



The Resurrection and the Life

Study Scripture: John 11: 17 - 27
Background Scripture: John 11: 1 - 27

Lesson 12 May 19, 2012

Key Verse

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

John 11:25

INTRODUCTION

The story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead is the occasion of Jesus' great "I AM the resurrection and the life" statement. His claim was strikingly demonstrated in the most dramatic fashion possible, the restoration to life of a man dead for four days. The raising of Lazarus from the dead, represents for many the high point of Jesus' miracles and understandably so. Many would argue that man's greatest desire is to have life and his strongest instinct that of survival, so when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he demonstrated in a very practical way, that He is the answer to the essential need of humanity. Here, Jesus again showed his power over death, the ultimate enemy of man, as He restored the 'four days dead' Lazarus to life. His claim to be the 'resurrection and the life' points beyond the physical to the eternal life. He clearly states this fact in John 4:14; 6:47.

The resurrection of Lazarus was arguably the greatest demonstration of Christ's divine power to this point in His ministry. Although He raised Jairus's daughter (Mk. 5:22- 24, 35-43) and the son of a widow from Nain (Lk. 7:11- 15), those 'resurrections' occurred immediately after death. In the case of Lazarus, the miracle was most astounding because Lazarus was in the grave four days and the process of decomposition had already set-in.

Death was the legacy of Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden and it is the spectre that haunts the end of every man's life. Man does everything he can to disguise the stark reality of death. Our society attempts to lighten the occasion by having flowers, songs and fancy caskets at funerals. However man's pursuit of money, success, prestige, position, education, and sexual satisfaction become pointless in the face of the 'grim reaper'. The increasing anticipation of death that man suffers, leaves him with a sense of loneliness and despair. No matter what he has here in the way of security, friendship and meaning, it all vanishes at the time of death.

Thankfully, the dreaded scene just described is not the reality for Christians and the proclamation is officially made and attested to in our text. Jesus tells two sisters grieving at the death of their brother; *Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?* (vs.25-26). These verses have to be among the greatest words that have ever fallen on anyone's ears. The great news is that when a believer in Jesus dies, he dies only that he might rise again and live for eternity. Death only opens up eternal life. That is the Christian's hope founded on truth.

Our Study Scripture shows us unmistakably that there is a conqueror of death and His name is Jesus Christ. We are eternally thankful that Jesus Christ is named as death's conqueror.

To this point, Jesus ministry is clearly established through His teaching, healing and other miracles. His reputation as a Rabbi is widespread, large crowds follow Him and the Scribes, Pharisees and other authorities see Him as a looming threat, both on the religious and political fronts. Finally in chapter five after some minor skirmishes, serious opposition to Jesus emerged when He healed a paralytic on the Sabbath. The already hostile Pharisees are further enraged when Jesus defended Himself by claiming to be God. They attempted to stone Him but He walked away through the crowds.

In chapter six many of His followers abandon Him following a graphic "**I am the Bread of life**" sermon. His teachings invariably left few fence sitters; some are strongly opposed while others are u caused another attempted stoning (chapter 8) while He confirms His "**I am the Light of the world**" claim, by restoring sight to a man born blind in chapter nine. Later Jesus taught that He is the **Good Shepherd** and exposed the Scribes and Pharisees as false and wicked shepherds. Again some attempt to stone Him for saying "**I and my father are one**".

Today's narrative is the climax of a series of events that began in chapter ten (10:31-42). There we read that Jesus withdrew to a remote area east of the Jordan in the face of violent hostility and threats on His life from the 'Jews' in Jerusalem. This in fact marked the beginning of a transition from His public ministry to the nation, to a private ministry to His disciples. Jesus moved from the work of evangelizing the people to that of edifying His followers, who would be given the responsibility of reaching the world with the truth of the gospel.

