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SPEAKER

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Fully Alive

PART

30

TITLE

Our Comforting Conqueror

SCRIPTURE

John 11:17-44



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Well, if I haven't met you before, my name is Ryan, and I'm one of our pastors at the church and always look forward to Sunday mornings and getting to hear from the word of God. If you have a copy, we're going to be in the gospel of John. If you don't have a copy of God's word there should be one provided in one of the chairs underneath the chairs in front of you. We'll be on page 897 in that text.

We've been going through this series called Fully Alive. The reason why we've been calling it fully alive is because the whole story of the Bible is 66 books, but there's one book that we're looking at specifically, the gospel of John, and it's about believing in Jesus Christ and in him finding abundant life, full life. That's where this series title come from. We're just going to continue to walk through the gospel of John today.

As you turn you Bibles or find your way there, I have two kids. I have a four year old and close enough to a two year old. They enjoy the Lion King movie. I don't know if you've watched the Lion King movie with your grandkids or your kids or you watched it when you were growing up as a kid. Watching it as an adult now I was starting to notice some things that I didn't notice before. Of course everybody notices the scene where it starts with the movie, the circle of life and the raising up of Simba and all of that. It's not long after that scene that Simba, the son, is talking to his dad, the king, and he's asking him questions about death. He's starting to wrestle with this. He says, "Dad, don't we eat the antelope?" His dad, to comfort him, the king responds. He says, "Well yes son, we eat the antelope, but then one day we die. We go back into the ground and we come back as grass and then the antelope eat us. That's just the circle of life."

I hear that and I'm like, that's not comforting at all. There's no comfort in that. Then I look at our world and I talk to people today and we might not use the same language but we say the same things. We just say death is just a part of life. It's the final stage of life. We all have to experience it. I just don't find comfort in that. There's nothing that goes deep into my heart to satisfy it with that response. I mean, really it's cosmetic. It's like putting lipstick or makeup on a skeleton. It doesn't fix it.

The reason why it doesn't satisfy us is because it's not true. It didn't satisfy Simba either. Spoiler alert if you haven't seen the movie, but there's a scene where Simba's dad dies. Simba goes down into the ravine. When he goes down to the ravine I'll tell you what he's not doing. He's not singing the circle of life song. He's not like, "Oh, this is the circle of life. Dad is dead." No. He's crying and he's weeping. Even in our own hearts, we want to weep at that moment because it's sad because there's death and loss. It's not the circle of life.

What I love about this passage we're going to look at is we see the God of life. We see Jesus Christ come face to face with death, and how he responds is amazing. Look with me at this passage in the gospel of John, chapter 11. We'll start in verse 17.

“Now when Jesus came he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.” Lazarus is their brother who had died. Verse 20, “So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you would’ve been here my brother would not have died, but even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha says, ‘I know he’ll rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to him, ‘Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world.’

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary in private saying, ‘The teacher is here and is calling for you.’ And when she heard it she arose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Now when Mary came to where Jesus was, she saw him and she fell at his feet saying, ‘Lord, if you would’ve been here my brother would not have died.’ 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. He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept. So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him,’ but some of them said, ‘Could this man who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?’ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave and there was a stone laid against it. Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’

Martha, the sister of the dead man said, ‘Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone and Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 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.’ When he had said these things he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out.’ The man who had died came out, his hands and his feet bound in linen strips and his face wrapped with cloth.

Jesus said to him, ‘Unbind him and let him go.’” Let’s pray. Take a moment right now to pray that God would speak to you this morning. Take a moment to pray for me that I would communicate God’s word clearly this morning.

Lord, thank you that your word doesn’t leave us ignorant in tough, difficult situations of life and in death. Thank you for the beauty that we see in this text, Lord that you are the comforter who comes to help us in our time of need, but also the great warrior who conquers the grave and death. God, help us to clearly see that this morning. Lord, may it change our hearts and our minds and our everyday lives for your kingdom and your glory we pray. Amen.

All right, so just two things that I want you to see from this text, just two things that I want you to grasp. It’s simply this, that God, that specifically Jesus Christ is the comforting conqueror. He’s the comforting conqueror. Jesus is the great comforter. We see this in the very beginning of this text, this first part, where he interacts with Mary and Martha in their loss. Both these women are from the same family. They have the same situation where they’ve lost their brother. They make the same statement to Jesus. What we see is Jesus as the great comforter responds to them very differently. I think that says something about Jesus and his goodness to us.

