

JESUS IS THE RESURRECTION

John 11:17-57

Key Verses: 11:25-26

“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Today’s passage records the 7th and greatest of Jesus’ miraculous signs which Jesus performed during his human life on earth: the raising of Lazarus from the dead. In Jesus’ ministry, the Bible records that he raised three people from the dead: Jairus’ daughter (Mt 9:25; Mk 5:42; Lk 8:55), a widow’s son in the town of Nain (Lk 7:15), and Lazarus. This is the most amazing account of the three since Lazarus was the most dead among them. In fact he had already been in the tomb for four days. Bringing the dead to life has been a frightening thought to many as depicted in Mary Shelley’s novel, “Frankenstein,” and in so many zombie movies. Even St. Paul said of the dead rising, **“But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?’”** (1Co 15:35) In a word, raising the dead, not just resuscitating the clinically dead, may be regarded as the most amazing miracle of God, next to the creation of the world. And it is an essential part of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the message of the New Testament—Jesus Christ was resurrected, never to die again.

So what are the implications of the dead being raised? What is our greatest fear? Is it not death? The expression “fear of death” occurs only once in the Bible as follows: **“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too [that is, Jesus] shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death”** (Heb 2:14-15). Why are we so afraid of death? Perhaps it’s because death is such a great unknown. What happens after you die? No one knows for sure. Of course, there are stories of people dying and coming back to life, and having seen heaven or hell or something in between. We should not believe every story we hear. But we can trust in Jesus, for he has the power over death. Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

First, do you believe this? (17-27). In the previous verses, Jesus intentionally waited for Lazarus to die before going to him. Jesus doesn’t always answer our prayers the way we want him to. When Jesus arrived in Bethany, they found that

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Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than 2 miles from Jerusalem and many Jews came to comfort Martha and Mary in the loss of their brother. Upon hearing that Jesus was coming, Martha went out to meet him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha seemed disappointed in Jesus. **“Lord,” she said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”** It was a complaint: “Jesus, why didn’t you come sooner? You’re too late.” Martha expressed her faith in Jesus’ healing power—healing for a sick person, for she had heard and probably even seen his healing of the sick. Jesus healed the lame. Jesus gave sight to the blind. Surely Jesus could have healed her brother. Martha added words of faith and hope: **“But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”** Martha knew Jesus to be a man of prayer. She knew that his requests were heard by God. But in her heart she felt it was too late.

Jesus said to her, **“Your brother will rise again.”** In a general sense, this is true of everyone who dies. Jesus said in John 5:28-29, **“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.”** So we will all rise again to be judged. **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad”** (2Co 5:10).

As we will soon see, Jesus did not mean this in a general sense of something that would happen in the distant future. Jesus meant it more immediately. How did Martha understand Jesus’ words? She said, **“I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day (24).”** The word translated “resurrection” occurs 40 times in 12 books of the New Testament. Apostle Paul wrote that **“there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked”** (Ac 24:15). So there will be a resurrection at the last day, on the day of judgment. Martha knew this. She had good doctrine. But her proper head knowledge of these facts does not seem to have reached her heart. It did not seem to help her much at the present moment. Head knowledge or proper doctrine is good. But it is not enough. For example, James 2:19 says, **“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.”** So knowing or believing the right things is good. But it is not enough. We must have living faith in our hearts. Many people grew up in the church, but they have not reached a point of making the faith their own, of taking a personal stand for Jesus. They are just going through the motions. Perhaps they need a crisis moment to make their own decision for Christ. Perhaps they need

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some hardship or trial to probe their hearts to challenge them to what they really believe. Others here have made a personal decision for Christ, accepting him as their Lord and Savior and living for his purpose and mission for their lives. But every believer needs renewal. Every believer in Jesus needs to not only know in their minds but believe in their hearts that he is living and real and relevant right now in my life, at my work place, in my plans and decisions, in how I relate to others.

See how Jesus replied to Martha's correct theology. Look at the key verses, 25-26: **"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'"** Jesus did not want to be to Martha a distant love or a vague hope. Jesus was there with her, right then and there, in his fullness, in his love, in his power. She actually did not believe what Jesus was really capable of doing. She said with her lips the right things. But we do not trust with our words alone. We trust with our hearts. This is why Romans 10:9-10 says, **"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."**

Jesus said, **"I am the resurrection and the life."** This is one of Jesus' "I Am" sayings in John's gospel. In the "I am" sayings, Jesus makes a great claim and includes a conditional promise with it. Jesus says here, **"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"** This is Jesus' claim and promise. Whoever believes in Jesus, whoever receives him, whoever trusts in him, will live forever, even though they die. This is Jesus' promise. It sounds too good to be true. But it is true for whoever accepts it. But you must accept it. No one can accept it for you. Simply believe. Lord Jesus, you are the resurrection and the life. I believe and trust in you. I commit myself, my life, to love, follow and obey you. Forgive my sins and make me a new person, a child of God. Come and live in me, through your Holy Spirit. In your holy name. Amen.