Our text is a record of Jesus' response to the news that His dear friend Lazarus was gravely ill, His arrival at the now dead Lazarus' home, His raising of Lazarus back to life and the aftermath of that great miracle. Humanly speaking, Jesus was reacting to the death of His friend Lazarus and the grief of his sisters Martha and Mary. John informs us that even more than this, Jesus raised Lazarus for the sake of the glory of God. As the story unfolds we see the hand of the sovereign Lord orchestrating circumstances to the glory of His Son and Himself. *This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.*"

A little later Jesus tells His disciples: *And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe.*

Jesus delayed coming to see His friend when news of Lazarus' imminent death reached Him. This seeming lack of an immediate response from Jesus was a cause for disappointment in Him on the part of Mary, Martha and others. Clearly the purposes of God in our lives trump our own needs, however pressing they may appear to us. Many grieved the death of Lazarus but according to Jesus that death was only for the glory of God, the griefs of people not-with-standing. When 'the Resurrection and the

Life' arrived at the house, physical life was restored and eternal life was assured. This sign made the disciples confident that Jesus had the power to give life in His hands.

Jesus was also concerned about the faith of the sisters and His own disciples. Mary and Martha certainly believed Jesus could prevent someone from dying, but to raise someone dead after four days, they were not sure. Importantly Martha's recognition of Jesus as the Messiah opened the door for her faith in Jesus to increase. Christians must bear in mind at all times that our mediator is Himself God and this awareness must of necessity result in increased faith in our Lord and Saviour.

Let us study our text with the assurance that God is in control of the circumstances of our lives and our own resurrection and eternal life are forever secure with the one who is 'the Resurrection and the Life'. The reaction of the grieving sisters to Jesus arrival is an admirable display of faith in Jesus and surely an example for us: *even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.*"

THE TEXT

Verse 1 – 2. We are introduced to the principals involved in this story; Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Lazarus is said to be sick and Mary is identified as the Mary who anointed the Lord with an expensive oil and wiped His feet with her hair. (John 12: 1-10; Luke 10: 38-42). They lived in Bethany, a village about two miles from Jerusalem and Jesus might have stayed at their home on His visits to Jerusalem.

Verse 3. We find Jesus carrying on His ministry in the area where John the Baptist first baptized, having recently left Jerusalem, where the Jews had tried to kill Him. (John 10:31; 39-42). Lazarus' condition is rapidly deteriorating as his sisters send an urgent message to Jesus informing Him of the situation. Although no suggestion is made in the message as to what course of action Jesus should take, there is evidently, a confidence in His friendship and an expectation that He would come immediately or shortly thereafter.

The message to Jesus simply said; "*Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick*". So we know that there was such a true bond of love there was no need to request a favor. One just states that there is a need. The sisters might have expected the Master to drop everything and rush to their brother's bedside and heal his sickness, being the close friend that He was to the family. Jesus however does not respond as they expected. Note that the title "Lord" (Gr. kyrie) was respectful and did not necessarily imply belief in Jesus' deity.

Verse 4. Jesus did not go immediately but remarked that the sickness would not end in death but was for the glory of God through the Son. Jesus was not assuring the disciples that Lazarus would not die. He was assuring them that even though Lazarus would die, that would not be the end of the matter. He was also informing them, that the crisis had a divinely intended purpose, which was to bring glory to God the Father through the glorification of the Son. His delay was certainly not from lack of love or fear of the Jews, Bethany being so near to Jerusalem. Rather Jesus waited for the right time in His Father's plan.

Note the display of Jesus power and obedience to the Father led to His own death. Jesus obediently faced His own death for our sins.

Verse 5-7. ...*now Jesus loved...* John dispelled any doubt about Jesus' true love (Gr. agape) for this family. His delay did not show disinterest but divine purpose (2:4; 7:3-10). Interestingly the statement

about Jesus' love for the family is followed by news that He deliberately waited two more days before leaving for Bethany, in spite of His love and the urgency of the situation. Clearly God will not be held hostage by His love for us but His glory takes precedence over all. Mary and Martha will discover what many Christians have come to realize; what we regard as God's delay oftentimes is for our benefit and the glory of God.

Note Lazarus might already have been dead when news of his condition reached Jesus. Clearly, by the time Jesus arrives in Bethany Lazarus would be *good and dead*.

