



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 11: 1-27

Fall 2022

"The Resurrection And The Life"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. I hope all of you had a great Thanksgiving and are ready to move on in the Gospel of John from a glorious 10th chapter to the equally glorious 11th chapter. It's difficult to say which chapter is the greatest in this great Gospel of John, but we're in chapter 11 and we're going to look at a rather lengthy passage with a lot of narrative; and so we're going to look at chapter 11, verses 1-27.

You'll remember the Lord has had a discussion with the Jews—the Jewish leaders and others around Him. They wanted to know who He was; 'Speak plainly. Are you the Son of God?' And He had spoken plainly to them; He said in verse 30, "I and the Father are one." And they understood exactly what the significance of that was; and we read that in verse 31, "The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him." The conversation continues as the Lord challenges them. And as He continues to demonstrate from the Scriptures that He is the Son of God, they again sought to grasp Him, arrest Him, and stone Him.

So He left; He left the region. He went to the eastern side of the Jordan River and that's where the chapter ends with the great ministry that He had there; "Many there," we're told in verse 42, "believed in Him."

Well now verse 1 of chapter 11,

11 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. ³ So the sisters sent *word* to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." ⁴ But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days *longer* in the place where He was. ⁷ Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸ The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰ But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹ This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." ¹² The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." ¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. ¹⁴ So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." ¹⁶ Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, (*which means 'twins', as you can see in the margin*), said to *his* fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him."

¹⁷ So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning *their* brother. ²⁰ Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. ²¹ Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² Even now I know that whatever You ask of 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; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, *even* He who comes into the world."

John 11: 1-27

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's pray.

Father, it's a blessing to be here with Your people on this Sunday morning. We just finished the annual celebration of Thanksgiving; and yet we have every day to be thankful: Thankful for Your mercy and Your grace and thankful for what our Lord spoke of here—the great hope that we have as Your people of the resurrection to come.

And not only the resurrection, but the life that we possess now, eternal life—what is spoken of in John 3:16, and that we have through faith and faith alone. And it begins the moment we believe; we have new life; we become new creatures; we have fellowship with You, direct access to You. We can come to You at every moment, as we do at this moment, and seek Your help in time of need—and You answer us; in Your way and in Your time. And all of that's illustrated so beautifully in our text and what the Lord will do with Lazarus.

We have the hope that You care for us now, You love us now in the midst of difficulties—and the ultimate end of it all is life, glorious life—all because of Your Son, who is "...the resurrection and the life." So LORD, as we study this, may we be encouraged and may our faith be deepened in You; and may our life be lived as it ought to be lived in light of what's coming. This life, this "world is passing away," as John wrote in 1 John, (2:17). It's passing away even now, before us. We're passing away. But what's coming is forever—and it's eternal. May we live for that. May our time together be an encouragement to that. So gives us perspective.

And give us perspective on the difficulties that we face. There are some of us in the congregation that are struggling, or grieving—so LORD, 'You are the God of all comfort', Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 1:3, and we pray that You'd comfort Your people; and encourage them as well.

LORD, it is a great time to be here today to be able to read this text and then consider it. We pray that You'd teach it to us and build us up in the faith—to Your glory we pray. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) In the crypt below St. Paul's cathedral in London, lies the body of one of England's greatest military heroes, the Duke of Wellington, a man who knew the terrors of death long before he faced his own. He saw it at Waterloo, which gives weight to a statement he made that, "Man must be a coward or a liar who could boast of never having felt the fear of death." That fear is common and universal. And yet, the apostle Paul told the Philippians, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Phl 1:21). Death was not loss to Paul. Death was gain; it was profit.

I don't know what the general thought of the apostle, but he was no coward or liar. Still, how could Paul speak so assuredly and fearlessly about death—the king of terrors. The answer's found in John 11, where Jesus, standing near the tomb of a good friend declared, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies." (vs25). Those were not empty words or a vain boast, because He then proved them by calling Lazarus out of the tomb and raising him from the dead.

This is the seventh and final sign in the Gospel of John. Each one is a miracle that illustrates some particular aspect of Christ's authority as the Son of God—this one shows that He is Lord over death. He is God. He is God the Son. And as Bishop John Ryle wrote, "He makes the grave itself yield up its tenants."

