

I Am The Resurrection - III

John 11:1-27

BI: Everyone who lives and believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, will never die. Do you believe this?

Introduction:

Last week we raised the question of how it could be claimed that Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters when, in fact, He failed to do anything that would relieve their suffering. Jesus answers that question in verse 4 when He says, “this sickness is not to end in death but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.” In other words, sometimes *love* requires that God allows us to suffer so that we might apprehend the glory of God more clearly and glorify His Son more fully because of it

Today, however, we are going to see that we are not the only ones who have wrestled with the apparent contradiction between Jesus’ love for Lazarus and His failure to come to his aid when he learned he was sick. First, we’ll see Jesus’ response to the news. Then, we will observe Jesus’ response to Martha. Third, we’ll see His response to Mary, and finally, His response to the Crowds. Let’s just work our way through the text from the beginning so we can catch these first two points in context.

I. Jesus Responds to the News that Lazarus is sick:

1. Read 1-6

2. I want to submit to you that one of the reasons this passage is so dearly loved and appreciated by Christians around the world is simply because of that the fact that its such a great story! We all love a great story. That’s why Hollywood’s movie making industry is so outrageously profitable. People will pay a lot of money to see, hear, or read a good story. That’s usually not the case with documentaries. Given the choice between laying down \$8 for either a good story or a well produced documentary, the story will win 9 out of 10 times. Why? Well, there is a difference between a documentary and a story. A documentary is simply the presentation of certain facts or a particular point of view. A story, however, is much more dynamic. And what makes it so dynamic is that every story has a problem that begs to be resolved and a plot that attempts to bring that problem to a satisfying resolution. And that is exactly what we see here in the story the apostle tells in John chapter 11. In this story the problem is that Jesus’ friend, Lazarus (whom He loves), has taken ill and is going to die if someone doesn’t come to rescue him in time.

3. Now, this would have been a great story if Jesus simply did what we would expect. If he arrived at Lazarus’s bedside at the moment of his last breath and rescued him from the immanent death, that would have been a amazing story! But that’s not what Jesus does. Instead of running to Lazarus’ aid, He does nothing for two days.

4. Now, let's notice where Jesus was when he got the news. We learn in the paragraph before (10:40) that Jesus "went again beyond the Jordan to the place where John [the Baptist] was first baptizing. Now, where here was that, exactly? Well, we need to turn back to chapter 1 to bring it into clearer focus. So let's look at 1:28. Here we read "These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing."

5. The question is, where is "Bethany beyond the Jordan"? Well, we know Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived in a village called Bethany, but that Bethany was a couple miles S/W of Jerusalem. This Bethany, however, is beyond (east of) the Jordan (not s/w). And it's not just East, it is *way* North, and East of the Jordan. In fact, many scholars believe he was in a region called Batanea, N/E of the Sea of Galilee. In the O.T. it was called Bashan. But the important thing to note here is that if our geography is correct, Jesus was nearly 100 miles away from where Lazarus was sick.

6. Since we know he stayed where he was for two more days, it was probably 6 days (nearly a full week) before he actually arrived in Bethany. By then, Lazarus had been four days in the tomb.

7. I have no intention of repeating everything I said in the last two messages, but let me summarize it all on one sentence. Sometimes God is glorified more by our sickness and death than He is by our healing. Therefore, as followers of Christ, we would do well to learn how to please the Lord in our suffering as well as our comfort; and do it for the glory of God and our own deep, rich joy. Now let's see what happens next.

8. Read 7-16

9. Let's remember the context here. In chapter 10 (39) the Jews were so enraged by what He said to them (claiming deity) that they formed a lynch mob and tried to kill him. Now he is talking about going back to that same area. That's why Thomas says (11:16) "*Let us also go that we may die with him.*" We don't know if that was a statement of uncommon devotion or a bit of sarcasm, but one thing is certain; the disciples knew the danger that would be waiting for them if they went anywhere near Jerusalem. It was a very real threat of bodily injury and probably death, but Jesus didn't that hinder him.