Verse 8-10. The disciples are less than enthusiastic about such a quick return to Judea. They question the wisdom of making the journey, since the Jews had recently tried to kill Jesus when He was last in Jerusalem. They were very aware that being His followers, they too would be in danger in Jerusalem.

Jesus was marching to a different drummer and that was the will of His Father. So He over-ruled their concerns with a statement about working while one had the '*light*' and in the time allotted for such work. Jesus was making it clear that He had work to do and His use of the phrase '*twelve hours in a day*' likely indicates that the Father had allotted a certain time to Jesus' earthly ministry.

We must be mindful that there is an appointed time of God. We have been given a restricted amount of time in which we are to be 'awake', when we must do the appointed activities. Another period of time is appointed by God for resting or sleeping. So Jesus is really telling them what Psalm 31:15 and Psalm 90:12 advises. That latter Psalm tells us: "*Help us to so number our days that we shall walk in ways that please the Lord*".

Jesus is also here pointing out to His disciples that it was not because of fear that He left Judea sometime before and there was no question that fear would prevent Him from going back there, even if it seems that conditions were worse than before. The disciples had obviously not yet come to appreciate the Father's protection of His Son or the inevitability of Jesus' death.

Some consider this a veiled response and see it as Jesus telling the disciples that as long as they are in the will of God no harm would come to them and the trip to Bethany would not be dangerous.

Verse 11-12. Jesus tells the disciples that Lazarus their *friend* had fallen asleep and that He was going to awaken Him. (See John 15:13-14; James 2:23 for significance of friend in the Scriptures.) The disciples did not understand Jesus meant Lazarus was dead; they gladly respond that's okay then, he will recover and we do not have to go to Judea. The disciples have no desire to risk their lives going to Judea, so our Lord's words are indeed welcome.

Of course, since the coming of Christ believers who have died are said to be asleep, a common metaphor for death in all languages. However a higher meaning is put to it in relation to believers who have died in Christ. (Acts 7:60; 2 Cor. 15:20; 1 Thess. 4:13-18)

Verse 13-16. Jesus plainly tells the disciples that Lazarus is dead, since they thought that he was just sleeping. As is so often the case with the disciples, Jesus is talking about one thing while they are thinking about something else.

Jesus statement that He is “*glad*” over the death of his friend comes as something of a shock. He is “*glad*” on their behalf, because He knows the miracle of raising Lazarus will become the occasion of the disciples belief and strengthening of their faith. It is apparent that the faith of the disciples continued to grow the more they saw of the person and work of our Lord. Similarly our faith should not be static but should always be growing as our knowledge of God increases.

Why should Jesus be glad? Contrary to popular opinion, God does not look bad when death occurs. God is perfectly holy and just, cannot overlook sin, must deal decisively and punish sin. We must realize that *the wages of sin is death*. In addition, since Jesus Christ will prevail over death, conquering this last enemy will clearly demonstrate that He is Lord over all, including death. This will bring glory to God the Father. The revelation of the Son brings glory to God.

Believers should have a victorious testimony in the face of death, showing the world that though they do not delight in death, they do not dread death. They regard death as a defeated enemy. Death is therefore not an unmitigated tragedy.

Some see Thomas words as an expression of love for and faith in Jesus, while others consider it a sort of fatalistic resignation. Either way, if ‘doubting Thomas was prepared to go, who of the other disciples was going to decline.

Verse 17. If we work back from four days Lazarus would have been dead by the time the message of his illness reached Jesus. Jesus waited two days after receiving the message and given a day for His travel time to Bethany and the same for the messengers and we have four days. There is some speculation here since we do not know Jesus’ travel time or that of the messengers.

Though sometimes bodies were embalmed, quick burials were the norm in the region, given the hot climate and lack of any effective means to preserve the corpse.

