

## I Am the Resurrection and the Life

John 11:1-54

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Scr. Reading: John 11:1-54  
BELIEVE! The Gospel of John

Four and a half months ago, I received a phone call from a close HS friend informing me that our friend David had suddenly become gravely ill with an infection in his bloodstream. And that afternoon, within hours of the onset of his illness, David died. The next morning I received an email from his wife requesting that I perform his service, and 3 days later I found myself facing the surreal experience of preaching the funeral of one of my dearest friends, a man I had known for over 30 of his 46 years.

I did the only thing I know to do—went to the life of Jesus and searched for some word of comfort and wisdom for myself that I could share with others in this tragic circumstance. And I found it here in John 11, where Jesus attends the funeral of his own very good friend, Lazarus.

How many countless Christians over the centuries have found reassurance for their soul in this story? How many times have His words been read in cemeteries around our globe: “I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live”? How many mourners have found validation for their own tears in the tears of their Savior?

Yes, there is great comfort to be found here for broken hearts. There’s reassurance for our confusion in the face of death. There’s inspiration in the authority of Jesus, staring down Death, demanding he give up his prey, and overpowering him with the word of His mouth.

But none of that is the PRIMARY purpose of this story. Those are all legitimate and wonderful effects, but they are secondary. Jesus did not raise Lazarus from the dead so we would *feel* something—e.g., comfort, inspiration. He didn’t even do it so we would *know* something—e.g., He has power even over death. He did it so we would *see* something:

**v4** *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."*

**These events took place so you would see the glory of God.** So that you would grasp the worth and majesty of Jesus. So that you would fall on your face before the Son of God and cry out, “Glory!”

More than anything else, this is what you need: to apprehend the glory of God in Christ. Anything you could give—**ANYTHING you might lose—would be worth it for a better appreciation of God’s glory.**

That is the whole point of this story. In fact, it’s the goal Jesus had in mind as soon as He heard Lazarus was sick:

**v6** *So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*

Notice the first word: “So” = “Therefore” (NAS, KJV) (highly unfortunate that the NIV uses “Yet”). “As a direct result of this, when Jesus heard about Lazarus’ illness, He stayed two more days.” As a direct result of this. “This” what? What caused Him to remain 2 days instead of jumping immediately into action?

**v5** *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*

Jesus loved this family. They were deeply important to Him. He had a special affection for them beyond what was typical for the rest of His followers. This family was among the circle of Jesus’ dearest friends. So what did He do when they came calling with a dire need? He delayed. Notice again the logical sequence: “Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus. So, when He heard Lazarus was ill, He stayed where He was 2 days longer.” His love compelled the delay. **Their importance to Him made Him wait to meet their need.**

Why? Because His glory would shine forth more brightly in the delay than in an instant response. And that was worth it to Him, **not because He values His glory so highly** (although He does!), **but because He valued them so dearly**. He loved this family so much, He was willing to put Lazarus through death and these sisters through 4 days of mourning in order to give them the grandest display possible of His glory.

APP: Have you ever considered that God might be allowing this hurt in your life, this unanswered prayer, this delay to show you something of Himself you wouldn’t see otherwise? And that would be an expression of His love? Have you ever considered that God is willing to put you through extreme loss in order to show you extreme glory? That if He answered your prayer sooner, it might be a sign He loves you less? That it’s more than worth it if more pain for you makes Jesus look more amazing to you?

5 scenes of increasing glory: disciples, Martha, Mary, Lazarus, Sanhedrin

## Jesus and the Disciples (vv7-16)

The glory of Jesus' confidence in God

After the 2-day delay, Jesus announces His intention to return to Judea (v7). The disciples well remember the hostility of those crowds toward Jesus and are understandably concerned for His safety (v8) and their own (v16). Jesus answers their concern with a parable:

**vv9-10** *"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. <sup>10</sup> But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."*

He's making a comparison between daylight and safety, and it entails two points of similarity:

- Just like each day has a set number of hours, so your life has a set length as well
- Just like you won't stumble during the day, so no harm will come to you as long as you walk in the light of the world—i.e., trust and obey Jesus

In other words, ***your life will fulfill its appointed number of hours and nothing can hurt you as long as you remain in the light.*** Jesus isn't the slightest bit uneasy about going back to Judea, because He knows 1) God has an appointed number of days for His life and 2) no harm can come to Him until that number runs out.

In verses 14-15, Jesus shares His goal for them in this calamity:

**vv14-15** *Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, <sup>15</sup> and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe."*

Most of these men already do believe in Him (cf. 2:11). But Jesus wants to take their belief further, drive it deeper—which is exactly what a display of God's glory always does. There's nothing like a fresh encounter with God's faithfulness or power or compassion to put to rest our doubts and fears. In those moments, Jesus says to us: "For your sake, I am glad this happened so that you may believe."

## Jesus and Martha (vv17-27)

The glory of Jesus' presence

Verse 17 tells us Lazarus has been dead four days. In this era before modern medical technology, it wasn't always clear when or even if a

person had truly died. It wasn't unknown for someone formerly thought dead to surprise everyone and revive. Jewish tradition held that a deceased person's spirit hovered nearby for 3 days and could resuscitate the body during that time. But 4 days? The effects of death and decomposition were unmistakable by then.

As Jesus approaches the family home, word reaches the sisters that He is coming (v20). Martha, the woman of action, runs out to meet Him:

**vv21-24** *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."*

It's a sweet exchange, and tender. But it's not overly emotional. Respectful, not demanding. Matter-of-fact, not weepy. They are discussing ideas, trying to solve the problem.