10. Notice v. 9 Jesus asks, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" "Hours." People in Jesus' day had no thought about something called minutes. They divided daylight up into twelve segments (hours) and that's how they thought of time. If you read the commentaries on this text you'll discover that it is difficult to interpret, I think, at the very least, Jesus is speaking of the sense of urgency He has to complete the assignment God had given Him. It's as if he is saying, there is only a short period of time. During that time Jesus believes He is absolutely protected by God the Father so that He will reach the goal of His ministry on earth; namely, to pay the price for the sins of all who would believe by dying in our place on a bloody Roman cross. Those who reject Him will walk in darkness because they reject the God's Light, their Savior, the Christ who came to reconcile them to God.

11. It's good for us to see this kind of faith Jesus had in God's sovereign rule over His life, because he rules our lives in the same way. Spurgeon weighs in on this passage by writing, "

Christ felt that His day was not over and that He could not die before His work was done and, therefore, He did not fear the stones cast by unbelieving foes! So, my Brother, at all risks go on with your God-given work! You will live through your 12 hours and you will not live a moment longer! Be so much a believer in predestination that even if duty calls you to risk your life, you will bravely do it knowing that you are in the hands of God and that your life cannot end until your appointed 12 hours have expired!¹

12. If Jesus is our example in all things, this part of the story begs the question, “What am I doing with the “12 hours” He has entrusted to me? What fears are holding me back from the joys of Christ-loving, risk-taking obedience to the will of God for me today? What adventure will I miss? What opportunity will pass me by? What spiritual investment will never bear fruit because I chose safety over action when a opportunity to be God’s instrument was laid at my feet?”

13. I’m 50 years old now, and these questions are beginning to resonate in my soul more than ever before. Jesus was only 33 when He died. David Brainerd was 28. Jim Elliot was only 29 (I think). I am almost twice their age already, and what do I have to present to the Lord on that final day when the accounts are settled and I have opportunity to pour out the fruit of my life at His feet? What are we doing with the “12 hours” He has entrusted to us? That’s a good question. Jesus was determined to do the will of God even when called to return to the place where men were waiting to kill Him.

14. Now, back to the story. In case there is any ambiguity about whether or not Lazarus is dead or alive at this point, Jesus makes it explicitly clear at the end of verse 14, “Lazarus is dead.” And then Jesus reveals once again that God has a purpose in this death (Read 14-15).

13. In verse 4 He said that the sickness was not to end in death, “*but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.*” How would the Son of God be glorified in Lazarus’s death? He will be glorified when His disciples “believe.” I think what Jesus means here is that the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead is going to do more to strengthen the disciple’s faith in Him than healing could have done. This last of the 7 signs would do more to embolden them to put their lives on the line for the gospel than any other miracle short of His own resurrection.

14. As a side note, I really enjoy John’s writing style. Notice how he strategically places Thomas’s comments immediately after Jesus’ explanation. Jesus says “I’m glad I wasn’t there when Lazarus died so that *you may believe.*” Then, Thomas make His sarcastic crack and you’re left saying, “Yea, that has hasn’t happened yet.”

15. In verse 17 Jesus finally arrives in Bethany, and this is where the plot really begins to take shape. First, Jesus responded to the news of Lazarus’s sickness. Now...

II. Jesus Responds to Martha Grief: (17-29)

1. Read 17-19

¹ Charles Spurgeon, *Spurgeon Gems and Other Treasures of God’s Truth*, (Sermon # 3236 *The Gospel Cordial* – exposition at the end of sermon), <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols55-57/chs3236.pdf> (accessed on 12/04/2014).

2. It will pay us to remember here that when John says, “many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them” there is a hidden reference to the fact that there were probably many professional mourners wailing, others playing flutes randomly, and weeping out loud. First century Jewish funerals were quite an event that featured a cacophony of loud, chaotic noises.

3. Now this is where we hear Martha voice her grief and disappointment. Read 20-21

4. Do you sense the pain and grief of her loss? I take Martha’s words are a restatement of the question we have been asking for the past two weeks; namely, “Jesus, you say you love us but why didn’t you come? Why didn’t you come when we sent word that our brother was ill?” Martha’s words are carefully calculated, but I wonder if her suffering had provoked her to doubt Jesus’ love.

5. It seems she makes an effort to correct herself in the next verse (Read 22). Nevertheless, her concern is now laying at Jesus’ feet.

