

107. The Gospel of John—11:17-22

“The Resurrection and the Life” Pt.1

(7/19/20)

In our study of John’s gospel, we are currently in chapter 11 looking at the greatest miracle that Jesus performed—the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

Before we continue in John 11 let me first set this message up by saying that this chapter brings us face to face with the inevitable consequence of life—death.

Death is a reality that each one of us must face at some time in our life—it's a grim Reaper that has touched every one of our lives in some form or another, bringing with it pain, fear, loneliness, and grief.

It's a constant reminder of our own mortality and how tenuous life oftentimes can be.

As someone has said,

“Death is the Specter that haunts the end of the corridor of every person's life. Death has both mystified and terrified man from the very beginning. It knows no boundaries and is not limited to any one class of people or ethnic group—small or great, rich or poor, young or old—no one escapes its grasp.”

Paul said that the human race has been taken captive by death which has caused people to live their lives in bondage to the fear of death.

And yet in John chapter 11, Jesus announced the greatest news ever delivered to mankind when he said, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”** (v.25-26)

Jesus came to rob death of its sting and the grave of its victory—but before a person can share in the victory that Jesus won over death he or she must first answer the question Jesus asked Martha when he said—“**Do you believe this?**” (v.26)

Do you believe what?—*“Do you believe that Jesus is God in human form—the resurrection and the life?”*

You see one of the inevitable realities of death is that it causes us to question the meaning of life.

Questions like—*“Why am I here?” “Is this all there is to life?” “Is there a purpose in it all or do I only live to die?” “And what happens after I die, does my consciousness cease to exist or do I go on living in some other dimension, in some other form?”*

These are burning questions deep in the heart of every person—questions that deal with the ultimate issues of life.

These questions may not be wrestled with every day—yet they’re never far from the surface of our consciousness.

They’ll surface every once in a while, and we’ll contemplate them for a little bit—and then we’ll push them out of our consciousness and bury them once again as we go on majoring on the minors and spending our time in trivial pursuits.

But whether you realize it or not these are the most important questions in life.

Now in John chapter 11, Jesus answers all these questions by declaring that He is the resurrection and the life, and then he proved it by raising Lazarus from the dead!

So far in our outline of John 11, we have looked at:

I. The Critical Friend—v.1-5

II. The Callous Savior—v.6

III. The Concerned Disciples—v.7-16

John 11:1-16 (NKJV)

¹ Now a certain *man* was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was *that* Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. ³ Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." ⁴ When Jesus heard *that*, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days 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, lately the Jews sought 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 one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹ These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." ¹² Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." ¹³ However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him." ¹⁶ Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

Last week we ran out of time, but I told you that before we moved on in our study of John 11, that I wanted to stop briefly and talk about a false doctrine that is based on the concept that when a believer in Jesus dies they “**sleep**” (v.11)—a doctrine known as ‘*soul-sleep*’.

Those who believe in ‘*soul-sleep*’ believe that when a believer in Christ dies their soul goes to sleep and does not awaken until the rapture (or if they’re an unbeliever at the final resurrection (Rev.20:12)—but that is incorrect.

The Bible doesn’t teach that when a believer dies their *soul* goes to sleep—it teaches that their *body* is placed in the grave and ‘*sleeps*’ while their soul remains conscious.

Revelation 6:9-11 (NKJV)

⁹ When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. ¹⁰ And they cried with a loud voice,

saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" ¹¹ Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were*, was completed.

These are Christian martyrs who were killed by the Antichrist during the Tribulation Period—and notice their souls are fully conscious and have gone into the presence of the Lord (2Cor. 5:8).

However, the greatest example of this is the story Jesus told of a rich man (unnamed) and a poor diseased beggar named Lazarus (a different Lazarus than the Lazarus in John 11).

Luke 16:19-24 (NKJV)

¹⁹ "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. ²⁰ But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, ²¹ desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. ²⁴ Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame...'"

Jesus tells us in verse 23 that this place is called '*Hades*' (not Hell)—a temporary place of incarceration located in the center of the earth.

Hades is divided into 2 compartments separated from each other by a great gulf (like the Grand Canyon).