Second, Jesus wept (28-37). In reply to Jesus' question, **"Do you believe this?"** Martha made a good confession: **"Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world (27)."** Whoever

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believes that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, has life in his name (20:31). At this point, Martha went and called her sister Mary aside and said to her, **“The Teacher is here, and is asking for you.”** Then Mary got up quickly and went to him, outside the village. The Jewish visitors followed Mary, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn. When Mary reached Jesus, she fell at his feet and said, **“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”** These words were the same words that Martha had said to Jesus. Perhaps for the last four days they kept saying to each other, “If only Jesus had been here, Lazarus would not have died!” The words “if only” are words of sorrow, regret, helplessness, frustration and even anger. Their words did not encourage or build up one another. Rather, their words only made themselves more regretful and sorrowful. We should be careful of the words we choose. Sometimes our words tear down more than build up. Sometimes our words plant doubt or sorrow, rather than giving hope and encouragement. Sometimes it’s not the words we say, but how we say it. Are we being judgmental? Are we failing to understand or to try to understand? Do we rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn? Or are we out to fix people up, as if we think we know better?

Jesus dealt with Mary differently than he did with Martha. Jesus knows his sheep by name. He knows how we are different. He knows just what we need. Look at what Jesus did in verses 33-35: **“When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. Jesus wept.”** This is one of only three times mentioned in the Bible that Jesus wept. Why did he weep? We don’t know for sure. There are many ideas or theories from Bible scholars explaining why Jesus wept. It could be that Jesus was troubled by the power of death that was overshadowing these people. Verse 36 interprets Jesus’ tears as his love for Lazarus. The Jews there said, **“See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”** The point remains: Jesus wept. Jesus was not devoid or aloof of human emotion. Jesus was fully human. Jesus shared our humanity. Jesus understands us. Hebrews 4:15 says, **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”** Jesus not only understands and empathizes with us—Jesus loves us.

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Third, “Lazarus, come out!” (38-57). Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. **“Take away the stone,”** he said. Jews were not supposed to go near the dead or their graves, or it would make them unclean. Martha objected, **“But, Lord, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days”** (39). Maybe Martha assumed that Jesus wanted to see the dead body to pay his last respects. In the normal way of nature though, Lazarus’ body would have begun to decompose.

Jesus’ next words in verse 40 are important words to Martha and to us: **“Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”** From time to time, we are discouraged by things happening in the world—wars, poverty, famines, diseases, disasters. So much of the news that is reported is bad news. These things make us fearful and quite aware of our own mortality. In the back of our minds we wonder: “When will I die? When will those I love die? Will I live to old age? Will they? Is God really in control of my life and the world?” And doubts and fears creep in.

Jesus’ rebuke to Martha is also a rebuke to any such fears and doubts that we have: **“Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”** Jesus would soon go to the cross. The cross was before him. He could not escape or avoid it. He would not run and hide. Jesus overcame fear and doubt because he saw the glory of God. Hebrews 12:2b says, **“For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”** Jesus saw the **“joy set before him.”** Jesus prayed just before his arrest, **“And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began”** (Jn 17:5). One who believes can see the glory of God. Without faith one will see gloom and doom, disappointment and death.

When they took away the stone, 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”** (42). Jesus, as the eternal Son of God, prayed to his eternal Father in heaven. Jesus did not need to pray. But he prayed so the people would know that he came from heaven and the Father in heaven sent him. Jesus was saying and doing just what the Father wanted him to say and do.

After he had said this, Jesus called out in a loud voice, **“Lazarus, come out!”** Perhaps some thought it was a joke. But it was no joke. Verse 44 says, **“The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a**

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cloth around his face.” Jesus gave life to the dead, because he is the resurrection and the life. In him was life. Through him all things were made.

Jesus still gives life to the dead. Apart from Jesus Christ, the Bible says that people are dead in sin. Ephesians 2:1-5 reads: **“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”** Again, Paul wrote also in Colossians 2:13, **“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins...”**

When Jesus calls your name, he calls you out of death into life, out of darkness into light, out of selfishness into love. Jesus is calling us daily out of fear into peace, out of doubt into a life of hope and purpose in him.

Perhaps some who saw the mummy come out, thought it was a hoax; that it wasn't Lazarus but someone wrapped like a mummy. But Jesus said to them, **“Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”** They could see for themselves that it was Lazarus, not someone else. There will always be skeptics, who find some explanation for miracles, scientifically or psychologically. Many of the visiting Jews knew it was no hoax and believed in Jesus. But others went to the chief priests and the Pharisees. They did not debate whether Jesus had done a miraculous sign or not. They only worried about the consequences: everyone would believe in him and the Romans would take away their temple and nation. They probably worried about losing their jobs too if Jesus got too popular.

The high priest Caiaphas spoke prophetic words: **“...it is better... that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”** Jesus would die not only for the Jewish nation but for the scattered children of God to bring them together and make them one. Caiaphas did not understand that Jesus would die for the sin of the world. He only thought Jesus should die as a scapegoat to save the nation. So from that day on he plotted to take Jesus' life and looked for a way to arrest him (53,57).

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Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. It was no joke or hoax. It was a prelude of Jesus' own resurrection from the dead. It was the proof that Jesus really is the resurrection and the life. One who believes that Jesus is the resurrection can have joy and victory and hope and abundant life while living in this dark and troubled world. One who believes that Jesus is the resurrection will live even though they die. Do you believe this?