We see Martha come on the scene first in the story. She hears Jesus is coming. They had actually sent a messenger to say, “Hey, Jesus get here quicker because our brother is ill and he’s about to die.” Jesus actually waits and then he comes. By that time it’s too late. It’s too late. Martha runs to Jesus disappointed. She’s disappointed in this moment. She makes this statement that Mary will make in a bit where she says, “Jesus if you would’ve only had been here, if you’d have been here for this moment then my brother wouldn’t have died.”

It’s interesting that both of them say that, because I wonder how much they talked about that in these few days before Jesus came, how much Mary and Martha would say together, “If Jesus just would’ve been here things would’ve looked different.” What I love in this moment, there’s something we can learn from Martha in this, is that Martha in the midst of her disappointment still keeps her persistent faith.

She says this statement to Jesus, “If you’d have been here my brother wouldn’t have died.” Then she says in verse 22, “But even now I know that whatever you ask of the Father, whatever you ask of God, he will give you.” She’s like, “Hey, I still believe in you. I still believe you have all this power and all this authority and all this might. You can still do anything you want to.” Jesus responds to her in the midst of this suffering and this pain and this disappointment, he responds to her with truth.

He says, “Your brother is going to rise again” in verse 23. There’s this little theological discussion that’s going on. Martha is like, “Well I know he’s going to rise one day in the last day, like a long time from now. Then he’s going to raise from the dead”, which is true. This is a good principle that she’s clinging to. What I love about this is even though this truth has been laid down and Jesus has said this truth of he will rise again, he makes it extremely personal too. That’s what we need in the midst of disappointment and sorrow. Right?

You’ve all got the biblical answers that people will give you at times of your sorrow and suffering, but we need more than just truth. We need the personal touch of Christ with it. That’s what Jesus does. Don’t miss this. This is huge. Don’t miss what Jesus says to her. After she makes the statement, “I know that one day he’ll rise again in the last day”, what does Jesus say in verse 25? “I am the resurrection and the life.”

He doesn’t say, “I offer the resurrection”. He doesn’t say, “I offer healing.” He doesn’t say, “I can give a resurrection.” Jesus takes this principle that Martha has said and he makes it personal and says, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Our hope doesn’t rest in knowledge of facts. It rests in the true reigning Savior who interacts. That’s where our peace rests, is in him. That’s what we need in the midst of these moments of disappointment is truth with grace, truth with the personal touch of Jesus Christ.

He takes this truth, and not only does he make it personal, he makes it apply to everyday life when Jesus says, “Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.” Jesus knows the tension that’s bearing right here when he says this. We know people that have loved Jesus and have followed Jesus and now are in the grave. They have now died. I mean, the author who wrote this book of John is dead. Jesus speaks in this moment and he says, “Though he die, yet he shall live.” What’s so amazing about this is in our minds and our worlds we think death is ultimately a flat line of vitals. When you read the scripture, the way Jesus talks about death and the way the Bible talks about death is much greater than just the flat line of vitals.

Death is being separated from God. The reason why that’s death is because being separated from God is being separated from all that is good and right. Every good and perfect gift comes from God above. Everything we enjoy from the sunsets, to family, to the air we breathe are gifts from God. When we’re separated by our sins from God, that is when we’re living in death. That’s when we’re walking zombies and we need to be regenerated, we need to be saved.

Jesus speaks in this moment and he says, “Yet though he die, he shall still live. Life will still go on. He’ll still have everlasting life. Even though he physically dies he will never be separated from the God of life.” What I think is so interesting with this text is how Jesus, the great comforter, again how he responds to Martha. He asks her in verse 26, okay, you have this truth and you have this personal truth that I’m the resurrection. The question he asked her is “Do you believe?” Do you believe?

This is a really important statement because he's asking her in light of her asking something of Jesus and Jesus not answering the way she wanted. She wanted Jesus there earlier. She wanted Jesus to heal her brother. Jesus says, "Hey, even though you didn't get the answer that you wanted to in the time that you wanted to, do you still believe this to be true?" I love her response. It's emphatic. She says, "Yes Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world." She said, "I know you are our Savior. You're our Messiah. You're the Son of God who is coming into the world to fix these things."

In the midst of her disappointments she looks and she's like, "I still believe." This is crucial to this text. This is crucial to the book, because if you don't believe this part, if you don't cling to this part, you will never experience the resurrection and the life. You will never see the joy of eternal life unless you know this truth that Martha is explaining right here, that Jesus is the Messiah who would save us from our sins, the Son of God who has all power and authority and who is coming into the world to redeem what has been broken.

