says Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world. This last phrase emphasizes that Jesus is the fulfillment of the OT promise of a Savior, finally come to the world in the flesh, no longer just a promise in the future, but here, now.

Summary

It has been said, “The death rate throughout history has remained constant—one per person.” Sooner or later all of us must face death. It is the ultimate problem of the entire human race. Humanly speaking, there are no solutions for it or for the eternal death that would follow.

But death does not have to end in eternal misery. Those who believe in Jesus are promised a new and perfect life after death, for Jesus has canceled the deathly debt of sin with his substitutionary life and death for us, and Jesus will reunite our bodies and souls in heaven. Jesus is the ultimate solution for death, because Jesus is the Resurrection.

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, when I think of my death, my sinful nature creates questions, doubts, and fear. Point me always to your Son, Jesus Christ, who overcame death for all by dying in their place and rising from the dead. Thank you for revealing him to me as the Resurrection. Amen.

For further discussion

18. Philosopher Blaise Pascal once said, “Being unable to cure death, wretchedness and ignorance, men have decided, in order to be happy, not to think about such things.” How does this tendency of human nature make the gospel about the resurrection less appealing for people? Why might our modern medical advances have a similar affect on people’s views about death and resurrection?

If we aren’t thinking about death or we’re avoiding the topic and possibility, then there is no need to talk and think about life after death. And we often do like to avoid thinking about things that

we don't understand or that bother us. We distract ourselves with other things so we don't have to think about it. If we never think about death, then we never wonder about what happens after.

I have to be honest, the resurrection is probably something I take for granted. I know it's going to happen. Great. Cool. Not worried about what happens when I die. So it is sometimes hard for me to imagine how people without faith feel about the prospect of death. Does anyone struggle with that?

This is the answer from the author:

Since people prefer to ignore death, rather than deal with its realities, they don't appreciate the promise of the resurrection. They would prefer to have their life and their heaven here and now, and they may prefer "other gospels" that promise them this. The less they think about death, the less they ponder its effects, and the less they consider what comes after. The less urgent they feel about finding a solution, the less need they feel for a Savior.

Our modern medical advances can have a similar effect. Since medicine can delay death, people begin to put their hope in medicine, as though it could stop death altogether. Instead of desiring a guarantee of life after death, people give all their attention to extending their lives. Some have even turned to "cryogenics," the quick freezing of their lifeless bodies, in the hope that medical science will discover ways to revive them in the future. All of this tends to make people take death less seriously and find the resurrection less appealing.

19. How important is the teaching of the resurrection to the Christian message? (See Philippians 3:10-11 and 1 Corinthians 15:13-14.)

Listen to Paul's language in Philippians. It is so important. He talks about pressing forward and obtaining the resurrection by any means necessary. The 1 Corinthians passage I think answers this question on its own. If there is no resurrection, the why on earth would we be here? If Christ has not been raised, then death and sin win. If Christ has not been raised, forget about just resurrection, we can kiss salvation goodbye. That's what Paul says when you read all the way to verse 18. If Christ has not been raised, we are still in our sins. The teaching of the resurrection is central to the Christian message. Without resurrection, there's no eternal life.

20. Comment on this quote from C. Everett Koop, regarding the death of his son David: "In an effort to be comforting, so many Christians glibly say, 'God will fill the void.' Instead, we found that the void is never really filled, but God does make the void bearable."

Remember the question earlier about comforting people we know? Koop, in this quote, is getting to the problem that so many people have with things Christians say in these situations. We need to be careful to not give platitudes. God can fill the void in time, but He will also be in the void with you when it seems like there's no way it can ever get better. God doesn't promise to make everything easy, but he does promise to be with us in the hard times.

In this world we will have trouble, but take heart, because Jesus has overcome the world.

Nothing in Scripture would suggest that just because a person has died we should cease to love him or her. Therefore we can expect to feel a certain void in our life when we have said farewell to someone we cared about. God never created us to be separated from those we love in this life. Death and the feelings of loss that it brings are, therefore, something of an "unnatural" addition to God's creation. (I love that line.)

But God also promises not to let us be tempted beyond what we are able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). He promises that nothing we experience in this life—not even death—will be able to separate us from his love (Romans 8:38,39). As we bear our crosses, he upholds us with his grace in our times of weakness (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Therefore we can also expect him to give us the strength to deal with the loss and the void that death leaves behind, as the Koop family experienced.

21. It is said that there are five steps that people go through when grieving a death or facing their own imminent death: (1) Denial, (2) Anger, (3) Bargaining, (4) Depression, and (5) Acceptance. How does Jesus' promise of the resurrection address each one?

This is not to say that we can't feel any of these things because God has taken care of them and we have no right to deny, be angry, be depressed, etc. No, but it is true that God ministers and provides for us in each phase of grieving in which we find ourselves.

Denial—We can face the reality of death with confidence, since the resurrection guarantees to us that death is not the end and that a better life awaits us after death.

Anger—God uses death to end our earthly sufferings and give us a better life with him in heaven. Earth has nothing to offer to compare with the glorified bodies and life with God that we will enjoy. Though parting with our loved ones may be painful, we know that we will see them again. Death may still be “the wages of sin,” but for the believer God has also made it the gateway to many blessings. With so many promises and blessings, we need not be angry at the situation or angry with God.

Bargaining—There is no need to try to avoid death forever, since we will be raised to life again. God has also taught us that he deals with us by grace and that he gives us eternal life as a gift. We have nothing to bargain with and no need to bargain, since we will be raised to life again freely by God's grace.

Depression—The hope of resurrection can lift us out of depression, just as it helps us overcome anger. God has promised that in death we will receive deliverance from all our earthly troubles, and that after death we will receive a better life with him in heaven. Though we are saddened by the thought of saying goodbye to those we love, the resurrection assures that we will someday see them again.

Acceptance—In light of all the promises we have just reviewed, we can accept death as part of God's good and gracious will for us when it comes.