The Word Resurrects the Dead

Bible Background • JOHN 11:17–44
Printed Text • JOHN 11:17–27, 38–44 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 3:18–21

AIM for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will **EXPLORE** Mary’s and Martha’s faith relationships with Jesus; **EMBRACE** with the confident expectation that Jesus has the power of God to save, heal, and raise people from the dead; and **ENGAGE** with Jesus honestly and faithfully, even when faced with impossible situations.

In Focus

Franklin hesitantly ascended the steps of the church. It had been a long time since he’d been in any church, but he couldn’t stay away from DeShawn’s funeral. He still couldn’t believe that his friend had died so suddenly. He knew that DeShawn was in heaven, but that didn’t help the ache in Franklin’s heart.

The funeral started, and one by one, people shared how much DeShawn had meant to them. Franklin was touched when he heard the many testimonies of how DeShawn had shown God’s love to others. His cousin said, “DeShawn lived his life in the certain hope that he had a place in heaven ready for him. But he also had hope that his mighty God could change this world too. That’s why he fought so hard for change in our community.” Finally, the preacher came up to give the message. “Jesus said, ‘I am the resurrection and the life.’ Those of us who have believed in Jesus Christ as our Savior know that we will see DeShawn again. We do not mourn as those who have no hope! We do have hope, and His name is Jesus.”

Franklin thought about the preacher’s words for several days afterwards. It had been a long time since he had hope of any kind. Maybe now was the time to gain new hope—the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

*Because Jesus has conquered death, we have hope. What can we do to keep our hope vibrant in the face of impossible situations?*

Keep In Mind

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”

(John 11:25-26, KJV)
Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already.

18 Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off:
19 And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.
20 Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.
21 Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.
22 But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.
23 Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.
24 Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.
25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:
26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?
27 She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.
28 Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.
29 Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.
30 Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?
31 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.
32 And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.
33 And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.
34 And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

The People, Places, and Times

Martha. Most scholars believe that Martha was the elder sister of Mary and Lazarus. This is because she is referred to as the owner of the house (Luke 10:38). In an earlier meeting with Jesus, it was Martha who became distraught when her sister Mary sat at Jesus’ feet instead of helping her serve (Luke 10:39–42).

Bethany. This is a village on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, almost two miles east of Jerusalem. It appears that Jesus preferred to lodge there instead of in Jerusalem while He was in the area for the pilgrimage festivals of Passover, Tabernacles, and Pentecost. It was here in the house of Simon the Leper that Jesus was anointed days before his death. The name means “house of figs.” Today, it is known as el-Azariyeh (i.e., “place of Lazarus”).

Background

Only in the book of John do we find the recounting of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. This is a family that Jesus loved, and He was loved by them. When He needed a rest, He knew He could find it with these three adults. At the start of John 11, Martha and Mary notify Jesus that their brother Lazarus is deathly sick (v. 3). But instead of rushing to Bethany, Jesus stays where He is for two more days.
Therefore, by the time Jesus finally arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has been dead four days. Obviously, Jesus was not in a rush to get to Bethany. He informs His disciples that Lazarus is in fact dead and that He is glad that He was not there to keep Lazarus from dying, so that they may believe (John 11:15). This statement shapes the theological heart of today’s lesson.

**At-A-Glance**
1. **Jesus Is in Control (John 11:17–20)**
2. **Jesus Is Always Right on Time (vv. 21–24)**
3. **Jesus Is the Resurrection and the Life (vv. 25–27)**
4. **Jesus Is Lord over Death (vv. 38–44)**

**In Depth**

1. **Jesus Is in Control (John 11:17–20)**
   When Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus had already been dead four days. The professional mourners had arrived, and the situation looked hopeless to the human eye. Everything around Martha and Mary was telling them that it was time to give up hope—that there was nothing more to be done. Ultimately, Jesus is in complete control of the situation. His delay is for the benefit of His disciples and Lazarus’ sisters, Martha and Mary, so they may come to trust in the Lord with all their hearts, instead of leaning on their own understanding (Proverbs 3:5).

