

**Find Life in the Son:
Believe in the Life-Giving Son
John 11:1-27**

Introduction

We come this morning to one of the most loved passages in John, recording the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead. The incident occurred sometime between the Feast of Dedication in winter and the Feast of Passover in the spring during Jesus' last year on earth. The miracle increases the opposition to Jesus yet further and foreshadows His own death and resurrection. It well illustrates why John wrote his Gospel:

John 20:30-31

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so 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 Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer 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, the Jews were just now seeking 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 anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹ After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." ¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." ¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." 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."

1. Illness to the Glory of God (1-4)
2. Delay, Death, and Danger to the Furtherance of Faith (5-16)
3. Faith in the Certain Promise of Resurrection (17-27)

1. Illness to the Glory of God (1-4)

¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

Lazarus, Mary, her sister Martha—real people who are close friends of Jesus. John wants us to know that this is the Mary who anointed Jesus' feet with pure nard and wiped them with her hair (John 12:3). When the sisters send to Jesus to let Him know their brother is ill, they identify Lazarus as "he whom you love."

We all know illness is common, but when it strikes those we love we feel it more deeply.

So Jesus' response is not shallow religious talk. He loves Lazarus and his sisters and cares about them. The illness is serious, and Lazarus will in fact die, but death will not be the final outcome. God's glory will be.

We are at once reminded of the man born blind, whose blindness was not because of his own sin or his parents' sin but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

So what does Jesus mean when He says this illness "is for the glory of God"? Jesus explains further, "so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." When the Son of God is glorified, God is glorified. Glory is shining splendor, stunning majesty. When we glorify God we don't make Him more glorious. Rather we recognize and acknowledge how radiantly splendid He actually is. *Jesus revealed His glory as God the Son when He*

healed people from their illnesses. But to raise a person from the dead is greater yet. The illness of Lazarus and his subsequent rescue from death was going to serve to reveal what a glorious Savior Jesus Christ God's Son actually is. This miracle would result in many putting their faith in Jesus as their Savior (John 11:45). So the impact of this miracle literally stretches into eternity.

When everything is rocking along without trouble, setbacks, illness, and death, we often find ourselves unaware of God's goodness and greatness. We are used to being healthy. We are used to being alive. We have no need for miraculous interventions. We assume we are self-sufficient—even though everything that keeps us alive at all, including the very air we breathe, is created by God as a free gift to us.

The fact is that all of us, however healthy we may have been for years, are going to face illness and we're going to meet death. We know it's happened to every generation before us, but it's hard to imagine experiencing it ourselves.

So when someone very close to us is terminally ill, when that someone dies, it hits us hard. And when our turn comes, well, it's suddenly a different story. All our confident positive attitude of the past will do us no

good. Pat religious sayings won't do. We need the clear display of God's loving power exercised on our behalf. We need a God who will break the stranglehold of death on us when we can do nothing for ourselves. Can He and will He do it? That's what this event in Jesus' ministry is all about.

Applications

- What struggles and calamities could cause you to doubt God's love for you?
- In what ways could your suffering turn out to bring glory to God as your Savior-King?

2. Delay, Death, and Danger to the Furtherance of Faith (5-16)

⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer 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, the Jews were just now seeking 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 anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹ After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." ¹² The disciples said to him,

“Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.”
¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” ¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

This paragraph starts by reiterating Christ’s love for Mary and Martha. And verse 15 underscores that everything that happening to Lazarus was going to be for the good of Jesus’ disciples. It was going to build their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Sickness and death are not good things, but God can and does turn such calamities for good. Jesus could have healed Lazarus. But what is a healing compared to a resurrection? That would have far more benefit to His followers. “For your sake I am glad that I was not there.”

If we do not transfer the weight of our trust to Jesus, we cannot be freed from sin and death, we cannot enter the eternal kingdom. *Unbelief will damn us. Only those who believe in Jesus will be saved. So whatever dispels our unbelief is of great benefit to us. And Jesus finds joy in bringing us the greatest treasure of all—eternal salvation.*

So it is love that drives Jesus to do what He does. It is love that motivates His delay. That's very clear from verse 6. He loved Mary and Martha, so when He heard He stayed two days more. He is not a slave of time—He is Lord of it. We often struggle with God's timing. We would do better just to trust Him with it.

It was love that let Lazarus experience death so that when Jesus raised him from the dead four days later, his disciples would believe in Him.

