

**Christ Presbyterian Church**  
**Edina, Minnesota**  
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**Jesus in His Own Words: I AM the Resurrection & Life**  
**John 11**

We are talking about heaven this morning so this is going to be a lot of fun. We are in a series where we are looking at the *I am* statements in the Gospel of John. There are two reasons we are doing this. One is so that we can get more and more of an understanding of who God in Jesus Christ is. I remember when I was a kid, my mom made me a blanket. It had my initials on it and in all these little quadrants on this huge blanket were images of things I loved. She tried to describe me on the blanket so there was a baseball, a football, there was a baritone, yes, I played the baritone. She had all these different things that described who I am. The *I am* statements in the Gospel are a little bit of that. Each one gives us an insight into who God is. We have looked at "I am the light of the world," "I am the bread of life," and last week, "I am the Good Shepherd, I am the gate." All of those are very different aspects of who God is, but we need all of them to begin to get more of an understanding of who this God is.

The second reason we are looking at the *I am* statements is that one of the things we believe here at CPC is that all of this Book, the Bible, is God breathed. We believe that it is our primary voice for all that we do in faith and practice. I don't know about you, but when the statements in here are in red letters, your ears perk up a little bit more, right? Because it is Jesus, it is God, saying something about Himself. Like that must be really, really important. The way it's phrased, if you have been around, you've got this. The way it's phrased in the Greek is "I, I am." It is this redundancy that is meant to emphasize importance, not only to say "I, I am" out of importance, but it brings us back to the Old Testament. It is God, it is Jesus claiming to the divinity. These are huge statements. We have seen time and time again, after Jesus makes one of these statements, what do they want to do? Kill Him! And we are going to see the same thing again this morning.

If you have your Bibles, turn to John 11. If you don't have your Bibles, grab a pew Bible in front of you because not all of the passage is going to be up on the screen. Page 1,598 in the pew Bible. We start with this question, when you think of heaven, what goes on in your mind? We all have these perceptions, these ideas, of what heaven is, what we think it to be. In Sunday School when I was growing up, we would sing this song, *Somewhere in outer space God has prepared a place....*

Didn't you all sing that? Maybe it was just my little Baptist church growing up, but when it says somewhere in outer space, your mind starts painting this picture of something out there, streets of gold.... I am a big golfer, so in heaven I must shoot 3 under par every round, right? You start to dream about what this ethereal reality out there is all about. I think for a lot of us it is heaven. It's a cloud. It's angels. It's you're with God. It is interesting that in John 11 in His statement, "I am the resurrection and the life," we get a very different understanding of what heaven is all about. Let's go to John 11. We don't have time to go through this long chapter which is one

whole story but let's pick it up in verse one. We'll read a few verses and then jump down to verse 17. Verse one says this.

<sup>1</sup>Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup>(This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) <sup>3</sup>So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

Listen to how this goes.

<sup>4</sup>When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." <sup>5</sup>Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

Jesus loved these three a lot. Pay attention to the next verse. Now remember Lazarus is very, very sick.

<sup>6</sup>So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days....

Isn't that interesting? He gets word that Lazarus, someone He loves dearly, is sick, and what does He do? Instead of going straight there, He decides to stay put. Keep that in mind. We are going to come back to that as we go on. So that is how the story goes, and Jesus is interacting with His disciples and sort of realizes that Lazarus is actually dead. Go to verse 17. It says this.

<sup>17</sup>On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

This is basically to raise the point that Lazarus is dead for sure. There is no question about what is going on here. Lazarus is gone. Four days.

<sup>18</sup>Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup>and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. <sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup>"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

This woman has amazing faith.

<sup>23</sup>Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup>Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

So then Martha doesn't get what Jesus has just said. Jesus is predicting the miracle He's going to do immediately. She looks at Him and says, "Hey, I believe there is a future resurrection out there. I get that he is dead and will live once again." Then Jesus says in verse 25, this is our verse,

<sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup>and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Those verses are so powerful, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die...." His death doesn't get the final word in God's story, "...and whoever lives by believing in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" The story here is this. Jesus is interacting with the religious leaders and the Sadducees, the conservative religious leaders of the day who didn't believe in the resurrection, an ultimate resurrection when things would be made right. So when Jesus uses this language, He is speaking heresies, not only claiming to be God by saying "I, I am," He is saying, "I am the Resurrection. I am the life. Those who believe in me will not die."

The crazy thing that is happening here is that this literal bodily resurrection of Lazarus points to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the ultimate resurrection. It is the realities of heaven invading the realities of earth. It is what we pray every week,

<sup>10</sup> thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.... (Matthew 6)

Because life has entered in, things have now changed. This truth changes the way we live. As I was sitting with this story, it's a tough one to sort of put our minds around, that Jesus raised someone from the dead, I asked myself, what do we take away from this resurrection and life language? We know the story, right? In fact, I just picked up a pew Bible here that had been marked up. We probably preach this story every couple of years around CPC because it is so important. The resurrection that happened here points toward the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Two thousand years on this side of the story of Jesus raising someone from the dead, what does that mean? What does it mean to us as people who say words like "thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"?