When the chapter begins, Lazarus was sick and Jesus was far away. He and His disciples were beyond the Jordan, on the east side of the river, outside of the land. He had gone there from Jerusalem after an attempt had been made on His life. Men accused Him of blasphemy and picked up stones to stone Him, so He wisely withdrew to a safe place. But now He learns that His friend, Lazarus, needed Him.

Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, lived in Bethany, on the east side of the Mount of Olives, about two miles from Jerusalem. Jesus was a frequent guest in their home when He visited Jerusalem. Luke records on one of those visits, in chapter 10 of his Gospel, that when He was there, 'Mary sat at His feet learning from Him.' (vs39).

Both sisters were completely devoted to the Lord. Mary's devotion had become celebrated: John says, "It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair." (vs2). [He records that incident in the next chapter, but he mentions it here because it was already well known, long before the Gospel of John was written.]

The Lord had a very close relationship with this family and the sisters made a request for His help based on that relationship and their confidence in His love for them—and His power. "Lord, behold," they said, "he whom You love is sick." God's people get sick. Those whom the Lord loves suffer trials in this life. We shouldn't think it strange when we fall on hard times. But we have a Savior who is Lord over all times, and circumstances, and conditions, which also means He could have prevented Lazarus' sickness—but didn't.

He can prevent every problem that we experience, but He doesn't. In this fallen world, we suffer physically and spiritually. It's no sign that the Lord doesn't care. Here it was Lazarus, "whom You love." Now that's a present tense, and it indicates 'constantly loves'. Even while he was sick, the Lord loved him. We should never forget that. These things happen to us for a good purpose; and the Lord will state that shortly in regard to Lazarus. But trials are no sign that He does not love us. He does.

And based on that love, the sisters asked for His help. In fact, they were so confident of it that they didn't panic. They didn't say, 'Come quickly.' They simply reported that their brother's condition was grave and confident that He would respond

to their request in mercy. Now that's faith. Those who have that, who trust Him and know He loves them, will never be disappointed; will not be disappointed for long; will not be disappointed forever.

And we see that here. Jesus gave a positive response to the request, "This sickness," He said, "is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." (vs4). He didn't mean that the sickness was not fatal; Lazarus did die, as we know. But his sickness would not end in death finally, ultimately. 'Death would be defeated; Lazarus would be raised', that's the Lord's meaning.

And Jesus would be glorified in that in a way far greater than He could have been by healing a man who was sick. It was the climactic miracle, the greatest miracle, because it was the reversal of the greatest ruin, the greatest loss, with life triumphing over the grave. And so to insure that the miracle would be indisputable, that Lazarus would be in the grave for four days, John wrote that, "He stayed two days *longer* in the place where He was." (vs6). And after that He said, "Let us go to Judea again." (vs7).

Often God does not give an immediate answer to our prayers and our cries for help. That's never due to callousness; it's never due to indifference on His part. He always answers in a way and a time that is best for us—and brings glory to Him.

Waiting, though, is never easy. What enables us to do that is understanding that everything around us is governed with perfect wisdom. The Lord does everything well. He does everything in the very best way. Now, that's how we're able to wait when we hear nothing but silence—when we make our requests and there doesn't seem to be an answer. That's faith that can endure those periods of silence. That's mature faith, firm faith that is able to sit still and wait on the Lord. That's persevering faith, which is grounded in an understanding that the Lord is sovereign and that the Lord loves His people.

Well, two days passed. The disciples thought that Lazarus would recover from his sickness when the Lord announced that they were returning to Judea. The disciples were

less than enthusiastic. "Rabbi," they said, "the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" (vs8).

It was an objection that He answered with an enigmatic statement, a kind of mysterious statement, that really comes off very much like a proverb in verse 9 and verse 10; "Jesus answered, 'Are there not 12 hours in the day?' " (Of course He knew there were 24, but He's speaking of the daylight hours. There are 12 hours of daylight.) " 'If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.' "

Labor, in those days, was limited to the daylight hours. Night was not safe and hindered work. So if a person wanted to finish a task he had to work while he had the opportunity to do that—in the daylight, in the 12 hours that were available. And it was the same for our Lord. As long as He followed His Father's will, He was like a laborer working under the sunlight: He was safe, wouldn't stumble, and could succeed.