Typical of the times when someone prominent died in those days, the religious leadership came out. Lazarus must have been such a person given the many people who came to his funeral. People often stayed at a funeral for a week. The burial took place immediately following the death and the rest of the week was filled with mourning the deceased and comforting the family. Some people came as professional mourners who would wail as an expression of grief. In this case many were there to legitimately comfort Mary and Martha.

The four days was also significant in the local lore, as it was believed that the spirit hung around the body for three days hoping for a resuscitation but once decay set in the spirit left and death was final. So the stage was set for eyewitness accounts of the ability of Jesus of Nazareth to reverse even the iron grip of death.

Verse 18-19. The proximity to Jerusalem, less than two miles, made it easy for people to get to Bethany and easy for word to get back to Jerusalem and the Sanhedrin about Jesus’ presence and the miraculous sign of Lazarus’ resurrection.

Would they bow to this clear evidence of Jesus’ Messiahship and praise God for sending their Saviour, or would they draw even closer to their father the devil?

The scene was one of mourning as the women gathered around Mary and Martha to console and comfort them. These would likely be the extended family, friends and acquaintances.

The absence of Jesus at the time of their brother's death would have deeply affected Mary and Martha, for they longed for the comfort of His presence. His physical presence would have calmed their troubled heart in their grief.

So it is important for us to understand what Jesus meant when He said to His disciples: "*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*" He is here with us in a most powerful way and we cannot escape His presence.

Verse 20. Martha's reaction to the news of Jesus' arrival seems in synch with what we learned of her personality elsewhere. In Luke 10:38-42, Jesus visited the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Martha was the busy one, performing the duties of a hostess, while Mary was more of an introspective, pensive individual. So we find that when Jesus' arrival was announced, Martha immediately went to meet Him while Mary remained in the house. Some believe Mary did not hear of Jesus' arrival, while others think she *did* hear but was so overwhelmed with sorrow that she did not care to move, choosing rather to indulge her sorrow.

Among the Jews sitting was the common posture of those in grief. (Ezra 9:3-4; Neh.1:4).

Verse 21. Martha could be rendering a mild rebuke to Jesus for his seeming delay in coming to Bethany or it could be an expression of her faith in His ability to heal the sick. The fact is Lazarus is no longer sick, he is dead!

'If only you had been here', both Mary and Martha said to Jesus and they probably had said it many, many times to themselves before Jesus came.

Martha's faith appears to have stopped at Jesus' ability to heal the sick, thus she gives no thought to Jesus raising Lazarus from the grave. She had confidence in Christ, yet she limited His power. She believed no illness could kill her brother when Jesus was present, but once her brother died, she thought even Jesus could not change that situation.

Does your faith limit God?

We should probably look at Martha's faith as commendable, though imperfect, for no matter what, she believed in Jesus as Messiah. Some believe that her reaction was only one of genuine regret and involved no rebuke.

Verse 22. Martha's faith like that of most of us might have come up a bit short but her knowledge of the relationship between Jesus and the Father was commendable. She knew God would give Jesus whatever He asked, because He had been saying that throughout His ministry. In John 6:38, Jesus said, "*For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will but the will of Him that sent Me.*" Martha knew who Jesus was. She understood His relationship to God because He had visited her home on several occasions.

Martha's...*whatever you ask*...leaves the door open to anything Jesus might desire of His Father, including bringing back her brother to life. Maybe she lacked the confidence to ask Jesus to bring Lazarus back to life. After all, there was no precedent as yet of any one being raised to life that had been dead for so long. Humbly and wisely she left it to the compassionate consideration of the Lord. She is certainly showing confidence and belief in Him, despite any disappointment. On top of that she certainly was honest, which is more than most of us show in times of disappointment.

Note, when we are unsure of what to ask or expect, let us in general leave it all to God, let Him do *what seemeth him good*.

Verse 23-24. Though Jesus words could be taken to mean immediate or 'last day' (Day of Judgment) resurrection, Martha assumed the latter, despite her deep desire to see her brother brought back to life.

