

JESUS IS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

John 11:17-44

Key Verse: 11:25,26

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’”

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Jesus wanted Martha and Mary to believe this and overcome the power of death. But they could not. So Jesus went to the tomb and raised Lazarus from the dead to plant resurrection faith by any means. Jesus does not want us to live under the power of death, which makes us evil. Jesus wants us to live with resurrection faith and eternal life. Then we can glorify God and be victorious. Let’s accept Jesus’ word prayerfully today.

First, “Lord, if you had been here...” (17-24;27-32).

After deciding to return to Judea, Jesus and his company made their way to Bethany and were at the outskirts of the village. Many Jews were traveling to and from the home of Martha and Mary. Along the way, these travelers exchanged news. Thus, word spread that Jesus was coming to Bethany. Word also came to Jesus that Lazarus had died and had been in the tomb for four days. It meant that the funeral ceremony had passed and the burial service had been completed. The initial shock of his death had now given way to the cold reality. Martha and Mary felt sharply the loss of Lazarus, the only man in their household.

When we examine how the sisters were dealing with their loss, there is a marked difference between them. Look at verse 20. “When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.” Though Martha was very sad, she was not powerless. She had a strong sense of responsibility. She was doing what she could to manage the situation. She must have greeted all the guests and seen to their needs. When she heard that Jesus was coming, she did not sit down and wait for his arrival. She got up and went to meet him. On the other hand, Mary stayed at home. The news that Jesus was coming must have gone into Mary’s ears. But Mary did not move. Mary was a woman of heart. When her heart was touched by affection, she would perform extraordinary acts of devotion. However, when her heart felt dead, she had no strength at all. So she stayed at home.

Look at verse 21. “‘Lord,’ Martha said to Jesus, ‘if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.’” These words reveal the mixed emotions in Martha’s heart. She called Jesus Lord. She really wanted to trust Jesus. But she was also deeply disappointed. She said, “...if you had been here...” She knew that Jesus could have saved Lazarus from death. Yet Jesus did not. Jesus had deliberately delayed coming and Lazarus died. Martha could not understand Jesus’ action. Although Martha did not come right out and say it, she doubted the love of Jesus. At the same time, she really wanted to have a right relationship with Jesus. So she tried to affirm her faith in Jesus. But her heart was sick with doubt.

Jesus told Martha, “Your brother will rise again.” Jesus meant that he had come to raise Lazarus from the dead. And Jesus would do it soon. It was time for Martha to say, “Amen.” Instead, Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Let’s consider the contents of Martha’s faith. Martha believed in the resurrection at the last day. Most likely, it was because she had accepted Jesus’ teaching. In John 6:39,40,44,54, Jesus repeated four times the words, “I will raise him up at the last day.” These words remained in Martha’s mind. So she was much better than the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection and live a hedonistic life in this world. But her faith was not what Jesus wanted her to have. Her head knowledge of future resurrection did not give her victory when she confronted death personally.

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life.” We will think more deeply about Jesus’ words in a minute. First, let’s see how Martha responded. Look at verse 27. “‘Yes, Lord,’ she told him, ‘I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.’” It sounds good. But she did not answer Jesus’ question. She was not listening to Jesus or communicating with Jesus. There was an invisible barrier between Jesus and Martha. They were separated by the doubt in Martha’s heart. Before Jesus could say something more, Martha turned away from him and went in and told Mary that Jesus was asking for her. It was not true. It seems to be Martha’s effort to restore their human relationships. But in reality, Martha was separated from Jesus. When she did not listen to Jesus’ word, their relationship was not restored.

What about Mary? When Mary heard Martha's words about Jesus, she got up quickly and went to him. She was very sensitive toward Jesus' affection. The moment she felt that Jesus had spoken lovingly to her, she jumped up and ran out to meet him. But Martha's manipulation could not solve Mary's root problem. When she reached the place where Jesus was, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Mary was weeping. She cried and cried before Jesus, as did her entourage.

The sisters reacted to Lazarus' death in different ways, but their spiritual problem was the same. They doubted the love of Jesus. When they doubted the love of Jesus, their spiritual relationship with him was cut. Actually, they had been receiving divine training from Jesus from the moment he said, "This sickness will not end in death." They were receiving real spiritual love. Admittedly, this training was hard for them. Jesus had allowed their beloved Lazarus to die. Nevertheless, their real problem was that they doubted the love of Jesus. There is a danger to doubt the love of Jesus in the time of hard training.

One young man accepted Jesus' word of glorious resurrection. He overcame his fear and became a powerful messenger. Then he decided to live for Christ. Afterward, while talking with family members, he quoted many Bible verses with great spirit. He was not at all interested in watching television or playing computer games. Then they thought he was strange. They began to persecute him. This may be spiritual training to refine his faith. He must accept Jesus' divine love, overcoming doubt.

Another young man accepted the blood of Jesus and made a new covenant with Jesus. He was happy. Then suddenly he fell into depression without knowing why. It is because of sinsickness in his soul. He is in divine training for the refinement of his inner man. Sometimes he feels that strange things are going on inside of him. At that time, he must accept God's love, overcoming doubt.

There is a beautiful young lady with big eyes who is very talented in music, drama, and speech. She made a decision of faith to seek God first and set her life direction according to God's word. She might hope that God will bless her with an easy life. But it is unlikely. She must struggle to resolve relationship problems and to exorcize inner demons. During the time of struggle, she must accept the love of God, overcoming doubt, and persevere until she obtains God's blessing.