But His time was short, for we're nearing the end of His ministry here in chapter 11. So He was, as it were, 'in the 11th hour' and He needed to be doing the work of His ministry, taking every opportunity that the Father gave Him: And this was an opportunity for Him to reveal Himself. And as long as His disciples were walking with Him in the light of the world, (Him who is the light of the world, walking with Him in obedience and doing the will of the Father), they were safe. The work of God cannot be frustrated.

Then He told them the reason He was going back into Judea and into danger, into harm's way; "Lazarus", He said, "had fallen asleep". (vs11). And He was going there to "awaken him."

"Sleep" was the Lord's way of describing His friend's death. And it would become a Christian euphemism for death because sleep is pleasant and sleep is temporary—we rise from it. In his commentary, Leon Morris commented that nothing demonstrates more clearly the difference Christ's coming has made than that: Overcoming death,

defeating death. He wrote, "Throughout the ancient world, the fear of death was universal. Death was a grim adversary that all men feared and no man could defeat."

But Christ did. And because of Him, death is *sleep*. We close our eyes in this world to open them in the next, in the Lord's presence. And Lazarus would rise from his death like rising from sleep.

But the disciples didn't get that. They didn't get it. They didn't understand what He was saying—understandably, I think. They took the Lord literally, and wondered why He would put their lives at risk, and His life at risk in order to wake up 'a sleeping man.' "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." (vs12).

So the Lord spoke plainly. He said, "Lazarus is dead." (vs14). Then He added the surprising statement, "...and I am glad", (vs15). Glad because it would strengthen their faith and it would strengthen the faith of those that were there in Bethany—and strengthen the saints down through the ages.

All of this, though, was still not clear to the disciples. They hesitated to go until one of them, Thomas, spoke up. When we think of Thomas we think of 'the doubter', but here he acted with courage; "Let us go also," he said, "so that we may die with Him." (vs16). He didn't understand the Lord's need to return to Judea but he was still willing to go and die with Him, 'Better to die with Him than live without Him.' He had the heart of a true disciple.

(When I say that, I think part of what I'm saying is, 'We don't always understand what the Lord is saying to us. We don't always understand everything that we read in Scripture and the path that we're following. But we know we need to be faithful, regardless—and that's being a genuine disciple.) And that's what Thomas displays here—he had the heart of a true disciple. And so, through his exhortation they were moved—and they left.

When they arrived in Bethany, which is high up in the Judean hills, Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Many Jewish friends were there, comforting the family. Many had come from Jerusalem which, as I said, was just over the Mount of Olives, less than two miles away.

When Martha learned that Jesus had arrived she went to meet Him and she greeted Him with the words, "Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died." (vs21). Now those were not words of rebuke, but regret—and faith. She knew He could have prevented her brother's death and healed him. That's faith. And, as if to assure Him that her faith had not been shaken, she added, "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." (vs22). She'd not lost any confidence in Him. And He assured her that all would be well, that Lazarus would be raised from the dead; "Your brother", He said, "will rise again." (vs23).

Now she took His words as an attempt to comfort her with a reminder of the future resurrection at the end of the age, (which was a doctrine of orthodox Judaism). It's one of the doctrines that the Pharisees held. The Sadducees didn't believe it. But the Pharisee's held the resurrection of the dead to be true. —And that was orthodox Judaism.

She didn't imagine that Jesus might be indicating here that He was about to bring Lazarus back to life and raise him from the grave shortly. And so, as a good orthodox Jewish woman, she confessed, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." (vs24). She had that hope—that great hope.

But the Lord then goes beyond the doctrine to direct Martha's faith and confidence to Him personally when He declared in verse 25, "I am the resurrection and the life." Now that's the fifth "I AM" statement in this Gospel. It means He's more than a person who knows the secret to the resurrection and the way to life. Both are in Him. 'I am it', He said.