It is love for them and for the disciples that leads Jesus to cross back over the Jordan and return to Jerusalem, currently the most dangerous place on the planet for Him and His disciples. Last time He was there was in December at the Feast of Dedication. You remember what happened then? They took up stones to stone Him. For over a year the Jewish leaders had been trying to find a way to kill Him. To go to Bethany, then, just two miles away from Jerusalem, seemed suicidal. That's why Thomas says what he says: "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

Jesus talks about the opportunity to work in the daytime before the night comes. He has work to do, a mission to complete. His enemies cannot lay hold on Him until it is God's time for Him to die. So danger cannot

thwart His saving mission of love. It is clear as noonday to Him. In fact, when the time comes, the danger will be part of God's accomplishing His death for our sins. And after that comes His resurrection so even death does not stop Him.

Delay, death itself, and danger—our passage today reveals that all these Jesus uses to show not just His power but also His love for His people. His followers don't get a pass from the crises of life. Jesus shows His love not just by guarding us from such trials, but more significantly by guiding us through them.

Applications

- What delays or dangers has God brought into your life?
- Since it is for your good that you learn to trust Him no matter what, how could these delays and dangers, along with death itself, cause you to lean more completely on Him?

3. Faith in the Certain Promise of Resurrection (17-27)

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."

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Where were You? We needed You. You could have intervened, and You did not. The unspoken question ripping at her heart is "Why? Why didn't You come sooner and heal my brother? You loved him. You love us. Why did you wait?"

If you believe in a God who is loving and good and who can do anything, you wrestle with this question too. Every time a loved one battles with terminal illness. Every time a deadly accident occurs that could have been avoided by a slight shift of circumstances. Every time a spouse and children are left bereaved.

Here is the answer Jesus gives Martha in her deep grief. "Your brother shall rise again."

She knows this and believes it. The resurrection on the last day is a long-

established promise the people of God have believed from days of the patriarchs. Abraham believed God could raise Isaac from the dead. Job believed he would one day see his Redeemer from the vantage point of his restored human body. David writes about the resurrection (Psalm 16), as does Isaiah (Isaiah 26:19), and Daniel (12:1-3). And since it was the lying serpent that convinced Adam and Eve to sin against God and bring death on the human race, and since God promised that the offspring of Eve would crush the serpent's head, Adam and Eve must have believed it too. They knew what life was like before God's death sentence fell on the human race, and they had faith death would one day be removed through the promised Offspring of the woman. That's why Adam named his wife Eve—living.

Martha holds firmly to this confidence. The resurrection is coming. Death will not win forever.

Jesus has personal power to give life to the dead. He has already made this claim publicly.

John 5:21, 25, 28-29

21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.

25 "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will

hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

28 Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice **29** and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Jesus is the reason death will be defeated. He is the woman's offspring. He will be the One to conquer death forever. He has already demonstrated His power to do so by raising the dead in His earthly ministry. In the case of Lazarus He will declare His power over death and then prove it once again.

No wonder John's prologue declares in John 1:4

In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

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."

Who will live even if he dies? Whoever believes in me

Who will never die? Everyone who lives and believes in me

Jesus has been promising eternal life to those who believe in Him. They will never perish (John 10:27-28—my sheep). Those that keep His words will never see death (John 8:51). 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 (John 6:40).

So He says to Martha, as He could say to each of us, Do you believe this?
Her answer: Yes, Lord; I believe!

Why does she believe this? Because of what she has come to understand about who Jesus really is:

John 11:27

She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

You, Jesus, are the promised Messiah. You are the Anointed One who will save His people and rule an everlasting kingdom. *There could be no everlasting kingdom unless the King lives forever and His saints live forever. This King has to be stronger than death.* And all who are going to escape death must rely on Him to rescue them.

He is the Son of God, just as Psalm 2 identifies the Messiah to be.

God has been promising for centuries that this Savior would be coming into the world. And here He is standing before Martha, about to call Lazarus back from the dead.

Applications

- Since God has for centuries promised resurrection for those trusting Him, and Jesus has proved He can and does raise the dead, what would it mean if there is no resurrection from the dead?
- How should certainty regarding your own resurrection and that of your believing loved ones shape how you look at this life with all its challenges?
- What evidence do you show that you believe in Jesus as the One who is the resurrection and the life?

Conclusion

Several key verses summarize what happens in this passage:

⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

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The Son of God is glorified when human beings believe in Him as the One who raises the dead. They thus honor Him as He deserves to be honored. Are you among them? Will you too experience eternal life as His gift to you? Only if you believe in the life-giving Son.

Communion

Closing Song: Christ, Our Hope in Life and Death

Applications Summary

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- In what ways could your suffering turn out to bring glory to God as your Savior-King?
- What delays or dangers has God brought into your life?
- Since it is for your good that you learn to trust Him no matter what, how could these delays and dangers, along with

death itself, cause you to lean more completely on Him?

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