Knowing the truth about Jesus in our minds is important, but it is only a beginning. To experience the truth in our hearts, we need training. We must go through many hardships. During those times, we are vulnerable to doubt. Therefore, we must learn to trust the love of God and hold onto the word of God when Jesus gives us hard training.

Second, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (25-26).

Now let's think about Jesus' words. Look at verses 25-26. "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'" Jesus' words were the words of life to Martha. Jesus' words could solve her inner problems at the root.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection." Jesus did not say, "I will be resurrected." Jesus said, "I am the resurrection." Jesus told Martha who he was. Simply speaking, Jesus is God. When Jesus said, "I am," he referred to God's revelation to Moses in the wilderness. In Exodus 3:14, God had told Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" When he called himself "I AM" God emphasized that he exists by himself. God is absolute Being. God is eternal. God is the Almighty Creator God and the Sovereign Ruler of heaven and earth. This God has power to raise the dead. Those who live in his presence do not suffer from the thought of death. They can serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness, before him all their days (Lk 1:74,75). Jesus is this Eternal, Almighty God. Jesus is the source of life and power. Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Why is it so important to believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? It is because there is only one alternative; it is to live under the power of death. This makes a man miserable no matter who he may be. Howard Hughes was rich and powerful. He once boasted that he could buy anyone, even the president. But he became a sniveling coward before the power of death. The power of death makes man fearful. The power of death robs the joy and meaning

from man's life. God made man to live for the glory of God and to carry out the holy mission that makes him great and noble. But under the power of death he grovels for three meals a day and pursues petty pleasure for a cheap thrill.

When Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life," he wanted Martha to accept him as God at that moment. She did not have to wait for the last day to experience Jesus' power over death. Jesus wanted her to have victory over death immediately by believing in him. Jesus wanted her to receive eternal life and to live for the glory of God.

Look at verses 25-26 again. "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'" Jesus gives us eternal life from the moment we believe. In fact, Jesus himself comes to dwell in our hearts. Jesus gives his life to us. It is life with Jesus that never ends. Jesus solves our future security problem. Jesus solves our death problem. Jesus gives us peace. Jesus gives us great joy and the meaning of life. Jesus is the best gift, and Jesus is everything to everyone, no matter who he may be. Jesus wants each of us to enjoy his life right now and forever. We can do so when we simply believe in Jesus. However, Martha and Mary did not take Jesus at his word. How did Jesus deal with them?

Third, "Take away the stone" (33-40).

In verses 33-38 we can see how Jesus responded when the sisters refused to take Jesus at his word. When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. In fact, Jesus was so moved that he wept. Of course, it was out of compassion for those suffering under the power of death. But Jesus' weeping had a deeper, divine element. Jesus wept over the unbelief of those he loved. Unbelief makes Jesus weep. Jesus' emotional response reveals that he determined to help them overcome their unbelief as a matter of life and death.

How did Jesus help them overcome unbelief? Look at verse 39a. "'Take away the stone,' he said." Jesus gave a command to take away the stone. Jesus wanted them to challenge the power of death through an act of faith based on his word. Jesus wanted them to live by his word instead of their senses and feelings. Jesus could have simply raised Lazarus from the dead. But by telling them to take away the stone, Jesus helped them to make an act of faith based on his word. Jesus wants us to challenge unbelief with an act of faith.

Was it easy to take away the stone? No. Jesus' words evoked an immediate response from Martha. She was afraid that opening the tomb would release a bad odor. Her mind was filled with the thought of death. She imagined the rotting corpse of Lazarus so distinctly that she could smell the bad odor he emitted. When we want to learn resurrection faith, we must expel the thought of death from our minds. We cannot do this by human effort. We must hear Jesus' word. Look at verse 40. "Then Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God.'" According to Jesus' word, what was waiting for Martha behind the stone was not a rotting corpse. It was the glory of God. This is what Jesus had promised from the beginning, when he 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." Here we see Martha's problem. She did not remember Jesus' words. When she did not remember Jesus' words, she suffered under the thought of death. She fell into doubt and became unbelieving. But at this time, she did not remain in her unbelief. She accepted Jesus' word and consented to take away the stone.

Fourth, Jesus prays and raises Lazarus (41-44).

Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." Jesus was thankful that God listened to him. No one else had been listening to Jesus. Everyone had been wallowing in the power of death and the misery of unbelief. But God and Jesus were one. Jesus was faithful to God's purpose and enjoyed unbroken fellowship with God. God was with Jesus and comforted and guided him. Now, Jesus made a deliberate display of his prayer to reveal that God Almighty was working through him. Soon Jesus himself would leave this world and go back to his Father. His disciples would see him no more. Before that time, Jesus wanted to plant faith in God in their hearts. Jesus wanted them to learn how to pray so they could experience the power of God.

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” Lazarus came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. At Jesus’ word, Lazarus walked out of the grave alive. Jesus is the Almighty God. Jesus is the Son of God who gives life to the dead. Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

In this passage we learn that Jesus really wants us to believe that he is the resurrection and the life. Jesus wants to live in our hearts and give us victory over death. Jesus wants us to live for the glory of God and do great things for God. For this, Jesus trains us in faith. In the time of training we must accept God’s love, overcoming doubt. Jesus does not leave us alone. He gives us his word. We must take Jesus at his word. Jesus helps us by his one-sided grace to experience his power. Jesus helps us in every way to learn resurrection faith and to live for the glory of God. Therefore, let’s take away the stones of unbelief from our hearts by making practical decisions to challenge our situations and problems. Let’s live by resurrection faith for the glory of God.