And again, as we've covered in the past number of times that we've dealt with these "I AM" statements, it is a reference back to Exodus chapter 3, verses 14 and 15, where God spoke to Moses from the burning bush and identified Himself as "I AM WHO I AM". He is ever present, eternal, and self-existent. That's the significance of that name, and it's illustrated by the event that Moses was witnessing—the flame burning in the bush, but the bush not being consumed.

And you'll remember what we've said about that, what that illustrates, what that shows is the nature of God—that He's independent of the creation. He is not part of the creation, He's distinct from it; and He is independent of that bush, in that it's not drawing His energy from it. He exists apart from it—self-sustained, self-sufficient. That's the Lord God.

And the Lord was claiming that about Himself. I think He's saying that He is the one who spoke from that bush. He's saying He's equal with the Father—which is again a claim to deity; and therefore a claim to be the source of all life, both physical and spiritual life.

And by drawing Martha's attention to Himself, He was telling her that more is needed than confidence in doctrine. Personal faith in Him was necessary in order to rise in the resurrection. So Jesus added to His claim to be 'the resurrection and the life', that "...he who believes in Me will live even if he dies." (vs25b). All who *believe* in Jesus Christ as God the Son will live forever. Death will not prevail; it will not hold us in its cold grip. The believer will overcome the grave in the resurrection on the last day.

Well, what does it mean to *believe*? We can define it in different ways. I think a very simple way to define saving faith, (this belief that He speaks of), is it means simply, 'to trust'. It means to transfer confidence from self to Christ. The Lord said, 'Those who do that will live. They will have a glorious future.'

But He adds something more to that in the next statement: Our hope is not limited to a distant future; it is a present blessing as well. He said, "...and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die." (vs26). Those who put their trust, their faith in Me, "will never die."

Now, on the face of it, that might seem a little confusing. Jesus just said, 'The believer will live in the resurrection to come, even if he dies.' But now He said, 'The believer will never die.' What does He mean, 'The believer will never die?' Lazarus was certainly a believer; He loved the Lord, and the Lord loved him—but he was in the grave.

Believers in Christ die every day. He couldn't be speaking of physical death, obviously—so what did He mean, “never die”?

He meant that everyone who believes in Him escapes *spiritual* death: What is called “the second death”, in Revelation chapter 20, verse 14, ‘eternal death’. To put it bluntly—‘damnation’.

And we escape it because we have *spiritual* life. That's what the Lord gives to all who believe in Him: It is “eternal life”. And it begins in the soul the moment a person believes in Him, puts faith in Him, trusts in Him, rests in Him.

That is a major emphasis of this Gospel. We saw it back in chapter 3, verse 16, one of the great texts of the Bible; “...whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” And chapter 3 of John ends, “...he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him.” John 3, verse 36b.

Life, eternal life, is received through faith alone and at the moment of faith. Now what a blessing that is, because as that last verse of chapter 3 points out, those who do not believe live under, constantly under, “the wrath of God” that can fall at any moment.

Well, it is the life of God that is given to us: this eternal life—life in the soul that brings about a fundamental change in us. It is active. Life is active; and the life is active in a distinctive way, this eternal life that He speaks of, this eternal life that we receive that overcomes the eternal death. And it's characterized by love.

It is obedience, but we can become very specific because John wrote about this new life, eternal life, in other places. In 1 John chapter 3, in verse 14, he gave love as the identifying feature of it, (as the Lord does in chapter 13 of this Gospel). John wrote there, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.” Life can't contain itself: It is active; it breaks out; it bears fruit.

And God's life is known by love for others—for the undeserving. This is not to be understood in the sense of, ‘There is a condition that you must meet in order to be a child of God.’ What John is saying in 1 John is, ‘Here's the evidence of the new life: You

love the brethren.' Life produces that. You have within you the life of God—and it is natural that it will reveal itself.

For us to know that we have this life, we know it by our love for the Lord and specifically, as John puts it, 'Our love for God's people.' So if you wonder about yourself at times, if you lack a little bit of assurance, ask yourself, 'Do I love God's people?' If you wonder if you have this salvation, we need to ask ourselves, 'What do we think of the people of God?'