One side is a place of torment where unbelievers go, and the other side is a paradise where all the Old Testament saints like Moses, David, Daniel etc. went—a place called "*Abraham's Bosom*" where they were comforted. (Elaborate—Eph. 4:8; 2Cor.5:8)

First of all, Luke 16:23 disproves the idea of '*annihilationism*'. (Explain)

But secondly, it disproves the doctrine of “*soul sleep*”—which is the belief that the soul is not conscious between death and resurrection.

This verse (and others) prove conclusively that there is a conscious existence beyond the grave.

For all unbelievers, when they die their soul goes into Hades in a fully conscious state where they will remain until after the thousand year Millennial Kingdom when they will be resurrected to stand before Jesus at the Great White Throne Judgment. (Explain)

This is something that the Bible teaches that is absolutely certain—it is not controversial nor ambiguous—that there is an existence beyond physical death.

And also a judgment coming for all who reject Jesus called the “Second Death” (eternity in the Lake of Fire or Hell)—but for the Christian death is only ‘sleep’ and at the time of the rapture, we will ‘awaken’ in His likeness!

Alright, this morning I’d like to continue by looking at the fourth main point of our outline—

IV. The Confused Sisters—v.17-34

The reason I have called this fourth point in our outline “*The Confused Sisters*” is because of Jesus’ response to the urgent message they sent Him, pleading with Him to come quickly and heal their brother Lazarus who was on the verge of death.

At the time the girls sent this message to Jesus, He was in Bethabara with His disciples down by the Jordan River.

As we have said, Bethabara was 20 miles from Bethany—which meant it was a two-day journey by foot.

But Jesus purposely waits a couple of days *before* making the trip to Bethany—not exactly the actions of a good friend!

This behavior was so unlike Jesus in that it seemed so callous and indifferent, so unlike their loving Savior—that it greatly confused Mary and Martha.

Remember, Bethany was located on the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives—about 2 miles from Jerusalem.

And because it was in close proximity to Jerusalem, and because of the close relationship that Jesus had with Mary, Martha and Lazarus—the Lord would frequently go to their house to get away from some of the pressures of public life or even to spend the night after a long day of ministry in Jerusalem.

As we said a few weeks ago, it's interesting that the message that Mary and Martha sent to Jesus didn't contain any instructions or commands, there wasn't any detailed account of the situation—in fact there really wasn't a request of any kind made of the Lord—it was *implied* in the message.

The women knew that all they had to say to Jesus was that His dear friend Lazarus was sick and He would rush to Bethany to help His friend—nothing more needed to be said.

But Jesus seemed to ignore their urgent plea for help and didn't come right away—that not only confused Mary and Martha mentally—I believe it crushed them emotionally.

John 11:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days.

As we said a few weeks ago—the story indicates that the day the messenger arrived from Mary and Martha telling the Lord their brother Lazarus was sick—on that very day Lazarus died.

Jesus then waited two days before making the two-day journey to Bethany so that by the time He and His disciples got there—Lazarus had been dead and buried for 4 days.

Understand that the Jewish people didn't embalm dead bodies like the Egyptians did—so when a Jew died it was customary to bury the deceased on the day of their death (Acts 5:5–6, 10).

Upon death, they would immediately wrap the body with cloth strips, placing spices in the windings—and then put the body into the family tomb immediately.

One author adds an important detail—

“The Jews believed that the soul hovered around the body for three days after death, hoping to reenter it. But on the fourth day, after noticing that the body was beginning to decompose (cf. v. 39), the soul departed. Only then would a death be considered completely irreversible. Lazarus had been dead for four days, and his body had already started to decompose (v. 39). The Jews therefore would have recognized that only a divine miracle could restore him to life.”

John 11:18-19 (NKJV)

¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. ¹⁹ And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

In Jewish culture, when a member of the family died—the whole community came out to mourn with the family.

One historian and pastor explains—

“Men and women would walk separately in the funeral procession, after which the women alone would return from the burial site to begin the thirty-day mourning period. The first seven days of mourning were the most intense, and many of the mourners would remain with the family for that entire week. That explains why the Jews who came to console Martha and Mary were still with them four days after the burial.”

