

I Am the Resurrection and the Life

John 11:1-44

By show of hands, how many of us have lost an immediate family member— a spouse, your mother or father, brother or sister, or your own child? Alright, keep your hands up, but we'll expand the circle. How many of us have lost a close family member— a grandparent, an aunt or uncle, a niece or nephew, or a favorite cousin? Hand's still raised. Let's expand it one more level. How many of you have lost a dear friend or a close coworker, someone you saw almost every day and did stuff with them all the time?

Look at that. Death touches us all. There is nothing more certain, more universal than death, and yet we do everything we can to avoid and ignore it. We even avoid using the word. We have a whole host of euphemisms for death. She's passed on. He's gone to a better place. They went to be with the Lord. We'll say anything that sound less blunt and brutal as "dead." We will spend huge amounts of money to deny, disguise and delay it.

Last year Americans spent 16 Billion dollars on cosmetic plastic surgeries, the most ever, in large part to deny the fact that death is constantly creeping ever closer.ⁱ The average American woman will spend \$300,000 over the course of her lifetime to disguise the effects of aging with cosmetics. It averages out to \$8 per day just on your face.ⁱⁱ We drop serious coin on gym memberships, yoga classes and exercise equipment. We spend \$30 billion a year just on workout apparel. We spend \$60 billion on fad diets and weight loss gimmicks.ⁱⁱⁱ And we have all the miracles of modern medicine to delay death as much as possible.

But still, it's coming. For some of us the journey into the valley of the shadow of death is slow and gradual. For others, it is sudden and steep. What gives us hope in the face of death? Some say religion is just a crutch to help weak people through life. I'm more than happy to admit I need a crutch, but does Jesus offer us anything sure and solid in the face of the unavoidable reality of death? What difference does following Jesus make when the doctor gives the worst prognosis? When the drunk driver crosses the center line just as you look down to change the radio station? When the heart rate monitor beeps its last few plaintive tones in the hospital room? What difference does Jesus make then.

As we continue our exploration of Jesus' "I Am" statements, we find ourselves in John 11. We find ourselves in the middle of a hopeless situation. We find ourselves in the middle of a terminal illness, in the middle of a life ended way to soon, in the middle of a funeral, and in middle of two grieving sisters asking the very same questions we ask at times like this. Why? Why did this happen? Why didn't you do something? Where? Where were you when we needed you? What? What am I supposed to do now?

Into the face of death Jesus speaks the greatest words of hope, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”* Jesus even illustrated this truth in a dramatic way. It showed us that we have hope because of his wisdom, his love, and his power. The wisdom, love, and power of Jesus gives us a firm anchor hold in the future, because of the eternal life he guarantees for us.

BODY

John 11 is one of my favorite stories of Jesus. The best way to appreciate this passage is to just let it develop as John tells it. So come with me and let’s walk through these verses and explore the beauty of God’s hope.

Verses 1 – 3 break the chain of events in chapter 10 and give us a new setting, forming the backdrop for this the most majestic of stories. (Read 1-3)

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were two sisters and a brother who lived in Bethany, a suburb of Jerusalem. These three were some of the closest friends Jesus had in his earthly ministry. These were faithful friends. They were true even when Jesus’ more fickle followers deserted him. We learn from other gospel accounts that Jesus had no place to lay his head, but when he came to Jerusalem he often stayed in Bethany. You see here in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, Jesus had a home.

In verse 3, the bad news arrives from Bethany that he dear friend is deathly ill. This is the phone call you never want to receive, the shocking text message, the heartbreaking Facebook post. There’s been an accident. There were complications in the surgery. Something happened. There are a couple of important things to note about this message.

The scene is now set. Death is at the door, and hope is growing dim. How does Jesus respond, and how does he give hope? We see Jesus respond first of all with wisdom, then with love, and then with power to give hope in a otherwise hopeless situation.

I. Jesus Gives Hope Through His Wisdom. (Read 4-19)

Jesus did not need to hear the message to know that Lazarus was ill. We see here that Jesus already had a plan and a purpose for this illness. He said, *“This sickness will not end in death.”* Jesus wasn’t lying. Notice he didn’t say, “Lazarus will not die.” He merely said it wouldn’t end in death. Key difference. What may feel like the end to us, isn’t the end to him. Our end is never God’s end. Our end is often only the beginning for Jesus. In fact, it’s often only when we are at our end when Jesus shows up and God’s glory can be seen.