Sometimes they're quite unlovely. So it's not an easy thing to love the brethren always. But, do you care about that? Do you want to associate with them and minister to them? That's evidence, proof, of *life* and a consequence of having God's life in us. It will produce that within us. Not to the fullest degree, of course, we grow in that—but that's an evidence. And we receive it through faith alone in Christ alone.

And that's just the beginning. Death cannot end it. Jesus promised here that, though some day the believer will die physically, he or she will not die spiritually. And they will live again physically because they will be raised to life because of what Christ has done; because what He has put within us. And He can do that; He can raise us from the dead; and will do that for us because He is "the resurrection and the life." That is our great hope based on that great truth—but truth that is true only for those who believe in Christ.

So Jesus then put the question to Martha; He asked, "Do you believe this?" (vs26b). The truth of God's Word always calls for a response. We may find it interesting to listen to lessons on the Bible. We may find it interesting to be taught, (and we should if we're God's people—we should find great interest in that), but it requires a response from us—and it always does. And so, the Lord puts the question to Martha, 'Did she understand this?' Was Martha understanding and believing Him?

And she responded in verse 27, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, *even* He who comes into the world."

True faith, saving faith, is faith with correct content/doctrine. It has an object. And the object of Martha's faith, which is the object of saving faith, is Jesus Christ. It's not clear how much she understood of the Lord's "I AM" statement, but she had an enlarged understanding of who He was compared to others. In fact, she says, 'You're the one who comes into the world.' (vs27b).

Remember back in chapter 10, when the Lord is defending Himself, (we looked at this last week), He spoke of Himself as the one, "whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world." (vs36). They didn't understand that, (or at least they didn't believe that). They understood that He was saying, 'He's more than a man. He's God's Son.'

Well, she is accepting it: You're the one "who comes into the world." And in her confession she made three points: First, she said that He is "the Christ". He is the Messiah, the anointed one, the hope of Israel, the fulfillment of the prophets of the Old Testament. And second, He is "the Son of God." Again, it's hard to say how deep her knowledge of that was, but she was right in what she said—and knew, certainly, that He's more than man; He is God and man; He is the eternal Son of God. That's the meaning of what she's saying.

Well if He were not, we could have no hope of eternal life, no hope of the resurrection to come. Only the eternal Son of God can give what Jesus promised here.

And that leads to a third point: That Jesus is 'the He', "who comes into the world." She knew that He was, 'the sent one from the Father'. That He'd been sent into this world to fulfill the promise that was made early on, at the very beginning, at the dawn of human history, when Adam and Eve were about to be sent out of the garden, guilty of sin but with the promise of Genesis 3:15: 'That the seed of the woman would come, crush the head of the serpent, and deliver God's people.' They had the promise of a deliverer to come.

And that was the mission in which our Lord was sent and that Martha confessed faith in. That's her confession. She believed these truths about Jesus. Her understanding may have been small, like a mustard seed. Genuine faith often is. It begins the size of a

mustard seed, which is to say, it begins very small—but it's alive! And because it is alive it grows.

She had fundamental trust in Him; that's very clear from what she said. But her trust was defined by truth; it was defined by doctrine. And as she would increase in her knowledge of it, her understanding of who Christ was and what He had done, her faith would grow—and she would be able to say with the apostle Paul, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

That is the hope we are given. Every believer is given this hope—that hope in this fifth 'I AM' statement, "I am the resurrection and the life." Our God, the Triune God, is a life giving, death defeating God. As Jesus said in chapter 10, verse 10, "The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly." It's the good life that He gives us: The orderly life, the healthy and helpful life, a life turned outward toward others in love—not inward towards self, not a soul curved in on itself, but rather a soul that goes outward to others. And it is unending life that overcomes the grave.

But, the world paints a very different picture of this life that Christ gives us. The British poet and pagan, Charles Swinburne, hated Christianity, and he wrote the line, "Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown gray from thy breath." Or, 'Christianity has taken the fun out of life, the joy out of life'; that's what he was saying.

