Jesus – The Resurrection and the Life

1. Introduction

a. So far we have looked at four of the seven statements that Jesus makes in John's gospel which begin with the words *I am*. Each of these "I am" proclamations furthers our understanding of Jesus' ministry in the world. They also link Jesus to the Old Testament revelation of God. In the Old Testament, God revealed His name to Moses: "I AM WHO I AM." Thus, in Judaism, "I AM" is unquestionably understood as a name for God. Whenever Jesus made an "I am" statement in which He claimed attributes of deity, He was identifying Himself as God.

b. So far we have seen Jesus use the following metaphors to describe his identity:

i *"I am the bread of life"* (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51). In this case, Jesus states that He is the bread of life just after He had fed the 5,000 in the wilderness. At the same time, He contrasts what He can do with what Moses had done for their ancestors: "*Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die*" (verses 49–50).

ii *"I am the light of the world"* (John 8:12; 9:5). This second of Jesus' "I am" statements in John's gospel comes right before He heals a man born blind. Jesus not only says He is the light; He proves it. Jesus' words and actions echo Genesis 1:3, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

iii *"I am the door"* (John 10:7 and 9, ESV). This "I am" statement stresses that no one can enter the kingdom of heaven by any other means than Christ Himself. Jesus' words in this passage are couched in the imagery of a sheepfold. He is the one and only way to enter the fold.

iv *"I am the good shepherd"* (John 10:11, 14). With this "I am" statement, Jesus portrays His great love and care. He is the One who willingly protects His flock even to the point of death. When Jesus called Himself the good shepherd, He unmistakably took for Himself one of God's titles in the Old Testament: *"The Lord is my shepherd"* (Psalm 23:1).

c. In John 11 Jesus makes his next "I am" statement immediately after raising Lazarus from the dead. Having shown that he could fulfil God's promise to Israel that he would raise the dead he goes on to make a claim that his actions had just substantiated.

Is.26:19 *Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.*

2. Death

a. Lazarus was dead. Earlier, Jesus had heard from Martha and Mary that His good friend was sick, but instead of going to visit Lazarus, Jesus "stayed where he was for two more days". He explained to His puzzled disciples that the sickness was "for God's glory, that God's Son may be glorified through it" (v. 4).

John 11:3-4 *So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." **4** But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."*

b. After Lazarus died, Jesus began a journey to Lazarus's home in Bethany. Significantly, when Jesus informed His disciples that Lazarus was dead, He simply said His friend was "asleep, but I am going there to wake him up"

John 11:11 *After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him."*

c. Outside Bethany, Lazarus's sister Martha went out to meet Jesus. "If you had been here," she said, "my brother would not have died." Such was her faith in Jesus' power to heal. Jesus replied by assuring Martha that her brother would rise again. Martha responded again in faith: "*I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day*." At this point, Jesus makes His fifth "I Am" statement in John's gospel:

John 11:21-26 *Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.* ***22*** *But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."* ***23*** *Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."* ***24*** *Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."* ***25*** *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life.*[d] *Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,* ***26*** *and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.*

d. Here we have Jesus interacting with probably some of his closest friends. Throughout the gospel we see how much Jesus loved both Martha and Mary and Lazarus.

John 11:5 *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*

e. Surely John is stressing Jesus's love for this family because he knows that what Jesus is about to do here does not feel like love to most people. To wait two days and allow Lazarus to die, to put Martha and Mary through the grief of losing their brother, very few of us think of love this way.

f. However, it was love that moved Jesus to let Lazarus die. It was the love of Jesus for this family and for his disciples and for us, that caused him to choose to let Lazarus die. Love lets him die because his death will help them see, in more ways than they know, the glory of God. This is a clear example of Jesus knowing what is needed to reveal his glory.

g. In our lives we may also suffer and be in distress but the promise found in this passage is that Jesus will reveal his glory. As his disciples we can often be confused and feel that he is not addressing our pain and grief but we have to understand that the purpose of our lives once we have given them to Jesus is to reveal his glory and this means "taking up our cross". This means allowing death in our lives to reveal his glory.

h. However, the passage also shows us how Jesus *feels* about death. It is here we find that short phrase, "Jesus wept".

John 11:32-37 *Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* ***33*** *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.* ***34*** *And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."* ***35*** *Jesus wept.* ***36*** *So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"* ***37*** *But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"*

i. The reality of death deeply moved Jesus – but what does this mean? The Greek word underlying "deeply moved" is *embrimaomai.* It is used elsewhere in the New Testament,

in John 11:38, Matthew 9:30 (“sternly warned”), Mark 2:43 (“sternly charged”), and Mark 14:5 (“scolded”). In all instances, it means to feel something deeply and strongly.

j. Jesus was moved with profound sorrow at the death of his friend and at the grief that his other friends had suffered. In addition, this sorrow was intermixed with anger at the evil of death. Jesus reveals that heartfelt mourning in the face of death is not an indication of a lack of faith — of doubt — but it is honest grief at the reality of death and suffering.

k. Death is a devastating reality of humanity. It happens to us all — our own mortality — and to those around us. Yet with its unwavering commonality, it does not make it any easier to experience. It’s especially hard to swallow when death comes unexpectedly and too soon in a life.

l. We live in a broken world, and when sin entered the world with the fall of humanity (with Adam and Eve), the reality of death entered as well. Death is not God’s original desire for us it is the consequence of sin. Like Jesus we should also be deeply moved by death because it is the evidence of sin in our world.

