



JOHN 11:17-46

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ 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 from God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

²⁸ When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² Now when Mary

came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. ³⁴ And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me."

⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." ⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

DAY 1

JOHN 11:17, 25, 26, 33, 38

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. . . . ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. . . . ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. . . . ³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb

It has often been said that the only things certain in life are death and taxes. While we nod our heads at that truism, death wasn't always meant to be a certainty; in fact, death has been an intruder since Adam and Eve fell in the garden. We see this clearly in this text as Jesus faces the death of his friend Lazarus. That Lazarus is dead is beyond dispute. The text highlights that he has been in the tomb for four days, and there is concern about his odor should the tomb be opened (v. 39). What do we observe as Jesus comes face to face with death?

One of the most striking things to note is that Jesus does not face death impassively. Two times we are told that Jesus was deeply moved in his spirit. The text highlights that he was greatly troubled. But we actually need to push a little deeper to get the full extent of what is going on here. In his classic essay *The Emotional Life of Our Lord*, B. B. Warfield, theologian at Princeton Seminary in the early 1900s, provides explanation. When Jesus observed Mary weeping, he groaned in his spirit and groaned in himself. Warfield writes:

"The natural suggestion of the word 'groan' is . . . pain or sorrow, [but] this rendering . . . is misleading. . . . What John tells us, in point of fact, is that Jesus approached the grave of Lazarus, in a state, not of uncontrollable grief, but of irrepressible anger. He did respond . . . with quiet, sympathetic tears: 'Jesus wept.' But the emotion which tore his breast and clamored for utterance was just [i.e. righteous] rage."

Jesus was justifiably angry at the phenomena of death that has wrecked the beauty of his creation. As he approaches the tomb of Lazarus, the culminating and cascading effect of the deaths of millions coalesce to focus the anger of the Savior.

This understanding then leads to the purpose for which Jesus came to this earth. "I am the resurrection and the life." I have come to face this enemy and to put an end to death. Theologian John Owen famously titled one of his books *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. Paul, in speaking of the subsequent victory of Christ, exults:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”
“O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:54–57)

As we begin these post-Easter meditations, let us pause and celebrate once again the work of our champion, Jesus Christ. He has defeated the enemy that we could not have defeated on our own. As we pause, may we also cultivate a holy hatred for sin and its effects on our world. As, by God’s grace, we begin to reflect Christ, may we become more and more sensitized to the presence of evil.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we thank you that as the Resurrection and the Life you did not avoid death but faced it head-on in order to defeat it. We pray that you would give us the confidence to face our own disease, decay, and death from the solid ground of your victory. We pray too for the sensitivity to see these ancient enemies with the same sensitivity that you did. Help us never to be comfortable with the effects that the fall has initiated, but may we ever hope for and embrace your resurrection work. We pray all this in your most precious name. Amen.

DAY 2

JOHN 11:20-27

²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ 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 from God, God will give you.” ²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴ Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” ²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

Jesus’s interaction with Martha reveals a lot. Jesus makes the claim that those who believe in him by putting their personal trust in the Messiah will have eternal life. Yet he uncovers the faith of Martha differently than the faith of Mary.

Martha reveals that she believes who Jesus is and that she knows he could have prevented Lazarus’s death. Yet she still isn’t seeing the full picture. When she responds to Jesus’s words about Lazarus rising again, she articulates a common Jewish understanding of the resurrection: “*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.*” Well, yes, that is true. There will be a resurrection in the last days. Yet Jesus does not leave it there. He presses her. He makes her think long and hard about what she *truly* believes. In other words, Jesus was addressing Martha’s head concerns.

All of us have doubts. Some may be heavier than others, yet all of us have some areas of unbelief in our lives. Just like the man in Mark 9:24 who said, “*I believe; help my unbelief!*” Martha believed, but she couldn’t quite wrap her mind around what was going on. She couldn’t see or perceive what Jesus was up to. She doubted with her intellect. Mary doubted with her heart. Peter doubted through his actions or obedience. Head, heart, and hands.

Who do you most resemble in your doubts? Martha through her head, Mary through her heart, or Peter through his hands?

Pray that the Lord would grant you a deeper measure of faith this day and that He would work directly through your areas of doubt.

When Jesus responds to Martha, he takes on her head concerns directly. She knows that Jesus will bring Lazarus back at the end of all things, but she does not see that Jesus has power to give life today. As the Messiah, Jesus brings the resurrection forward. He wants Martha to see and believe in him that she might have life.

That is Jesus’s hope for you and me today. That we might believe in him and through that belief have life today and forever.

PRAYER

Father in heaven, today would you grant me a measure of faith and belief that is deeper than what I had yesterday. Help me to see a truer picture of who you are as my Father and who Jesus is as my Saving King. Thank you that you do not leave or forsake your people, and that through the work of the Spirit you are making me complete in Christ. Thank you that you work in various ways. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

DAY 3

JOHN 11:28-37

²⁸ When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” ²⁹ And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. ³⁴ And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”

Before Lazarus had died, Jesus knew that he was going to be coming to resurrect Lazarus. Yet even after Jesus arrives, he does not hurry to the tomb. He doesn't rush to display his authority and power; instead, he takes time to connect in different ways with both Martha and Mary. In these verses, Jesus calls Mary to him and she brings her grief to him, right to his feet. A place she would later come to anoint Jesus with perfume.

Jesus does not turn her away, but sees her brokenness, her grief. Even though he knows that in moments Lazarus will be returned to her, he identifies with her pain. He is grieving with her, and it flows out of him as he weeps with her.

