

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

John 11:1-44

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?"

In today's passage, Jesus teaches us that our physical death is not the end of everything. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. The final destination of our lives is not some cemetery. Resurrection faith gives us a living hope in the eternal kingdom of God. May God plant resurrection faith in our hearts!

I. "SO THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE" (1-16)

Look at verse 1. *Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.* In the quiet village of Bethany, a town just east of Jerusalem, there lived a family of three: Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Martha, the older sister, was a hardworking woman. When Jesus and his disciples visited their home, she would serve them with delicious meals. Mary, on the other hand, was a woman of heart. She was the one who brought to Jesus the expensive perfume she had saved for her wedding, poured it on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair (2). This was her way of expressing her love for Jesus who had given her a new life. She loved the Bible study time with Jesus. Lazarus, the only man in the family, was always sickly that he could not work to support the family. Nevertheless, his sisters loved him dearly and were happy to have a man in the family. We don't know how they lost their parents, but as long as Lazarus was there, the sisters felt secure.

This family had a very close relationship with Jesus. Jesus visited them often whenever he was in Jerusalem. He would teach them the Bible and Martha would feed his hungry disciples (Lk 10:38-42). To this family who had no parents, Jesus was like a good father.

One day, a tragedy struck the family. Lazarus became very sick and was dying. The sisters were greatly distressed. They sent a messenger to Jesus with the urgent message, "Lord, the one you love is sick." They knew how much Jesus loved Lazarus. So they didn't have to say much. They expected Jesus to drop everything and come right away to help their brother. But Jesus did not come right away.

Look at verse 4. *When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."* To the sisters, Lazarus' illness seemed yet another sign of their misfortunes in their family. But Jesus did not see his sickness as a misfortune. Rather, it was an opportunity to display God's glory. Jesus said the same in Chapter 9. When his disciples saw a blind man begging on the street, they asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that

he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him” (Jn 9:3).

Jesus said that the sickness was “for God’s glory.” Through these words, Jesus reminds us what the purpose of our lives is. God put us here in this world so that we may glorify him through our lives. As the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, “the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” Whether we are in good situation or bad, we must live for the glory of God. When we don’t have this clear purpose of life in God, we tend to follow our instinct or the trend of the world, like dead fish flowing down a stream. We work hard to pay the bills, enjoying some pleasures along the way, not realizing there is more to life than this. This world is temporary. We are just passing through this world. Our permanent home is in heaven. So we should live a life that fulfills God’s purpose in us, until God calls home in his time. We should not waste away our God-given lives pursuing only what our sinful nature desires. Let us pray that whether we are healthy or sick, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, do it all for the glory of God!

Look at verses 5-6. *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.* Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters. But didn’t drop everything and run to Bethany when he heard the bad news. Instead, he stayed where he was two more days, making sure Lazarus was dead. In fact, this passage reads, “Now Jesus loved So he stayed two more days.” What kind of love is this? I heard that a woman stopped her Bible study after learning what Jesus did here. A normal person would drop everything and run to help his friend. But Jesus didn’t do that. His love is different from human love. Many people expect God to be a problem solver on demand, because God is love. They expect God to be a banker, a social worker, a matchmaker, a medical doctor, and so on. But God’s love is much deeper than we expect. Jesus delayed two more days, not because he didn’t love Lazarus and his sisters, but because he loved them so much. Jesus loved them so much that he wanted them to have life by believing in him.

After two days, Jesus finally said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” The disciples did not understand why Jesus wanted to go to Judea. They still remembered vividly how the Jews had tried to kill Jesus. So they said, “But Rabbi, a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, yet you are going back?” (8) No doubt, they were concerned about their teacher’s safety. But the truth was that they were fearful of their own safety. *Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light”* (9). Jesus told them not to worry about their safety. Just as there are twelve hours of daylight, so each man has an appointed span of lifetime set by God. No one will die before living out his lifetime set by God. We cannot add or subtract even one more minute from our lifetime set by God. What is more important is we walk in the light of the world, that is, our Lord Jesus. Jesus said earlier, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn 8:12). The disciples were with Jesus all the time. They did not have to be afraid of their death. We don’t have to be fearful of death as long as we are with Jesus.

Jesus also said in verse 11, *“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”* His disciples were puzzled by his words and said, *“Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better”* (12). They thought he meant natural sleep. But Jesus meant that Lazarus had died. We learn here that in Jesus, death is like a sound sleep. It is not a dreadful thing. We don’t worry about falling asleep, because when we wake up from a sound sleep, we feel refreshed. Likewise, to God’s children death is like a sound sleep. Death is a mere transition from an earthly body to a spiritual body (1Co 15:44). In several places, the Bible compares death to sleep (Mt 9:24; Ac 7:60; 1Co 15:6). When we have faith in Jesus, we don’t have to fear death, because death is only a first step toward the glorious, eternal kingdom of God.

How did the disciples respond to Jesus’ teaching? Thomas said, *“Let us also go, that we may die with him”* (16). He sounded as if he were a brave soldier who decided to join a suicide squad. But in reality, he was still fearful of death. The other disciples had the same fear problem. They were afraid of being stoned to death by the Jews. They were fearful because they had no faith in Jesus. They needed to grow more in their faith.

How did Jesus help them? Jesus said, *“And for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him”* (15). Jesus knew that they had fear of death. Jesus wanted them to overcome the fear by believing in him. He said, *“so that you may believe.”* Jesus really wanted them to overcome their fear problem by faith. He delayed his trip to make sure that Lazarus was dead for this purpose—so that they may believe. May God help us to believe! What specifically does Jesus want us to believe?