Martha: "My brother died. I believe you could have prevented that. But either way, I still trust you."

Jesus: "Lazarus will rise again."

Martha: "I know he will, someday. I'm a good Jew. I believe in a future resurrection."

But she's missed the point. Jesus is not talking about sometime in the future. He's saying: "Lazarus will rise again. Right now. That's why I'm here. I'm going to fix this problem." Of course she doesn't understand all that from His statement. Who ever heard of someone being resurrected after 4 days in the tomb? Elijah and Elisha had brought dead bodies to life, but not like that. Even Jesus hadn't done that.

But Jesus doesn't just want her to know He's going to fix the problem. He wants to take her to a deeper understanding of who He is, not just want He can do:

**vv25-26** *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"*

Notice carefully what He says: NOT "I have power to perform resurrection" or "I can provide you with future resurrection." But "I AM the Resurrection and the Life." In other words, He's saying eternal life and rescue from death are not merely gifts He provides; they are aspects of what it means to be in His presence and live life with Him.

Jesus is saying: “What you want, what you need in this moment is embodied in me. Wherever I am, life is. If you have me, you have resurrection life right here and now. You don’t need to wait until the last day – I am here and I am the only life worth living.”

When Someone confronts you with a claim like that, there is only one question left for you to answer: “Do you believe this?”

Martha answers with a confession comparable to Peter’s great confession in Matthew 18:

**v27** *“Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”*

Jesus has drawn her into a much deeper level of faith by showing her the glory of His own person and offering His presence.

### **Jesus and Mary (vv28-37)**

The glory of Jesus’ empathy

Martha fetches Mary (28). Mary approaches Jesus with exactly the same words as Martha: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (32, cf. 21). But this time, the Lord’s response is quite different.:

**vv33-36** *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.<sup>34</sup> And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.*

No teaching. No words at all. Just tears. Mary’s weeping brought tears from Jesus’ own eyes and sent them streaming down His face. People noticed and commented on it:

**v36** *So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”*

His heart breaks. Your high priest is touched with the feeling of your infirmities. He weeps. Of course He does—anyone who loves deeply will hurt deeply too. It’s no different with Jesus.

But there’s another reaction from Jesus in these verses. Twice (vv33, 38), the Holy Spirit describes Jesus’ reaction with a word that doesn’t come across very well in English. “Deeply moved” is the way it’s

generally rendered (ESV, NIV, NASB). But actually, the idea is more specific than just deep feeling. It’s a word used in classical Greek of the snort of a horse in war or a race. With humans, it describes fury, outrage, and deep anger:

**v33 NLT** *...a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled.*

**v33 HCS** *...He was angry in His spirit and deeply moved.*

Why anger? He’s certainly not angry at Mary or Martha. He’s just wept with them and tenderly instructed. He’s outraged at death itself.

People today tend to react to death 1 of 2 ways:

- 1) denial, avoidance, don’t think about it;
- 2) embrace it, sentimentalize: “our friend, peaceful, beautiful, natural part of life.”

Jesus does neither one. He faces it squarely. He talks about it. He weeps over it. But then He rages over it. He gets angry. He knows it’s not a natural part of human life; it’s a curse. It’s a massive problem—THE massive problem of human existence. He’s enraged at the sheer wrongness of death.

Jesus stands there at this funeral and takes in this whole scene—the sorrow, the disappointment, the confusion, the broken dreams, unfulfilled hopes, terminated joys, stolen years. And He looks beyond this scene to all the tears and all the pain at all the funerals in human history. The voice silenced by the grave. The sleepless nights of the lonely spouse. The tearstained pillows of forsaken children. The empty longing of lifelong friends. He sees it all, and He hates it. Humanity was meant for better than this. This is curse. This is evil. This is wrong.

### **Jesus and Lazarus (vv38-44)**

The glory of Jesus’ authority

His anger drives Him to the cave (v38). You can almost see the fierce resolve in His eye. Martha and Lazarus are figures in this scene, but their roles are secondary, bit players in a showdown between the Son of Man and man’s eternal foe. This little gathering is about to see the glory of God like they have never seen it before:

**v40** *Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see*

*the glory of God?"*

I picture Death standing like a specter on the rock above Lazarus's tomb. Grim. Gloating. Utterly impervious to the tears and sorrow below him. He never gives up his vanquished souls. No human can command him. Until now.

Jesus prays (vv 41-42) and then cries out with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come out!" (v42) And by the sheer authority of his voice, Death yields, life returns, and the dead man walks out of the tomb. I've heard it said that Jesus had to address His command to Lazarus specifically or every grave within the sound of His voice would have split open and the dead walked out.

### **Jesus and the Sanhedrin (vv45-54)**

The glory of Jesus' self-sacrifice

Two comments here to note:

**vv47-8** *So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. <sup>48</sup> If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."*

What could keep you from faith in Jesus? Only thoughts of self. Self-preservation. Self-regard. Self-satisfaction.

With Martha, we see Jesus came to reassure us. With Mary, we see Jesus came to weep with us. With Lazarus, He came to fight for us. Here, Jesus came to die for us.

**vv49-53** *one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. <sup>50</sup> Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." <sup>51</sup> He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, <sup>52</sup> and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. <sup>53</sup> So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.*

Immediately after this event, the opposition against Jesus shifts into high gear. By raising Lazarus up, He takes Himself down.

It's the whole reason He came. It's where His glory shines best. Considering all this, won't you trust Him? Perhaps it's best to let Him ask you Himself: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

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