She still seemed to be misunderstanding Jesus' plain statement "*Your brother will rise again*". She might not have had doubts about His power, but was simply not even giving it consideration. So she shows that she was not looking for the immediate resurrection of her brother and assumed Jesus was talking about the resurrection of the 'just' at the end of the world. Still Martha showed she had a good grasp of Jesus' intimate relationship with the Father, and of the fact that Jesus did not act independently of the Father. Thus, she did not express her assurance concerning whatever Jesus attempted to do, but rather of her assurance that God the Father would answer the prayers of His Son.

Jesus' words had an obvious literal meaning but as was so typical of Him, they carried a deeper sense. He offered Martha comfort based on the Old Testament assurance that God would resurrect believers (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2). Unlike some Jewish people of her day (Sadducees; Ac. 23:8), Martha apparently understood what the Old Testament taught about resurrection in such places as Psalm 16:9-11; Job 19:25-27. The 'last day' here refers to the end of the present age as the Jews viewed history, namely, just before Messiah inaugurates the new kingdom age (6:39-40, 44, 54; 12:48).

There is some inconsistency in Martha's response. She felt Jesus could raise Lazarus at the last day (5:25-29) but she did not consider the possibility that He could raise him after he had been dead only four days.

It seems we have no problem with the power of God for the future while doubting it or not considering that it applies and works today. We look forward to Christ coming in power and glory while down-playing His power to act in the present. If we can trust God in the future, we can trust Him in the present. His power does not change.

Verse 25-26. ...*I AM*... here Jesus shifts the discussion, moves the focus back from the program of God to His Person. Jesus' tremendous "*I am resurrection and life*" assertion renders time immaterial. Martha projected God's resurrection power into the future, but Jesus was saying: the resurrection is here and it is Me. Time was not an issue, Jesus could resurrect Lazarus whenever He desired to do so. His use of "***I am***" (the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew covenant name of God) reinforced His claim. In Jesus other 'I AM' statements He likened himself to tangible objects, Light, Shepherd, the Door but here, He is instead an event. The point is, He is the *author* or the *cause* of the resurrection and it so depends on His power and will, that it may be said that He is the resurrection itself. He wanted Martha to think about the Person who would do the resurrecting, rather than the event.

Salvation does not come through a system of religion or an ethical code; it comes in a living person, Jesus Christ, who is "the resurrection and the life." We will not have victory over death by going to church, by thinking religious thoughts, or by doing good works. Resurrection and life are found in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the power of resurrection for the past, present, and future.

...though he may die... has direct application to Lazarus as Jesus spoke here of physical death.

Notice that Jesus has dealt with the fears of every single person who has ever lived. Very importantly he mentioned two groups of believers. He spoke first of those who believe in Him, that though they die, referring to those who have already died with their bodies dissolving into the dust, they will live. He speaks of the prospects of the pious dead.

Then He referred to the second group, "*Whosoever lives and believes in me*", those not yet dead, also have a future. Jesus showed here the same prospects for *...who-ever lives and believes in me...; they shall never die*. He spoke of spiritual death (separation from God Gen.2:17) and the verse expressed what was true for Martha and all true believers.

...never... the Greek is emphatic, saying literally, 'they will never, ever die forever'.

Jesus spoke to both the natural and spiritual life of believers. He affirmed the teaching of a physical, bodily resurrection and will shortly raise Lazarus, which will prove his words. He himself will soon demonstrate resurrection in all its fullness by His own resurrection. Jesus showed that eternal life is the present possession of the believer. Though believers die physically, their spirits live on with God, one day to be reunited with a glorified, resurrected body.

Note the declaration and promise in both verses is very particular. It is for those who *live and believe*, those whose lives demonstrate a true belief in Jesus Christ. What does it mean to believe? Belief that results in salvation is a commitment to entrust one's whole self to God. Jesus said several times "*He who believes in me*" and so clearly Scripture gives those who do not believe in Jesus no hope at all.

Believest thou this... His question confronted Martha's faith. He was asking Martha to affirm her faith in Him as the One who will raise the dead and who gives eternal life. He questioned her faith in Him, not her faith in doctrines. She had already expressed her faith in the doctrine of the resurrection (v. 24). Jesus undoubtedly implied that He was then able to raise up Lazarus and now on the verge of this great miracle it was the proper time to test her faith.