Well that's just the old lie that Satan told in the garden when he convinced Eve that God was keeping her from the best—from a full life. 'He's keeping you from being a goddess', is what he was telling her. But that's a sham. That life, the life that the world exonerates, the life that Satan was exalting to Eve, is a life full of confusion, selfishness, sorrow, guilt, hopelessness, and bleakness. And the way the world mourns its dead proves that very plainly—the hopelessness of life for the unbeliever.

The Soviet Union fell a little over three decades ago, so some of you weren't around to remember the funerals that occurred in Moscow from late 1982 to early 1985. The old order was passing away. In a period of two and a half years there were three state funerals when three successive leaders, (heads of the Communist Party and heads of the Soviet Union), died. The first was Leonid Brezhnev, followed by Yuri Andropov, and then Konstantin Chernenko.

Now the news carried at least parts of those services. I remember watching them on television, giving viewers in the West a glimpse of how communism and atheism deals with death. —Not well; they had no hope beyond the grave. And their state funerals reflected that. They were all the same: Same protocol, same thing with dreary ceremonies of black crepe and somber music. Their hymn was Chopin's Funeral March. Depressing. (I could ask Elizabeth or Esther to play it, and you would go out of here terribly depressed. It would be the worst sermon you'd heard me preach.)

I've done a lot of funerals—Christian funerals. And they are always times of sorrow; but not despair. They are full of hope and joy through the tears because it is “sleep” for the Christian; it is temporary. The ancient Thessalonians lost loved ones; so in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verse 13, Paul informed them about their brothers and sisters: “...who are asleep, so that you will not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope.” We grieve, but we don't grieve “as do the rest” —as do the pagans.

‘Death is an enemy’, Paul said. (1Cor 15:26). We shouldn't be cavalier about it or treat it tritely. It is an enemy that causes great grief. Paul calls it “The last enemy”, but it's a defeated enemy. And those who are “asleep” are with the Lord and will return with Him when He comes again to establish His kingdom on the earth.

The world doesn't have that hope. It may think of death as sleep—but has no certainty, no real hope in that euphemism. One of the famous lines from Shakespeare is, "To sleep, perchance to dream." It's from Hamlet's soliloquy that begins with this famous line, "To be or not to be." He was contemplating death; in fact, he's considering suicide:

'To live or not to live'. And he thinks how pleasant it would be to just go to sleep and leave life's difficulties and headaches behind—and dream.

But then he ponders what he's thinking about and he wonders, "What dreams may come?" Sleep also has nightmares. What if that is his sleep of death? It gives him pause; in fact, it frightens him—as it should.

The world and unbelievers have no assurance beyond death. Is it paradise? Is it oblivion? Is it worse? Is it hell forever: eternal separation, eternal alienation, aloneness? That's part of what hell is. It is being isolated and alone forever with the burden of one's guilt fully felt. So is it that? Is that what Hamlet was contemplating—eternal night? That is a nightmare.

The Christian knows what dreams will come. And we know that they're far more than dreams: Our future is real, our future is certain. It is eternal day; it is rest; it is glory forever. We know that because we have revelation. We have a Savior who died and was raised, who entered the grave and returned from it. He has gained for us life forever and the resurrection to come. He is "the resurrection and the life"—and our hope is in Him.

So every believer in Jesus Christ has that certainty, and can say with the apostle, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." With that hope, may God give us the grace to rest in that, to believe that firmly, and then to live in light of it—to live for Him today, to live for all eternity.

If you've not believed in Him, we invite you to come to Him. We come through faith. It is the open hand, (that's what faith is), that receives the gift of salvation that He has obtained for all who believe in Him through His death. So trust in Him; receive eternal life; and then, by God's sovereign grace, live for Him to His glory—and to our own future glory. May God help you to do that.

Father, it's a great thing for a believer in Jesus Christ to be able to say 'We are graven on Your heart', and nothing can erase us from that, from Your eternal, infinite

affection for us, and Your purpose to bring us into Your presence some day and raise us from the dead. We have that hope and it is certain. We thank You for Your grace and all that You did for us through Your Son; to purchase us, to give us life that's everlasting, eternal, and the hope of the glory to come. We thank You for that. May we embrace that and understand it increasingly in our life.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

(End of Audio)