Jesus, in his perfect wisdom, has a purpose and a plan for your life to bring about his glory. In his wisdom, Jesus already knows every hopeless situation you’re dealing with. He knows every problem you

will ever face. Know this this. He already has a plan. He already has a purpose. So, when you reach your end, that's when you reach for Him.

But we don't always understand his wisdom, because we don't know the end of the story. If you read verse 5 without knowing what happens in verse 43, you want to scratch your head. You want to protest. If Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus so much and he already knew that Lazarus was so sick why did he stay 2 more days? Why wait.

He wasn't heartless. He wasn't selfish. He wasn't cruel. It was a part of his purpose and plan. Everyone knew his power to save a life, to heal sickness, to postpone death. But what about death itself? Could Jesus give life where there was none? Could he turn death into life? The ultimate battle with death would be fought on the cross and in a grave in a few short weeks, but Jesus needed to set the stage. He needed to show people what he was doing and why. And he needed to show them what to expect. And Lazarus would allow him to do that. Two more days would show his power even more, and it would also show that he was God, for only God can create and give life.

But while he waited two more days, Mary and Martha went through hell. No doubt, wondering why Jesus hadn't come. We need to remember that God in his wisdom has a plan and purpose when we reach our end, but we don't always get to see what he is doing backstage. All we can see is a black curtain drawn across our lives. That is all Mary and Martha could see, the expansive black curtain of Lazarus' death. They couldn't see the wisdom of Christ working backstage, but it was there working nevertheless.

We too experience God's delays, don't we? Don't you ever wonder why God lets you suffer through certain things? Why the delay? Why hold back the blessing? Why doesn't he do something now? Remember God never delays because he does not love you. It is his wisdom working backstage. When we experience divine delays we can be assured of two things:

1. It is to increase our faith (vs. 15) "I'm glad I was not there so that you may believe."
2. It is to the glory of God (vs. 4) "it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified."

This will be Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem. He knows what will happen there. We learn at the end of this chapter that it is this event with Lazarus that writes his death sentence with the Jewish leaders. That is why raising Lazarus is so important. It is the most clear foreshadowing yet of what Christ was about to do. Jesus goes intentionally and deliberately. In his wisdom he knew the time was right.

Gal. 4:4 says the time had fully come. It was pregnant with opportunity. However, the disciples weren't so clear on Jesus' mission. They don't understand that Lazarus is dead. They don't understand why Jesus wants to go back to Jerusalem. They're afraid they may die. This made Lazarus important for

another reason: Jesus had to make it clear to his disciples, so they would understand. Jesus goes knowing that he will die. The disciples go afraid they may die. This is why they had to stop by the tomb of Lazarus on the way.

Jesus wasn't going to raise Lazarus just because he loved Lazarus, or Mary and Martha, but he wanted to teach the disciples, and through this story, all of us that he gives life, even in the face of death.

When Jesus finally arrives in Bethany in verse 17 the funeral is already going on. A little knowledge of Jewish culture will be most helpful here. Jewish funerals lasted 7 days followed by 30 days of mourning. All friends of the family were to mourn. They would sit with the family and wail out loud and verbally express their grief. There were even professional mourners. Jesus arrives on the 4th day, and this is part of the reason he waited two days. Day 4 is significant in 3 ways:

1. The Jews believed that the spirit of a dead person stayed with the body for three days after which death was irreversible. By waiting Jesus showed the full extent of his power over the grave. He didn't just revive, resuscitate, or heal Lazarus. He brought him back from beyond the grave.
2. For this reason, the 4th day of mourning was always the most intense. What better day to give life than when the mourning was the greatest!
3. Medically, the corpse would have started decomposing by the 4th day. Decay had set in and the deterioration process was well under way. This would show that Jesus not only had power to save life, but to create it as well.

Here we begin to see the full wisdom of Jesus' plan and purpose come together. The next thing we see is Jesus' love.