3. Delay

a. Jesus’ decision to delay his coming to Lazarus essentially honoured the Jewish tradition of the soul and a dead individual. The cultural belief was that the soul hovered over the body for 72 hours before finally departing. By the time Jesus arrives to see Lazarus, he has been dead for four days. His perceived delay is no delay at all. He is removing any doubt from the people’s reasoning that He is the One who holds the power of resurrection and life.

b. Upon Jesus’ arrival at Bethany, Martha goes to see Him, and in their exchange, Martha acknowledges that Lazarus will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. This profession would have been based on the Old Testament understanding found in Job.

Job 19:25-27 *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.* ***26*** *And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God,* ***27*** *whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.*

c. However, Martha believed that the resurrection was an event. Jesus showed her (and us) that the Resurrection is a Person. It is in Jesus’ response to Martha that we see His proclamation, “I am the resurrection and the life”. In the midst of death there is someone who is life. In the midst of death, resurrection and life are available through faith in Jesus Christ.

John 11:25-26 *Jesus said to her, “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?”*

d. To know resurrection life, we have to believe that it is found in the one who is the resurrection and the life.

4. The resurrection and the life

a. When Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life,” He was claiming to be the source of both. There is no resurrection apart from Christ, and there is no eternal life apart from Christ.

b. Beyond that, Jesus was also making a statement concerning His divine nature. He does more than give life; He is life, and therefore death has no ultimate power over Him. Jesus confers this spiritual life on those who believe in Him, so that they share His triumph over death.

1 John 5:11-12 *And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.* ***12*** *Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

c. Believers in Jesus Christ will experience resurrection because, having the life Jesus gives, it is impossible for death to defeat them

1 Cor. 15:53-57 *For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.* ***54*** *When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:*

"Death is swallowed up in victory."
55 *"O death, where is your victory?*
O death, where is your sting?"

56 *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* ***57*** *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

d. The grieving Martha wished that Jesus had arrived earlier so He could have healed her brother. And when Jesus spoke of resurrection, Martha assumed He was speaking of "the resurrection at the last day." In both statements, Martha reveals that she considered time an insurmountable obstacle. In effect, Martha was saying, "It's too late to help Lazarus (the time is past), so now we must wait (allow more time)." Jesus shows that neither death nor time is an obstacle to Him.

John 11:38-44 ***38*** *Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.* ***39*** *Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odour, for he has been dead four days."* ***40*** *Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"* ***41*** *So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me.* ***42*** *I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me."* ***43*** *When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out."* ***44*** *The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."*

e. It's one thing to claim to be the resurrection and the life, but Jesus proved it by raising Lazarus, who was four days dead. Truly, with Christ, death is but "sleep". Death has no dominion over Him who is Life itself, nor does death have dominion over those who are in Him. Because He lives, we live. Because He is Life, we have life eternally.

1 Thess. 4:13 *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.*

f. Jesus' statement that He is the resurrection and the life provides a godly perspective on Martha's natural beliefs.

   i Martha believed that the resurrection is an event; Jesus showed her (and us) that the resurrection is a Person.

   ii Martha's knowledge of eternal life was an abstract idea; Jesus proved that knowledge of eternal life is a personal relationship.

iii Martha thought victory over death was a future expectation; Jesus corrects her, showing that victory is a present reality.

g. If our lives are in Christ and he is in us, then death has no hold over us and we live in victorious life

5. Do you believe?

a. So we come back to the question Jesus asked Martha. Do you believe this? Is her response our response?

John 11:27 *She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."*

b. In a world corrupted and decaying with death do we believe that through believing in Jesus we can know resurrection and life? This is what it means to follow Jesus. In the midst of a dark world under the curse of death we can find life, abundant life, eternal life, resurrection life. The darkness in our lives can be turned into glory – the glory of the Son.

c. Jesus showed the people then and He shows us now that death has no hold over Him. Resurrection and life go hand-in-hand. Without Jesus Christ, there is neither resurrection nor eternal life for the believer. Without Jesus there at the time of Lazarus' death, there was only an occupied grave and the stench of death. But through Christ Jesus, there was newness of life and the victorious promise of resurrection.

d. We don't accept death as inevitable – we weep at its impact on people's lives and on our world. But we have an answer to it – the resurrection life found in believing in the Son of God – the giver of life. The one who is the resurrection and the life.

6. When death seems to reign

a. Between the death of Lazarus and his resurrection four days later, his family could not see how God would be glorified in it. That would be revealed at his resurrection. There will be times in our lives when we can't see clearly how God is glorified in a situation that looks like death but God is doing more than we can know. And the resurrection will bring it all to light. In the meantime, we believe and trust in him.

b. We trust in the word of God knowing that death has been overcome and swallowed up in the victory of resurrection life.

1 Cor.15:54-57 *"Death is swallowed up in victory." **55** "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"**56** The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. **57** But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*