The resurrection life has come through Jesus Christ. We have access to that reality now. Two big things I want us to walk away with this morning. One, and it sort of bleeds through this whole story, is this idea that **faith is at the core of this story**. Time and time again, it is about belief. Look at verse 14,

<sup>14</sup> So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead,

The disciples thought he was just sleeping.

<sup>15</sup> and for your sake I am glad....

That is a weird statement.

<sup>15</sup> and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Look at verses 45 through 48. It says this.

<sup>45</sup> Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, <sup>46</sup> but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. <sup>47</sup> So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. <sup>48</sup> If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him....

At the core of this story, at the core of all the stories, is how John sums up his whole Gospel at the end of chapter 20 when he says,

<sup>31</sup> but these are written so that you may believe....

Trust, confident that Jesus Christ is at the core of the story, “I am the Resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me....” Believe in the one who claims to be the life, the resurrection, the one who is bringing heaven to earth. Tim Keller tells this great story.

A minister was in Italy and there he saw the grave of a man who had died centuries before who was an unbeliever and completely against Christianity, but a little afraid of it, too. So the man had a huge stone slab put over his grave so he would not have to be raised from the dead in case there is a resurrection from the dead. He had inscriptions put all over the slab saying, “I do not want to be raised from the dead. I don’t believe in it.” Evidently, when he was buried, an acorn must have fallen into the grave. So a hundred years later the acorn had grown up through the grave and split the slab. It was now a tall, towering oak tree. The minister looked at it and asked, “If an acorn, which has the power of biological life in it, can split a slab of that magnitude, what can the acorn of God’s resurrection do in a person’s life?”

That is the type of faith this story is talking about. Keller goes on to say this.

The minute you decide to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, the power of the Holy Spirit comes into your life. It’s the power of the resurrection—the same thing that raised Jesus from the dead.... Think of the things you see as immovable slabs in your life—your bitterness, your insecurity, your fears, your self-doubts. Those things can be split and rolled off. The more you know Him, the more you grow into the power of the resurrection.

You read a story like this and the first question you ask is, “What does it do to the belief I have in this Jesus?” Does the resurrection truly roll those things away, out of our lives? It is an invitation of faith to trust. The second thing I think this story does that is so important, this is where we talked about heaven, is illustrate that **how we view eternity affects how we live today**. What we think about a future life-to-be affects who I am and how I live today. Is my view of heaven simply that I go someplace, sort of I die and go onto the cloud, is that is how I treat the current reality in which I live? Or do I have a more Biblical understanding of it? That heaven is actually coming to earth as Revelation describes, this new Jerusalem coming down, the new heaven, the new earth come, recreated, restored, made right. That is heaven!

I think we can get some things from this story to help us lean into the realities of heaven becoming more and more true on earth. I think part of it is **we have to move from *if only* to *what now?*** Mary and Martha, when they see Jesus, I think it is completely fair to say that their first statement to Jesus is, “If only you had been here. If only you had been here, he wouldn’t be dead.” Don’t we play that game so often? When life doesn’t go the way we want, it is that *if only*. *If only* God had done this, but I think that is the wrong place to put our perspective. I think the reality is, *what now?* Not *if only*, but *what now?* Heaven is coming to earth. Heaven and hell are realities in the here and now, and they are realities in the future. There is *with* God and there is *apart* from God. That is true here on earth. We see hell around us every day, don’t we? But we also see the goodness of God, where God’s will is bright around us all the time. It changes our perspective when we ask *what now?*

Have you ever thought about John 3:16, “For God so loved the world....” We all know it. It is going to be held up in football games today.

<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but....

But what? But have, present tense verb.

...but have eternal life.

But have *now* the realities of the best in the future when this is restored and made right. Reality is moving toward invading the current place in which we live, moving from *if only* to *what now?* I think *if only* leads into our doubt, our fear, our questions. *What now?* says, God is at work, what can we do about it?

Another thing I think we need to do to get our minds to lean into the realities of heaven becoming more and more true on earth, and this one is so hard as you read in the passage, I think **we need to trust the timing of God**. If heaven is invading earth because of the resurrection, because of life, part of it is, we have to trust the timing of God. Verse 6 blows me away. I had to pause a few times through the week as I read it.

<sup>6</sup> So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days....

It's in our minds, if your buddy is sick and you have the power to do something about it, we know He ultimately does, why not just get on your horse, your pony, whatever it is, and get there as quickly as possible? It does not make sense. What do we miss when we consistently question the timing of God? Heaven and hell are reality now and reality in the future, but right now God's will is not completely made right, is it? There is death. There is pain. There is heartache. There are tears. We see them all around us, and when we miss out on trusting the timing of God because we are questioning things all the time, I think we miss something. In this passage I think they would have missed seeing something, the verse that we quote all time, verse 35, two words,

<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.