II. **Jesus Gives Hope Through His Love** (Read vs. 20-37)

Like most sisters Mary and Martha had their differences. We know from other passages that Martha is the active, practical sister, and that Mary is the quiet, contemplative one. They are true to form here. Martha, like we often do, expresses disappointment and faith at the same time. We don't understand, but we want to believe. You almost hear a tinge of rebuke in her voice when she says, "*If you were only here.*", but then she catches herself, "*But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.*" So, often we too are contradiction of faith and fear, of hope and despair.

Notice Jesus' response in verse 23. He doesn't rebuke her for questioning. He responds with love and compassion. He comforts her. Jesus doesn't return our doubts or questions with scolding. If we go

to him in faith, even if it's mixed with fear and disappointment and doubt, he responds in love. He tells her, "Your brother will rise again."

But her doubt and depression are still fighting back the faith and hope. "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Mary fails to understand Jesus' full and immediate power. We often fail in the same way. We are not convinced that he can change our present situation, only in some distant eternity, but Jesus still responds in love.

Jesus doesn't correct her. He doesn't deny the resurrection on the last day, rather he applies it directly to himself. "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" He wants her to understand that the promise of resurrection is a present reality. We shouldn't displace the promises of scripture to some obscure innocuous future, removing them from the present. I will have hope then, but what about now.

You can peel back Jesus I Am statement here like the layers of an onion. He is talking about three different things, each deeper than the one before.

1. The raising of Lazarus.
2. He's also foreshadowing his own resurrection.
3. Finally, he's prophetically pointing to the resurrection of all believers.

Notice the faith response of Martha in verse 27. She believes Jesus and believes in Jesus, and she is willing to place her life on it. I also want you to see that Martha express her faith even when all of her questions haven't been answered. She still has questions. She still doesn't fully understand, but she still believes. How can she do that? It is the Love of Jesus that makes this happen. Her faith here isn't a response to his answers, to having all the information, to having all the knowledge. She is responding to his love. Remember what John wrote in the little letter in the back of your Bible (4:18), "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.*" Even here in the face of death we see the perfect love of Jesus drying Martha's tears and soothing her heart.

In verses 28-32 Mary's initial response is the same as her sister, "*If you had only been here.*" How many times had they said those words to each other the previous four days, "If Jesus had only been here..." Unlike Martha, however, she didn't follow that statement with a statement of faith. Instead we see her faith by what she does. She throws herself at Jesus' feet. This Mary has three spotlight moments in the gospels, and every time she is at the feet of Jesus. One time she is anointing his feet with oil, another time she sits at his feet listening to his teaching, and now she anoints his feet with her tears. What an touching moment between our Savior and Mary.

AS intimate as this moment is, they are surrounded by family and friends. They see her tears and they're all moved to tears as well. Do you know who else was moved to tears? Jesus. John 11:35. The

shortest verse in the Bible. “Jesus wept.” And yet I believe it is one of the biggest verses in the Bible. It’s big because these two little words show us just how big, how expansive the heart of our Savior is. This is a very powerful scene. It is a picture of God crying. He loves Mary and is filled not just with sympathy, but he can empathize with her as well.

The text says he was “deeply moved in spirit.” The Greek words used there means to gasp and to shudder. It’s based on their word for a horse snorting. Every other use of it in scripture in means a deeply seated anger. What is Jesus angry at here? Certainly not Mary! He is angry at sin and death and what it does to us. He hates sin, and he hates death, and when he sees the mess it makes of our lives, it ticks him off. He is filled with compassion for us. He sheds tears for us.

“Jesus Wept” Although it is only two words it speaks volumes about the love of Christ. Think about it. Even though he knows he will raise Lazarus, even though he knows there is a good ending, he is still moved to tears, because of his love and sympathy. Again there are layers here. Jesus weeps for:

1. Mary
2. Lazarus
3. All of humanity

The Gospel of John was originally written to a Greek audience. The Greeks in their philosophy didn't believed god showed emotion. They had a very Stoic view of God. God would never cry, but we see God here doing just that. What is more amazing, a God who raises the dead, or a God who cries? Know this- You follow a Savior who both cries with you and for you. In your life’s deepest, darkest moments, know that his tears mingle with your own. You never cry alone.

Everyone there mourning could see the love of Jesus, but I don’t think they understood full depth of love that was carried with those tears. Each tear was filled with more love than they could imagine. Not just love for Lazarus, or Mary, but love for them too, and Love for you and me.