6. Notice how Jesus responds (Read 23). Of course we understand that Jesus means to actually raise Lazarus from the dead that very day, but Mary doesn’t know that. She thinks He is offering a theological excuse for not coming sooner (Read 24).

7. Martha’s belief in end-time resurrection was consistent with OT teaching. Job believed it (Job 19:25-27), the psalmist believed it (Ps. 16:10), and the prophet Daniel believed and taught it (Dan. 12:2). In addition, this is what the Pharisees taught in the Synagogue, so Martha would have known about the promised day of resurrection. More than that, Jesus Himself taught of the coming resurrection which He repeatedly said would occur “in the last day” (Jn. 6:39; 6:40; 6:44; 6:54). But right here, as He stood before His broken and grieving friend He wasn’t offering an ill-timed lesson in theology! No, Jesus was going to teach her something that was of infinitely greater importance!

8. To feel the full weight of this, let’s read Martha’s words followed by Jesus’ awesome 4-word response (24): “*Martha said, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus responds ‘I Am the Resurrection!’*”

9. Let those words ring loud and strong in your soul! “I am the resurrection!” Jesus is doing something very profound here. He is moving her thinking from a doctrine to a Person. He is moving her from an abstract belief in resurrection on the last day to personal trust in the One who is able to offer resurrection right here and right now.

10. You see, Jesus the point of Jesus’ ministry was not simply to offer correct theology. He came to offer a Person, the One who has the power to meet every need, no matter how big, in the present and for eternity. When you are sick, you don’t want a medical book. You want a doctor. When you are being sued, you don’t want a law book, you want a lawyer. And when you are facing the terrors of death, you don’t want a doctrine, you want a Savior. Jesus is the doctrine of the resurrection made personal, alive in human flesh. Therefore He says, “I am the resurrection.”

11. But notice, as earth-shattering as this statement is, Jesus isn’t done. He says, “I am the resurrection *and the life.*” In other words, “I am the One who raises the dead, and I am the One who gives and sustains life.” If anything is alive in the world it is because of Me.

If anyone takes another breath on earth today it is because of Me. And if anyone receives eternal life, it will come through Me.

12. But there's more (25): "He who believes in me will live even if He dies [that's resurrection]; and (26) everyone who lives and believes in me will NEVER die." Beloved, this is nothing less than a promise of salvation. And He will raise Lazarus from the dead to prove His offer is real and true.

13. Nevertheless, even before He performs this earth-shattering miracle, He asks Martha the very question that God is asking you today. Let's read His awesome pronouncement again, followed by the question (25-26): "I AM the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even if He dies; and everyone who lives and believes in me will NEVER die." Now here's the question, "Do you believe this?"

14. Friend, there is no more important question that will ever be asked of you. Do you believe? That is, do you believe, NOT that there is such a *thing* as resurrection, but that Jesus is YOUR resurrection? Do you believe that you live today because He is alive? And do you believe that your only hope of living eternally is that fact that He died for you rose again from the dead, and is now alive in heaven at the right hand of God the Father? This is the ultimate question.

15. You might be wondering, how do I answer this question? Let me suggest some appropriate answers.

- You believe in Jesus as "the resurrection and the life" if you have confessed to God that you are an undeserving sinner facing the certain prospect of eternal punishment in hell unless He, simply out of His love, mercy, and grace, rescues you from the just penalty of your sin. Believing in Jesus means running to Him as your only hope of eternal life. If you have never placed your faith in Jesus in this way, I plead with you to do so today.
- Second, if you are already a child of God let me challenge you with this thought. If you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, why do you still live in fear that obeying Him will not be better than keeping yourself safe. Do you know what made the apostle Paul such a powerful influence upon this world? It was his belief in resurrection. Here is what He said:
 - If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:19).
 - Why are we also in danger every hour? I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE (1 Cor. 15:30-32).
 - Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

- What are you doing with the “12 hours” God has entrusted to you. Believing that Jesus really is the resurrection and the life will help you overcome the fear that keeps you from taking the risks that you know will probably glorify the One who *is* the resurrection.

16. Do you believe? Notice how Martha answered (27): “Yes Lord; I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.” What about you? Do you believe?

BI: Everyone who lives and believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, will never die. Do you believe this?