They would have missed seeing a God who weeps with people in pain. What happens when we trust the timing of God even when it makes no sense? We had a group from The Table, our student ministries team, go down to Atlanta a couple of weeks ago for this conference called Catalyst. There was a speaker there named Geoffrey Canada. About 30 years ago after Canada graduated from school he moved into Harlem. He had grown up in Brooklyn and moved into Harlem, and he looked at one city block and said, “I am going to change that block. I am going to help kids get a chance.” All he said was, “I am just doing one block. That is what I believe I can do.” It was so amazing to hear this guy talk about “I focused on one block,” but he did it. He had a plan. That plan is now 99 blocks in Harlem. I think sometimes when we don't see the timing of what God wants to do through us, when we look at the 99 instead of the one, we miss out on some of what God wants to do in bringing heaven to earth.

The third thing I think we need to get our minds around is **we need to have a view of eternity**. Maybe a better way to put it is, we need to imagine what eternity could actually be like, to dream about heaven. We need to move away from the old paradigm, *Somewhere in outer space God has prepared a place*.... On some level we have bought into that song, but we need to change our perspective. Isaiah 65:17 says this,

<sup>17</sup> “Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth,  
and no one will even think about the old ones anymore.

God’s future plan is not to destroy the earth on which we live. God’s plan is, now and in the future to make it more and more and more right. The best way, the majority of the way in which that happens is through God’s people getting an idea of what heaven is like and making that more and more true around them. Revelation 21:1-5 at the end of the Bible says this.

21 I saw Heaven and earth new-created.

You could put in there “made right again.”

21 I saw Heaven and earth new-created. Gone the first Heaven, gone the first earth,  
gone the sea.

In the Bible the sea is this sort of idea of evil, where evil dwells.

<sup>2</sup> I saw Holy Jerusalem, new-created, descending resplendent out of Heaven, as ready for God as a bride for her husband. <sup>3-5</sup> I heard a voice thunder from the Throne: “Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood....

Exactly the same language as in John 1 when Jesus comes to earth, the incarnation.

God has moved into the neighborhood making his home with men and women!

Now listen to this. This is where we start to dream.

They’re his people, he’s their God. He’ll wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good—tears gone, crying gone, pain gone—all the first order of things gone.” The Enthroned continued, “Look! I’m making everything new. Write it all down—each word dependable and accurate.”

If Jesus is the resurrection and the life, we are called to dream about the reality of the future heaven and start living into it now, “...thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven....”

Here’s what I want to ask you to do, not invite you, ask you to do this for the week. I want to encourage you to read Revelation 21:1-5 to start each day. This is *The Message* translation. I would encourage you to read it in a couple of different translations, but read Revelation 21:1-5, and I want you to do this. Look at those words, *tears, death, crying, pain*. Where are the places in your life where you see these words as truth? Where are there tears? Where is there pain? One of the most profound places I’ve seen heaven meeting earth was not some glorious thing

going on in Africa. It was right here, actually, a couple of years ago. My wife and I are sitting at the kindergarten graduation of our first daughter, Genesis. We are in this packed little choir room, and four or five kindergarten classes are up there. You are like, can this get over? Can this get over? Genesis is standing on the riser right next to a little boy with pretty severe autism. The teacher is on the side trying to get this boy's attention but he is moving all around, sort of causing a ruckus. This little five-year old Genesis takes the boy's hand and for the next 30 minutes just holds it and leads him around, walks him around. You could see some sense of peace just sort of pour over him. He started singing and saying the words they were doing. That is heaven meeting earth, friends.

It doesn't have to be something big, but sometimes it is. It is two girls from CPC going to Africa and seeing kids who weren't going to have a meal and saying, "We are going to do something about this. We are going to start Feed Zambia so kids can have food." It is Geoffrey Canada going to Harlem saying, "I'm going to change a block" and God saying, "Fine! Change a block, but I'm going to give you 99 blocks because you are faithful and good!" Where in your life, where in your spirit influence do you see tears and death and crying and pain? Where do you see these and what will you do?

My prayer this week is for you to begin to imagine heaven with things aright, as in that Christian song, *I can only imagine what it will be like....* What God wants to do through you is exactly what Jesus said to His disciples, "As the Father hath sent Me, so send I you."

Jesus, I pray that You would take Your Word and make it true in our lives. God, I pray that as a community this week we would dream of heaven crashing into earth just like when Lazarus rose from the dead. I pray, God, that You would use this community of people in small ways and in big ways but in ways that breathe out the resurrection power that is in all of us who believe in You. We pray this in Your Name. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*