



SERMON TITLE: I Am the Resurrection and the Life

DATE: April 12, 2020

SCRIPTURE: John 11

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"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his own biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

John 11 opens on a family scene. A man named Lazarus is sick. He and his sisters, Mary and Martha, are very close to Jesus. Three times in this chapter we are told how much Jesus loved these close friends of his. As Lazarus's sickness worsens, Mary and Martha send messengers to let Jesus know he's in a bad way. They have faith that he is able to heal their brother. When Jesus hears the news, he says, "This illness will not lead to death, but it's for the glory of God." But rather than go right away, Jesus stays put for two more days which is totally unexpected. And during that time, Lazarus died. We assume that his love for his friends would compel him to rush to their side, but his love compels him to do the opposite. The fact that God loves us and that we love him is no guarantee that we will be sheltered from problems and pain. Clearly, Jesus is interested in accomplishing a lot more here than just healing Lazarus. He wants to grow the faith of everybody involved—Mary, Martha, his disciples, and all the friends who were helping the two sisters.

When Jesus finally arrives, Martha comes out to meet him on the road. She says, "Lord if you would have been here my brother wouldn't have died?" Interestingly, Jesus gives her no explanation but he reasons with her with this bold claim—*I am the resurrection and the life*. He's saying, "Wherever I AM then anything God ever did or ever will do can happen right now in the present." Then Jesus adds two promises to that claim—*Promise #1: Everyone who believes in me will live even if they die—and—Promise #2: Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die—and* then he challenges her—*Do you believe this?* And Martha responds in faith by saying, "I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God, who has come (from the Father) into the world." I love this quote by William Gurnall—"Let your hope of heaven master your fear of death. Why should you be afraid to die when you hope to live by dying."

Martha goes back to the house and finds Mary and tells her that Jesus is here and wants to talk to her. She goes out to Jesus and she says exactly the same thing as Martha (no doubt in a completely different tone)—"Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died." Both sisters knew that Jesus had the power to heal and to raise the dead. But Lazarus has been dead four days—he's good and dead—and to their thinking, he was beyond hope. Interestingly, Jesus doesn't answer Mary's statement like he did Martha. Instead, he weeps with her and walks with her to the tomb. When Jesus sees us hurting, it goes right to the deepest part of who he is.

At the tomb, Jesus commands, "Remove the stone." Martha instructs Jesus in mortuary science. She uses logic—"Lord, he's been dead four days. By this time there will be the stench of death." Here's the climax of the story. Jesus says, *Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God put on display?* If you believe, you will see! Not when you see, you'll believe, but if you believe in me, in what I told you I would do, you will see God's power and goodness put on display. Again, Jesus is working to grow their faith. He's not just calling them to believe in who he is and what he can do. He's calling them to act in faith even when what God says and doesn't make sense. So, they do what Jesus tells them to do—they remove the stone—even though it didn't make any logical sense and Jesus calls out, "Lazarus come forth"—and Lazarus shuffles out, wrapped up like an Egyptian mummy. And as a result, the faith of Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and Jesus' disciples was strengthened. But that's not all. Many people put their faith in Jesus for the very first time. At the same time, as John has been showing us all along, others rejected him and they plotted all the more diligently to put him to death.

Watch the story on YouTube. ["The Gospel of John * Official HD Movie English"](#) and start at 1:30:35.

Discussion Starters:

1. Talk about a time in your life when God didn't do for you what you expected/hoped/prayed he would do. How did you get through that time? Did that experience cause your faith to grow stronger? If so, how so?
2. How would you have felt if you believed Jesus was coming to heal your dying brother, but he did not arrive until four days later?
3. Tying back to question #1—have you ever experienced a trial or a season of suffering that caused you to doubt the goodness or the love of God for you? What happened at that time?
4. How can it be that Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus but he allowed them to live in this painful story?
5. We see death all around us. People die every day, and our loved one pass away during our lifetimes. How can Jesus say that those who believe in him will never die?
6. Look at Martha and Mary's responses when they both see both. They say the exact same thing, but Jesus doesn't deal with them the same way. Why do you think that is? What does that tell you about Jesus?
7. In vv33-38, we see how deeply moved Jesus was emotionally at the sight of sorrow and death. How does this picture of Jesus help you when you are hurting and confused?
8. Charlie said, "Growth in faith is not automatic." How do difficulties and disappointments with God strengthen or weaken someone's faith?
9. What God wants for us is that we act in faith even when what God says and doesn't make sense to us. How can logic and what we believe is possible or impossible hinder our ability to experience what God wants to do in our lives?
10. It's not uncommon to say—"Well, I would obey if I could understand"—yep—*And you know what? ...That's the problem. You see, God doesn't think and act like us. He sees things from a totally different perspective. There are dimensions to every problem that he sees that we cannot imagine. There are possibilities and opportunities in every situation that we cannot conceive. So he calls for us to trust him, knowing that he's working out something far greater than we can imagine. Because he loves us, he's always working out what he knows is best for us. The problem is, as C.S. Lewis put it—"We're not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us. We're wondering how painful the best will turn out to be."* Talk about that. How must our faith grow in order to embrace the pain of what God knows is best for us?
11. How does this story of the resurrection of Lazarus help us to better understand the resurrection of our Lord?
12. Think about all the things that are pressing you and stressing you. What does it look like for you to act like God is telling you the truth? What is the truth for you in this present crisis?