She believes this. Jesus comforts her in this. After Jesus has spoken these words of truth with grace and with a personal touch, she goes and she calls for Mary. She runs back and gets her sister and says, "Okay, the comforter is here. Jesus has come. You've got to come talk to him. He's calling for you." We see the great comforter working again because Mary is a little bit different from Martha. Of course she's disappointed, but it seems as we read this text she's almost depressed by all this.

When it talks about Mary, there's a lot of crying going on. When Martha comes back and shares the comfort of like, "Hey, Jesus is here. You need to go talk to Jesus about this", it says she arose quickly and she ran and fell before the feet of Jesus, which I think is just a beautiful picture because she's weeping and she's crying. Her mind and her heart are probably still in the grave with her brother, and she gets up quickly and she runs to see Jesus and she falls at his feet. She's going to be disheveled. She's going to have red, puffy eyes and she's going to be weeping. Still she knows in the midst of this depression and in this hard time she can come to the great comforter, and she can come quickly to the great comforter.

She falls at his feet and then makes the exact same statement that Martha made. Right? "Jesus, if you just would've been here things would've been different." Things would've been different if you'd have been here, Jesus. Now Jesus could've responded the exact same way he did to Martha, right? Jesus could've said, "Well, I'm the resurrection and the life. Let me give you some neat theological truths with a bow attached to them." Could've gave that to her, but Jesus being the great comforter knew that's not ultimately what Mary needed in that moment.

She still needs truth, but what she needed more than anything in this moment is what Jesus gave to her, his tears. Verse 35 says, "Jesus wept." He just cried with her in the midst of her depression. The great comforter knew that's what she needed more than anything in that moment. Now this is the shortest verse, verse 35 is the shortest verse in all of the Bible, but this verse is incredible.

If you haven't memorized any of the verses that we've been trying to memorize as a church through the gospel of John, this is one that you can start on. Okay? This is a great one. "Jesus wept", just two words.

It's not just incredible because it's short, but it's incredible because it is vastly different from any other world religion that you can find out there. There's no other false religion out there, there's no other world religion out there where you see a picture of God stepping off his throne, coming down, and weeping with his children. You won't find it. What we find is a God that's reigning on his throne in these false religions saying, "Well get your life good enough. Once it's good enough then you can come to me."

Jesus left his throne, left his gated community, came down to earth to weep with us in our pain and our suffering. This is the God in whom we serve, and this is the God in whom we worship. Yes, two words, "Jesus wept", but has incredible power behind it. Incredible power behind it.

The question is why in the world is Jesus weeping in this moment. He knows he's going to raise Lazarus, right? He knows what he's going to do. If you read earlier in chapter 11 you'll see he already knows what he's going to do, but still here he weeps. He weeps because he sees death affecting Mary, so he comforts her, affecting others who are crying and weeping in sorrow. Jesus looks at death and he feels the same thing that you feel and I feel when we experience death or we're around death. It's this, that death is not our friend, but is our great enemy. It's not our friend. Death is our great enemy.

Death is not a friend that we run to for freedom. Rather, it's a coffin of our freedom unless we know Christ. If we know Christ, what we find in the midst of our deepest depressions and our deepest disappointments is comfort in Jesus Christ. He weeps and he actually calls us to come to him, because not only does he console, but he can actually fix things. Not only is he our comforter, but he's also our conquering king. He's our maker that says come to him.

There's a recent study done by the New York Times. They did a whole article on it that they found out that if somebody purchases an iPhone or a washer and dryer, or some kind of device that you have, and you have a problem with it, what they found out through this research is that 95% of people don't go back to the maker to fix the problems. They go to their friends to complain about the problems. They just want to go like, "Well, I've got to vent to somebody about this", so they go and they complain. The funny thing about that is none of those friends that you have can help fix the problem. None of those friends that you have are going to make things better. They might make you feel a little better because you have somebody that can vent with you and be like, "yeah, that iPhone 7, that just really messed me up. Yeah, I had problems with it too.", but they can't fix the problem.

They need to go back to the maker who can help them understand why it works that way or why it's not working properly. This is human nature for us to go and to complain and to vent to others about our problems, but we have a savior who says, "Come to me all you who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He says in 1 Peter, "Cast all your anxieties upon me, because I care for you." Jesus stands here as the great comforter and he's like, "I'm ready. I'm ready for all of your anxieties and your stresses, and your disappointments and your depression. Bring them to me, because I'm the only one that can give comfort and fix the problem. I'm the only one who's going to walk with you through the valley of the shadow of death. I am the only one."