Jesus connects with Mary in a profound way. He shares her grief. The teacher, the miracle worker, the “Christ” does not lord these titles over her; instead, he loves her. And in this story we see Jesus, who calls us to bring our burdens to his feet—a Savior who sympathizes with our weaknesses, who understands our grief, and weeps with us. Even as he grieves with us, he knows that resurrection is coming—a time when all our tears will be wiped away.

PRAYER

Thank you, Jesus, for hearing our cries and sharing our pain. Transform us that we may grieve with one another. Help us to hold on to the hope we have in the resurrection.

DAY 4

JOHN 11:41-43

⁴¹ . . . And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”

One of my favorite scenes from the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy is when in *The Return of the King*, Aragorn leads a meager army of 6,000 men to the Black Gate to take on Sauron. They are faced with Sauron’s army pouring out, numbering over 60,000 with many more waiting behind the ominous walls of Mordor. It was an impossible mission, at least it would be if they had all their eggs in one basket. In fact, Aragorn’s siege was only meant to be a distraction while Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee carried the ring into the heart of Mordor to destroy it. Nevertheless, they are desperate. “For Frodo!” they cried out, hoping against all odds that they would make it before Sauron in all his darkness swallowed them up.

You may be familiar with the phrase, “storming the gates of heaven” to describe incessant prayer. This phrase gives a picture of determination and desperation. Indeed, there are times when prayer requires great perseverance. Yet how often might we have a skewed picture of our prayer to be like Aragorn storming the Black Gate? Hoping against all hope, that maybe, just maybe, God might hear and come through.

Jesus, too, experienced the anguish of desperation. As we saw yesterday, he was “deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled” when encountering the reality of brokenness in the lives of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. How does Jesus approach the “gates of heaven” in the midst of this tearful situation?

We see Jesus lift up his eyes to heaven. He is not storming; rather his words are filled with assurance, gratitude and peace. Jesus knows that his Father always hears him. Jesus knows that the Father has given him all the resources of heaven at his disposal to accomplish the work set out before him.

As we saw in John 6:37-40 where Jesus says I am the bread of life:

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Just as Jesus prays to his good Father, knowing that he is loved and heard, so we too in Christ have the same access to the Sovereign Lord of all. In fact, we are encouraged that “since then we have a great high priest...Jesus, the Son of God...let us...with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16, italics added). He says, draw near. To come, taste and see. To come, lay down your burdens. To come, eat, drink, that you may hunger and thirst no more.

In our prayers, we go to God not with a hope that leads to despair. Rather we have a true and living hope in Jesus. Mary and Martha got a glimpse of that in seeing their beloved brother raised from the dead. How much more do we experience that in our own newness of life, released from the bondage of sin and death, and made one with Jesus, the lover of our souls.

PRAYER

Dear God in heaven, O how we tremble sometimes before you. We confess that oftentimes we are wracked by doubt and unbelief in your goodness. We confess, dear God, that you are not only the Almighty one, but you are also our Abba Father to whom we cry. Would you lead us and guide us in sweet reliance on you? Strengthen our hearts to boldly approach your throne in prayer--not as in fear of Mordor--but sheathed in the white robes of Jesus's righteousness, having received all the rights of true sons and daughters of your Kingdom. Make us courageous intercessors for those around us. To you be the glory. Amen

DAY 5

JOHN 11:44, 25, 26

⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

²⁵ . . . “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

In many ways, we're like Martha. We can tell from her discussion with Jesus that she believed in the resurrection, but she saw it as being so far off in the future that it seemed a little abstract. For her, as for many of us, the resurrection is a promise that is just “out there.” Even though we affirm the resurrection in the Apostles' Creed, often we really don't live our lives much differently than if we didn't believe in it. So what does the resurrection do for us now? How can we make its truth a greater part of daily thinking? What would it look like to really BELIEVE the resurrection?

Here are some suggested ideas to think about:

The resurrection expands our imaginations. What God is doing now is bigger than we could possibly know. His plan is bigger than anybody thought back in biblical times. And today it is still bigger than any of us can know or foresee. We shouldn't be surprised. There is a universe out there that he has created. God is dealing in infinity. The sky is literally the limit. The resurrection exposes us to the wonder of all that is and is to come.

The resurrection points us toward that personal relationship with Jesus that is even now totally available to us. What we see in Jesus' relationship with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus is his compassion and care for them. Then we see that same attitude in all of Jesus's interactions with people throughout his post-resurrection appearances. We know he cares the same way for us. Our response should be to burrow into that life-giving relationship. Are we thanking and praising him daily and carrying on that conversation through prayer that maintains the relationship?

The resurrection gives us a taste of what is to come. It anticipates our futures. We know we're not stuck with these aging bodies forever. We can look forward to new heavenly bodies. We're just starting to understand how his glory is going to fill the earth and what our part will be in that glorification activity.

The resurrection reminds us of the resources and power that are available to us now to accomplish kingdom work. The gates of hell have been broken, and the power of God is now breaking down all the resistance to his rule. We're in a battle in which we're on the winning side. We should take heart. Through Christ, we're a part of that kingdom that will have no end. Do we ever think about what that means for us today?

Christ has won the biggest victory of all time. In him, life has conquered death. Through the gospel story, we witness anew the resurrection every year at Easter. Through the promises of the apostles in the epistles, we are challenged to live in the light of that resurrection. What he said he would do, he has done. How can we do less than to believe and act on the basis of who he is and what he has done?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, prepare our hearts this day to follow you no matter how difficult that path may be. Prepare us to die if that is what your will is. But also prepare us to know and understand the gift of life we have even now through your resurrection. Help us see through whatever difficulties we may be going through to the glory that is yours and that will be ours.