III. Jesus Gives Hope Through His Power (Read 38-44)

In verses 38-46 we see the power of Jesus. Through the power of Jesus a Jewish family is given new hope, but not just that family, all of mankind is given hope through the power of Jesus.

Notice there is no hesitation or uncertainty in what Jesus says. He is very sure of himself, and he knew exactly what he was doing. He is a Savior of power, not weakness. Unlike many modern interpretations of him that paint Jesus as a confused, struggling, whimpish savior suffering from low self-confidence and being torn between desires. Jesus was no such man. Jesus Christ, however, is a Savior, and he is a Savior of power!

Standing before the tomb Martha's doubt once again gets the upper hand. She knows that after 4 days the body has already begun to decompose. "Lord, it's going to stink."

Jesus again reminds her and reassures her as he does with us so often that we can experience the power of God in our lives right now. This sets Christianity apart from other religions. They all promise future glory, but Christ gives us glory now.

To make his purpose very clear Jesus prays out loud, not that he needed to, for Jesus and the father are one. They have the same will, but Jesus wanted everyone to know that his power was the very power of God.

After the prayer, Jesus shouts in a loud voice! He Yelled! Hear the authority and power in his voice. "Lazarus, come out!" He has authority over death! He has the power to give life! Authority is only as strong as its ability to back its word. Jesus' word is backed with the power to command life and death.

Jesus doesn't leave a job undone. He finishes it completely. He not only removes death, but he gives life. He also instructs to have the grave clothes removed. Why should a living man walk around in grave clothes? But how many of us have been given spiritual life, but we still wear our grave clothes.

(45, 46) The power of what Jesus can do will not let people stay in the middle. Notice everyone here took sides. They either decided for Jesus or against him. The power of what he can do will not let you stay undecided. You must decide too. What decision will you make? Will you decide for Jesus, or against him? It's up to you.

CONCLUSION

Nothing has the ability to steal hope from man more than death. Death is man's greatest enemy. But Jesus has defeated that enemy. Death can't steal our hope on the other side of the grave, or on this side of the grave. Jesus gives us a hope that conquers death. Jesus gives us hope through his wisdom. Whenever death rears its ugly head in our lives, know that there is always a bigger plan at work. Jesus gives us hope through his love. We never hurt alone. Our Savior is right there with us, and he cries with us, because he hates what death does to us. Jesus gives us hope through his power, because Jesus has defeated death.

Chuck Colson tells the true story of Rusty Woomer in his book, *The Body*. Rusty's life was a hopeless one, a continuing downward spiral. It was beyond depression, it was utter despair. His life was nothing but drugs, alcohol, and crime. He served several prison terms for everything from rape, to grand theft auto, to assault and battery, to burglary. Finally, Rusty broke all the way and went on a killing spree. He was sentenced to the chair. It was on death row where Rusty met Bob McAlister. Bob was a Christian volunteer in prison. When Bob first saw Rusty he was in a catatonic trance on his cell floor

under the domination of demons. Mice and cockroaches were crawling on his skin and through his hair, his cell was in shambles, the floor was covered in litter and strewn with Playboy's and Penthouse magazines. Bob's time in the cell block was almost expired, but he introduced Rusty to Jesus right then and there, but Bob had to go before he could see any results.

The next week Bob rushed to Rusty's cell. It was clean, spotless from bottom to top. Not a trace of the magazines was left. Rusty had a haircut, clean clothes, a fresh shave, and most importantly a big smile. He said, "I figured Jesus would want me to clean things up."

Bob and Rusty became close friends, but Rusty's time was running out. His time finally came, but it didn't matter to Rusty, he had a new life waiting for him. The warden asked, "Are you doing all right?" Rusty answered assuredly, "Yep. Like I told you before, I have been taken care of, and I'm going to be all right. But what about you?" Rusty knew the wisdom, love, and power of Jesus. Rusty had hope!

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." It was good news for Rusty and it is good news for you and I! Do you believe it?

ⁱ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/04/12/americans-spending-more-than-ever-plastic-surgery/100365258/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.popsugar.com/beauty/What-Do-American-Women-Spend-Beauty-Products-2017-43373145>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.fooducate.com/app#!page=post&id=57034AEE-364E-1DE1-4E44-B7BACFB5F72B>