The fact that John makes a point to tell us that Bethany was about 2 miles from Jerusalem serves two purposes—

1. *It highlights the risk Jesus took by coming so near to Jerusalem—the place where so many Jewish leaders lived who wanted to kill Him.*

2. *And it also implies that many of the Jews who had come to Martha and Mary to mourn with them over the death of Lazarus came from Jerusalem.*

The fact that so many Jews from Jerusalem came to console the sisters of Lazarus suggests that the family was prominent—and probably wealthy (John 12:1–3).

One author adds—

“From the human perspective, the mourners were there to comfort the sisters in their loss. But from God’s perspective, they were there to witness Jesus’ stunning miracle. The raising of Lazarus would be done in public before numerous onlookers, many of whom were hostile to the Lord. As a result, not even Jesus’ enemies would be able to deny what He had done (v. 47).”

John 11:20-22 (NKJV)

²⁰ Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. ²¹ Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

When Martha said to Jesus, **“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died”**—I first of all believe that her words contain a gentle, heartbroken *rebuttal*.

Remember how I just said that the way Jesus acted by not rushing to Bethany immediately upon hearing that Lazarus was gravely ill, but waited a couple of days before making the journey, how that it not only confused Mary and Martha mentally—it crushed them emotionally.

We see it here—these are the words of someone who loved Jesus and believed in Jesus, but someone who doesn’t understand the actions of Jesus in this situation—and now she’s possibly wrestling with the goodness and love of Jesus for her and her family.

Martha wouldn’t be the first person that trusted in the Lord to heal a sick loved one only to see them die—and now they are left to grapple with the goodness and love of God. (Elaborate)

But secondly, when Martha said, “**Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died**”—I believe it was her way of simply saying that if Jesus had been present before Lazarus had died—He would have simply healed Lazarus so that he wouldn’t have died.

Although, it could be that Martha had grasped onto an interesting detail from spending so much time with Jesus, how that—nowhere in the gospels did anyone *ever* die in the presence of Jesus (He is the Lord of Life after all!).

From what Jesus implies in verse 15, it tells us that He purposely waited for Lazarus to die before coming to Bethany, and that that was by design.

In other words, it was the will of the Father for Lazarus to die and be buried for 4 days before Jesus came to Bethany so that the disciples would see a much greater miracle than Jesus simply healing another sick person from a disease.

As Jesus said (in verse 15) this was all for the benefit of His disciples so that they might believe.

Believe what? Believe that Jesus was God Almighty—the only One who can give life to the dead.

Furthermore, that they might believe that everything He had been saying and teaching for the last 3 ½ years about Himself was true—information they needed to believe with all of their hearts if they were going to continue the ministry He had begun when He returned to His Father after His death and resurrection.

At this point in John’s gospel we are less than 4 months from the cross and Jesus has begun to pull back from public ministry to focus the bulk of His remaining time on His disciples.

You see, He needed to do this to prepare them to take over the work He had begun—the most important work in the history of the world—the work of bringing glory to God thru the ministry of saving lost souls.

I will admit that Martha's statement, "**But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You**" is somewhat confusing.

By making that statement, was she saying that even though her brother was dead, if Jesus asked His Father to resurrect him—it would be done?

It sounds like that's what she meant, and yet when Jesus said, "**Your brother will rise again**" (v.23)—instead of jumping up and down for joy and saying "*Great Lord, bring it on—raise my brother from the dead!*"

Instead, she responds in verse 24—"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Many commentators feel that Martha didn't have the faith to believe that *Jesus* could raise her brother from the dead.

They point to verse 24, but especially to verse 39 as proof of this—

John 11:39 (NKJV)

³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been *dead* four days."

John MacArthur—

"She seems to have had faith in the Lord's power to heal, but not in His power to raise the dead (perhaps the possibility had not even crossed her mind). Nonetheless Martha recognized that Jesus had a special relationship with God. She was therefore confident that through His prayers some good could still come out of the tragedy."