II. “I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE” (17-32)

What atmosphere did Jesus find when he arrived at Bethany? The whole village was filled with sorrow and the shadow of death. Lazarus had already been dead and his body was put in a tomb four days earlier. Many Jews had come from Jerusalem to express their sympathy for the sisters. When Jesus arrived, Martha went out to meet him and said, *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”* (21). Her voice could not hide her disappointment toward Jesus. It was her way of saying, *“Lord, you came too late. How could you let this happen to us?”* Still, she wished that Jesus would do something to help (22).

What did Jesus say to her? He did not say, *“I’m so sorry for your loss,”* or *“My condolences.”* Look at verse 23. *Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”* Given that her brother was dead and his body decomposing in the tomb, Martha could not understand what Jesus was saying. So she tried to understand his words theologically. She said, *“I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day”* (24). Martha knew about resurrection from her Bible study. She knew that on the last day the dead will be raised. The problem was that her resurrection faith was only theoretical. It remained in her head, not in her heart. She failed to see Jesus as the Creator God, the giver of life. So she was still under the power of death. She was fatalistic.

How did Jesus help Martha? Let us read 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?"* This is the most wonderful promise of God. There is no death in Jesus. I heard that the founder of a Korean conglomerate giant said he was willing to give a half of his possessions if a doctor could extend his life for a few more weeks. Ever since Adam's fall, mankind has been helpless before sin and death. But in Jesus we have eternal life. Notice that Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life," not "I was" or "I will be." If we accept Jesus in our hearts as the resurrection and the life, we don't have to worry about when we die. We can live each day with the hope of eternal life with Jesus in heaven. He who believes in Jesus will live, even though he dies. Do you believe this?

What was Martha's response to Jesus' wonderful promise? She knew about the resurrection (24), and she knew that Jesus was the Christ (27). But her faith was no more than head knowledge. So, her life problems remained unsolved. Martha loved Jesus, but she did not really believe in his words that he is the resurrection and the life. Her head knowledge did not give her spiritual strength to overcome her despair. She only complained bitterly to Jesus for not coming in time to save her brother.

What about Mary? When Mary met Jesus, she fell at his feet and said the exactly same thing Martha had said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (32). Mary studied the Bible diligently, but she did not believe the words in her heart. She was overwhelmed by the power of death. Now we can see why Jesus delayed his trip on purpose. He really wanted to help the sisters to believe in him as the resurrection and the life. Human beings are helpless before the power of death. But we can have victory in Jesus who is the resurrection and the life. Jesus is the only person who has won the victory over death. And we can have the final victory in Jesus! And we can live each day to serve the Lord and to glorify God because of this hope. Let's read verses 25-26 again. *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?"*

III. "YOU WOULD SEE THE GLORY OF GOD" (33-44)

Look at verse 33. *"When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled."* When Jesus saw Martha and Mary weeping, he was troubled. Why? It's natural for us to cry when we lose our loved one. Jesus was troubled not because the sisters were sad, but because they would not hear what he was telling them. The sisters were weeping instead of listening to his words. The Jews were crying for the sisters. The unbelieving atmosphere was overwhelming. Jesus' heart was troubled. Clearly, he shared the sisters' anguish for the loss of their brother. But Jesus had a deeper reason for his trouble. He was troubled in spirit because all of them were suffering under the power of death.

In this situation, some of the Jews stirred them up not to believe in Jesus by saying, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Verse 35 says, "Jesus wept." This is the shortest verse in the Bible. But it has a

deep spiritual meaning. Jesus weeps when we harden our hearts and remain unbelieving. Jesus weeps when we become helpless before the power of death, instead of believing in him who is the resurrection and the life.

Look at verse 39. When Jesus came to the entrance of the cave tomb, he said, "Take away the stone." Martha tried to stop him, saying, "But, Lord, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." She did not believe that anything could be done to her brother whose body was already badly decomposed. At the moment, Jesus rebuked Martha for her unbelief. He said to her, "*Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?*" (40) In this verse we learn that we must remove the stone of unbelief from our hearts in order to see the glory of God.

At Jesus' rebuke, they took away the stone at the mouth of the tomb. Then Jesus began to pray. Look at verse 41b. *Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me."* Jesus believed that God would raise Lazarus from the dead. We want to please God through our success in serving the Lord. But we often fail because we want to raise dead Lazarus with our own zeal. Jesus prayed before raising Lazarus from the tomb. He prayed that God would perform a miracle, not done by the human Jesus. Through this we learn that we cannot do anything, but we can do everything when we have faith in God through prayer.

Look at verse 42. "*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.*" The purpose of Jesus' raising Lazarus was not just to give Lazarus a second life in this world: It was to plant faith in the hearts of the people. Jesus said, "... for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he was finished with the prayer, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" (43) What happened? The dead man staggered out of the tomb, strips of linen still wrapped around his hands and feet (44). This way Jesus planted faith in them that he is the resurrection and the life.

We human beings have a dilemma: no matter how much we accomplish in this world, death swallows up everything in the end. If our hope is only in this world, we might as well live up the life to enjoy the maximum pleasures. But we learned today that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Jesus will live, even though he dies physically. Death is not the end. Instead, it is just a beginning of our eternal life in heaven. Let us answer personally to Jesus' question, as he says to us: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.... Do you believe this?"