For us to complain about our circumstances and our losses and not at the same time run to God is making a declaration to the world that our God is not relevant. It makes a declaration to the world that our God is not relevant, because in the hardest, most difficult times we're not turning to him. Here's what's key about that. If we aren't looking to him, then they won't see him when they look at us. That's a problem. If we're not looking to him in the midst of all of our depression and our suffering and the things that are broken in this world, if we're not looking to him, then when a lost world looks to us they will not see him in our lives. They won't.

We desperately need this more than we realize. We need to be running to Jesus Christ, because in him and him alone can we find true comfort. He is called the God of all comfort in his word. If we want rest and we want comfort, it's not found in football. It's not found in comfy sofas. It's not found in air conditioning. It's not found in heat. It's found in something much, much deeper, even though those things are great. It's found in our Father. It's found through Jesus Christ, that he is the resurrection and the life, and in him he will never leave us nor forsake us.

This is the joy in which we live in as believers. This is the joy in which we thrive in, knowing that he is the resurrection and the life. Even right now if your heart feels cold as stone and your spirit is just frozen within you, Jesus is the one, the only one, that can dissolve that hard rock and that can thaw your frozen spirit. He is the only one that can give us this hope in the midst of disappointment and frustration.

Jesus didn't just come to give us comfort. He came to conquer death. That's beautiful. We see Jesus as the wonderful counselor here, but also that he is the great warrior. Jesus is the glorious conqueror. In verse 33 and verse 38 there's a word that our translations kind of struggle to define, but it says "deeply moved". Your translation might have "indignation" there. Verse 33 it says, "Jesus was deeply moved in Spirit", and then in verse 38 "He was deeply moved again". This word right here is a word for anger. It's weird because we read this text, right, and we're like, "Wait, Jesus is angry? I see him giving truth and grace and shedding tears. In this moment he's angry?" This word is a word they would use to actually talk about a bull snorting and pawing the ground before he ran at somebody in anger.

The question as I read this is like, “Okay, if that’s what that word means, then Jesus what are you so angry at? You can’t be angry at Martha, right, because she’s believing in you. You’re not angry with Mary. You’ve just been weeping with her. Right? Why are you so angry, Jesus?” Jesus is angry in this moment because he looks at the grave. What he sees is the fallout from the atomic bomb of sin. He looks at the sin that was committed at the very beginning in Adam and Eve and the curse that came with it. He looks at the sin in your life and my life, and he sees all that sin and how it’s marred and broken and destroyed his good and perfect creation. He’s angry in this moment. He’s deeply moved because sin is here and it has brought death with it, the great enemy with which we fight.

This picture that we see of Jesus and Lazarus, this is just a preview. This is a trailer to the movie that’s going to come of Jesus in his glorious resurrection. Jesus starts the battle with death now, but he will finish it when he goes through the cross and goes through the grave and he is raised again. He is the one that’s going to conquer death in the way that we long for, in a way that we desire it in our lives. The difference between this resurrection here with Lazarus and the resurrection of Jesus is Lazarus is going to go back to the tomb one day. He’s going to die again. To be honest with you, I don’t know if I were Lazarus if I would want to be resurrected. Jesus raises him anyway, and he’s going to have to go back through that suffering again.

When Jesus on the cross dies and says “it is finished”, and he raises from the dead, his resurrection is a glorious resurrection in which he will never die again. His body will never break down again because it has been made perfect. Now what I love about this picture that we see here of this resurrection is how Jesus raises Lazarus. There’s no medicine, there’s no surgery, there’s no ointments for Lazarus here. What there is to raise Lazarus is a prayer and word. A prayer and a word is what Jesus gives. It almost seems crazy to talk to a dead man, unless the dead man actually does something. Then it’s not crazy anymore. Then it’s astonishing.

What just happened here? It even says in the text that Jesus cries out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” He says that loudly. Some theologians said that if he didn’t say, “Lazarus, come out”, then everybody would’ve come out of their graves because that’s how much power that Jesus had. He had to give the specific name, “Lazarus, you come forth. You come out.” I truly believe that. Jesus didn’t have to say that loudly for Lazarus to be resurrected. I don’t think Jesus had to say anything at all for Lazarus to be resurrected. Jesus could have whispered, “Lazarus, come forth”. I think he would’ve come out.

The scripture tells us why he prays out loud and why he says with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.” In verse 42 it says, “I say this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” We read it this morning and we say it this morning, because Jesus wants you to believe. He wants me to believe that he is the resurrection and the life. He is the one that the Father has sent to redeem our broken world. He is the one that he has sent to save us from our sins.