   Jesus wants us to put our complete confidence in Him because He is in control of all the affairs of life. When things look bad and we cannot see any way out, Jesus wants us to run to Him, like Martha, and place all of our trust in Him alone.

   *What benefit do we think we gain by handling things ourselves rather than trusting Jesus?*

2. **Jesus Is Always Right on Time (vv. 21–24)**
   Some scholars suggest Martha’s first remarks to Jesus were ones of reproach instead of grief. In a positive light, however, we recognize Martha’s faith in Jesus’ ability to heal her brother is undiminished. She knows God will do whatever Jesus asks, which implies she believes Jesus is a righteous man for whom nothing is impossible. When Jesus tells her, “thy brother shall rise again” (v. 23), Martha’s response implies that she does not yet grasp Jesus’ full implication. She understood that in the “last day” all would rise, but she does not expect an immediate miracle.

   The way Martha addresses Jesus is similar to how we often address Him when things do not go the way we think they should. The Lord may not show up when we think He ought to, but we can be sure that He is always right on time.

   *How have you misunderstood God’s meaning when He tries to comfort you?*

3. **Jesus Is the Resurrection and the Life (vv. 25–27)**
   When Jesus heard Martha’s reply, He responded to her by stating emphatically, “I am the resurrection, and the life” (v. 25). In essence, Jesus was telling Martha, “You keep looking forward to some event in the future, but what you are looking for is standing right in front of you.” Jesus challenged Martha to place her trust in Him as the One who holds the power of life and death in His hands. The Lord wants us to know that all power in heaven and on earth is in Jesus’ hand (Matthew 28:18), and for this reason we should place all of our trust in Him.

   Placing faith in Jesus has implications for the present and is not relegated to the afterlife. Jesus wants to effect change in our lives right now. As Christians, we must reach the point where our trust in Christ transcends our understanding of the world around us.

   *When has God surprised you when you thought the situation was beyond hope?*
4. Jesus Is Lord over Death (vv. 38–44)

Mary comes to meet Jesus on the road and interacts with Him much as Martha did. Seeing the sorrow of the sisters and the mourners, Jesus is still upset when He comes to the grave. There, He begins to work a miracle. Martha still objects pragmatically, but Jesus insists.

Jesus’ prayer to God here is largely for the benefit of those listening rather than for God Himself. Jesus will have it known that this miracle is to bring glory to God, above anything else. Then using only His voice, which created all things and therefore has authority over all things, He calls for Lazarus to come out. Lazarus obediently comes out. He is still dressed as a corpse and must be freed from his wrappings, but his resurrection is a lasting testament to the power of Jesus’ words.

Why do we, like Martha, object when God wants to work a miracle for us?

Search the Scriptures

1. How does Martha understand Jesus’ words about her brother rising again (v. 24)?

2. What does Jesus say are the results of believing in Him (vv. 25-26)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Jesus tells Martha, “Thy brother shall rise again” (from John 11:23), and raises him. Do you think that Jesus wants to demonstrate His resurrecting power in our lives even today? Give some examples of His power at work in your life.

2. What did Jesus mean when He said, “he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (from v. 25)? How does this affect our lives right now?

Liberating Lesson

We have many euphemisms when discussing death. We care for our health, take security precautions, create safety devices, and so much more, because we fear our death. And when we are faced with death, we do not always know how to comfort others during times of grief. The whole situation makes us uncomfortable. This is largely because of all the uncertainty surrounding death. Christians know, however, that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. He came to show us the way to an abundant life of bringing glory to God. We can trust Him to bring Christians a bodily resurrection and a heavenly home. The exact details of what that looks like are unclear, but the Christian’s hope for eternal life frees us from fear of death.

Application for Activation

We have all been in situations that looked hopeless. Undoubtedly, we have been tempted to give up hope and count our losses. Think about some of the times that you have given up hope and the Lord came in and “resurrected” the situation. Think about the effect this had on you and what effect it should have on your faith. What would it look like for you to trust Jesus to resurrect the situation today?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do?

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Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned?

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