Chuck Swindoll believes the same thing—

"Her statement, 'Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You,' cannot mean that she expected Jesus to bring her brother back to life (cf. 11:24, 39)."

Look, I believe that Martha believed in Jesus with all of her heart—and I further believe she had faith if Jesus asked the Father to raise Lazarus thru the power of the Holy Spirit working thru Him (Jesus)—her brother would live again.

But like so many of us, her faith wasn't perfect and was even subject to 'ebbs and flows' (some days it was stronger than other days)—let me explain.

When she said to Jesus, **“Lord if You had been here my brother would not have died”**—like so many of us believers, we have the faith to believe God to heal something small like a ‘cold’—but not something big like ‘*cancer*.’

And therefore, we tend to assign ‘*degrees of difficulty*’ to the situations and adversities we face in life.

This tends to impact the amount and intensity of the faith we exercise when we pray over a situation or sickness.

Martha was no different—she had more faith in the power of Jesus to heal her brother from his sickness—before he died than she did for believing that Jesus could heal her brother after he died!

After all, she had seen Jesus heal hundreds if not thousands of people from all kinds of sicknesses during the 3 ½ years of His public ministry—her brother's illness would be ‘no big deal’ for Jesus (and wouldn't require her faith to be stretched at all in believing Jesus could heal him).

But that all changed when Jesus delayed His coming until after Lazarus was dead and buried for 4 days (after his spirit had departed his corpse).

At this point she found herself facing a situation that went so far beyond whatever faith she had in Jesus, a situation that was stretching her faith beyond the boundaries of her comfort zone that

she gently rebukes the Lord for putting her in this uncomfortable position (we don't like it when God puts us into situations that stretch our faith—it's scary and unpleasant!)

And yet like most believers she didn't want to sound like she had no faith, so she said in verse 22—**"But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."**

Did she really mean that or was she simply making a 'super-spiritual' sounding statement so as to sound like a deep woman of faith?

Christians are famous for making great statements of faith so as to sound like deeply spiritual men and women of faith—but then when the Lord "*calls our bluff*" by saying to us "*Okay, let's see*" and forces us to live it out—our "faith" often collapses like a 'house of cards.'

I believe this is essentially what happened with Martha and why when Jesus told them to roll the stone away from the tomb—she said, **"Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days"**—it was her 'faith' collapsing like a house of cards!

Like so many believers in Jesus, Martha had faith for the future (**"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."** (v.24)—but she didn't have faith for the moment.

She believed that Jesus could and would raise her brother 'in the future' but she didn't believe He could raise her brother right then and there. (Elaborate)

But here's something else to consider—it could be that after 3 years of public ministry Martha had not yet come to fully believe that Jesus was God incarnate which could have been the real source of her doubts in Him being able to raise her brother from the dead.

And that could be what was really behind her words, **"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God ["because I don't believe You can do it"], God will give You** ['because I don't believe You are God'].**"** (v.21-22)

This is a position taken by William MacDonald—

“The word which Martha used for “ask” is the word normally used to describe a creature supplicating or praying to the Creator. It seems clear from this that Martha did not yet recognize the deity of the Lord Jesus. She realized that He was a great and unusual Man, but probably no greater than the prophets of old.”

Well, as we’re about to see in this account—that was about to change!

Let me close by saying that even for us who are genuine Christians, who do believe that Jesus is God in human form—even our faith needs to be exercised from time to time to make it grow stronger and larger (faith is like a muscle in that regard).

All the promises in God’s Word can only be actualized in our lives thru our faith—which is why Jesus asked Martha, **“Do you believe this?”**

Paul said that all the promises of God in Christ are *“yes and amen”* (they are ours for the taking—2Cor.1:20)—but only if we believe.

Faith is like a conduit that allows the power of God to flow from Him into our lives and fulfill everything He has promised to do for us and give to us—starting with eternal life (Eph.2:8-9).

John 5:24 (NKJV)

²⁴ "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

If Jesus can raise the dead—is there anything He can’t do in your life.

Can’t He raise a ‘dead’ marriage or a ‘dead walk or solve any problem you’re facing?

“Do you believe this?”