What's beautiful about the resurrection is this, that what it's ultimately pointing to is the fact that Jesus is coming to restore all things on this earth that are broken. Don't miss this. Jesus didn't comfort by saying, "Mary and Martha, you just hang tight, because one day I'm going to bring you up to heaven and you'll be away from all this brokenness and all these problems in this world and then you'll get to enjoy me forever." No, Jesus' response is, "I'm going to raise somebody from the dead." What he's showing is that death has been an enemy that's broken this world, and what I'm going to do is I'm going to fix that problem. What he's going to do is fix our sins by separating them as far as east is from the west, and he's going to do it here.

We get to the book of Revelation. It talks about how God comes from heaven to earth to dwell with us. New heaven and the new earth isn't well now everybody gets to go up and we're all away from this world. No. Christ is coming and he's fixing what is broken. What I love about that is you read throughout the story all the people are consoling Mary and Martha. Jesus consoles, but on top of that he fixes, he redeems, he restores what has been made wrong. That's what Jesus is doing today. That's what Jesus is doing through us. Our hearts long for this restoration. Our hearts long for eternal life.

We have a world that is searching for this kind of life, this resurrection and a life that they can continue to live and enjoy the beauties of this life. We long for it. Time Magazine released this cover this last year. Okay, this is showing how much our hearts are longing for this. I think it's coming. Time released this magazine cover that actually says that children now born, I think about my son, are born and they will live to be 142 years old or they can live to be 142 years old. This is Time Magazine. They're talking about all this different technology that's going on today and stem cell research is going to help children live to be 142 years old.

That's not the only place that's being recorded. Google Ventures, Bill Maris who is the CEO of Google Ventures, he's spending close to 500-million dollars to invest on making life longer for people. He says, "I've got a ton of people in Silicon Valley that are millionaires, billionaires who what they want more than money, what they want more than anything else is longer life. They're willing to give any kind of amount of money to me that I need to try to make life longer." Bill Maris said that his goal is that he would help people to live to be 500 years old. I mean that's what our culture is researching, spending money on, longing for.

Here's the thing. You and I can live longer. We can live to be 150 years old or 500 years old, but it's not real life if we don't know Jesus Christ. We can extend life, but it's basically looking at an inmate on death row and telling him "Hey, your date got pushed back, so you're just going to remain incarceration until that time comes." You've extended it, but you haven't brought life, you haven't brought freedom in this.

Let me encourage you, Christian, that when you go and you share the gospel with people who are longing for this, Christians don't share long life, they share everlasting life with people. We have a better story for what our world is longing for. We have eternal life, where our body doesn't break down. Who wants to live to be 500 if just the pain and suffering of life just continue to get worse and worse? Church, we have the good news. This is the gospel which we get to take to the world, that we have everlasting life found in Jesus Christ, the conqueror of the grave and death. We get to take this good news, this gospel, to our cities, our families, our work places, and tell others not of historical facts, but of a personal God who gives everlasting life.

I close with this. This last week, Monday night, I had a dream. I don't know if you guys have had a nightmare or a dream that really kind of sticks with you in your mind and it seems so real in the moment. This was one of those for me. My dream was that my four year old daughter, Haley, had died. I remember in my dream just weeping, just crying. I remember in my dream that I was just really upset by all of this. Then the morning comes and I wake up, and I hear my daughter playing across the hall. In that moment, those five minutes after I woke up, I just enjoyed the bliss and the glory of knowing that my daughter was okay. I thought in that moment while I was just sitting in my bed, "This is a sliver of what heaven will be like, where it will be so real that those that have loved Jesus and have passed away, those that we love dearly that are in the presence of the Lord now, one day we will see them again."

The only way that's possible is through Jesus Christ, the resurrection and the life. Let's live, let's breathe, let's thrive with that truth this week. Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you for your truth that you are the resurrection and the life, that you didn't just come to say, "Hold on tight. Make it through your depressing times and hard times, and I'll make things better one day". Lord, you came to give us comfort now. Whether that's sharing a truth with us, whether that's shedding a tear with us, Lord thank you. We thank you that we have hope. Lord, we can grieve, but we don't grieve as those that have no hope. Rather, we grieve as ones that look at the resurrection and the life and know that eternal life starts now in Jesus Christ, and it shall never end by definition, for it is eternal.

Lord, we praise you that you are the great comforter, that you are the conquering king. Lord, help us to sing knowing these truths about you. It's in Christ's great and holy name we ask. Amen.



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