Do you believe Jesus Christ? This is the ultimate question for all men.

One writer notes: **The time of affliction is a favourable period to try ourselves to ascertain whether we have faith. If we still have confidence in God, if we look to him for comfort in such seasons, it is good evidence that we are his friends. He that loves God when he takes away his comforts, has the best evidence possible of true attachment to him.**

Verse 27. This is the confession that all believers must make and a fact to which all must attest. This recognition of Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a sinner. (See Matt.16:16-17)

This statement is something of a climax in the gospel of John, for the apostle states that it is for this very reason he wrote his gospel: *"But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name."* (John 20:31).

Martha makes a comprehensive statement about Christ, the implications of which encompass the core of Christianity. She believed and confessed three inseparable things concerning Jesus and all to the same effect:

He was the Christ, or Messiah;

He was the *Son of God*;

He is the one who should come into the world;

One writer notes: Martha confessed that she did indeed believe that Jesus was the resurrection and the life. Her answer focused on His person, not just on the teachings of Judaism (20:28, 30-31). That she truly understood and believed what Jesus revealed about Himself is clear from her reply. She correctly concluded that if Jesus was the One who would raise the dead and impart spiritual life He must be the Messiah. She clarified that what she meant by "Messiah" was not the popular idea of a revolutionary leader but the biblical revelation of a God-man whom God promised to send from heaven (1:9, 49; 6:14). This saving faith rested on facts about Jesus that were true but went on to place personal trust in Him to fulfill His claims.

Jesus is the Christ so there is no difficulty in believing that he is the 'resurrection and the life'. He is the fountain of light and truth and we may take all his sayings as faithful and divine. He is that prophet whom we are to hear in all things. All that appears impossible becomes reality for He is the Son of God, who has life in himself.

CONCLUSION

In the events of our lesson, humanly speaking, there was no hope of recovery and yet at the point of absolute helplessness and hopelessness, Jesus promised and gave life to the dead in the subsequent verses.

Physical death is the divine object lesson of what sin does in the spiritual realm. Just as physical death ends life and separates people, so spiritual death is the separation of man from God. The spiritual parallel is obvious for all men are *dead in their trespasses and sins* (Eph 2:1-3).

One great lesson of our text relates to the magnificent comfort that believers have in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. His person brings great promises. We need to learn that when Jesus says to the main characters in our story: *"I am the resurrection and the life"*, he is focusing us on His Person, a focus which will undoubtedly steer us toward His promises.

What we can never do to merit eternal life, God has provided as a free gift (Romans 3:20-25; Eph.2:8-9). Jesus has come not to help us in our struggle towards heaven, but to give life to those who are dead. As He gave life to Lazarus, so he offers spiritual life to all men who believe in him

The sisters reacted to their brother's sickness by only informing Jesus of the situation. We can look on Jesus as our all-sufficient helper. Since He is present he can always deliver us and for believers He is always present. We know and are assured of His tender sympathy. He weeps with those who weep, for He can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities.

We will face all kinds of problems at home, at school, in the neighbourhood, at work. We should ask ourselves the question as to how we are going to face these problems. We should remember that Jesus the lord of Glory is always there and He knows how to handle every situation we will face. He knows how to protect, guide, lead and to set aside the laws of nature, or to change them as He wills.

He can do anything. Nothing is too hard for Him. He can and does the impossible.

So let us learn not to focus on the problem but on the Person in whose hand is everything. He might not raise us from the dead but He can if He so wishes. But if we die and even if He does not resurrect us now, do not worry, for being with Him when we breathe our last is better than what we have now.

Martha believed. Maybe you believe too, yet you still have doubts. That is a common problem because we must still struggle with the forces of evil and our human sinfulness. You may say, "I would like to believe. What do I do?" You could read verse as a prayer to God if it's the honest desire of your heart and ask Jesus to save you!