

JESUS IS the Resurrection and the Life!

John 11:17-37

Facilitator: Louise P. McQueen

I. Introduction/Biblical Background

As Christians who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, in times of death, we do not grieve as though we have no hope. However, some believers grieve just as unbelievers who have no hope do. They just cannot come to term with the loss of a loved one. While believers do grieve, their hope in Christ's coming and the promise of the resurrection should make their grief different from the way the world grieves.

In today's lesson, the reaction of Mary, Martha and the Jews is highlighted after their brother Lazarus died. Other people had been raised from the dead in the past. Elijah raised the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4); Jesus raised the synagogue official's daughter (Luke 8), and He even stopped a funeral and raised a young man back to life (Luke 7). In each of these cases, it can be argued by unbelievers that the persons had not really died because the resurrection was done in privacy. Nevertheless, that would not be the case with Lazarus. Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus that their brother whom Jesus loved was sick. The sisters trusted Jesus to respond because of that love. They did not know that Jesus waited two more days before going to Bethany so that the miracle He would perform would be believed (John 11:15).

II. The Lesson

1. vv. 17-22

Jesus did not begin His journey to Bethany, which was about two miles from Jerusalem, until Lazarus had been dead for several days, and by the time He arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Friends and neighbors had come to mourn the deceased. He deliberately remained where He was so that the miracle would display God's glory, and the followers would grow in faith. Upon meeting Christ, Martha appeared to have lost her faith in Jesus. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would

not have died. Even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you” (John 11:21-22). Martha limited Christ’s ability to heal by His physical presence and with regard to time: He could have done something if He had only been there four days sooner. But in the next verse she affirmed Christ’s ability to ask God for anything and receive it. There was no doubt in her mind about His power or compassion. Even though Lazarus was dead, her trust in Jesus had not diminished in the least. Christians do not always understand why things happen the way they do, but they can have confidence in God’s love for us and that His plans are for our good and His glory. Martha believed that and trusted Jesus. Christians should too.

2. vv. 23-24

“Your brother will rise again”. Martha understood that her brother would rise again with all the righteous on the last day. She did not even consider that Jesus might bring Lazarus from the dead. Jesus meant that Lazarus would rise again right then. Martha thought that Jesus was talking about in the distant future. Her hope was in God’s promises concerning the eternal future. Jesus did something unexpected and remarkable both to strengthen her faith and hope in the life to come, to give her a sign of what He was to accomplish through His own death and resurrection. He came from the Father to defeat sin and death for us and to restore life to those of us who believe in Him. As Christians we share that same hope with even more promises secured by Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus was going to heal Lazarus, bring him back from the dead and reunite him with Mary and Martha. If Jesus can overcome the soul’s separation from the body and the separation of loved ones from one another, then He can overcome our greatest separation, that is our separation from God.

3. vv. 25-26

“I am the resurrection and the life...” Jesus stated here that He is the resurrection and the life. Resurrection is the guarantee of the promise of eternal life with God (Is. 26:19; Daniel 12:2; Ps. 16:9-11, 17:15; Job 19:25-27). The believer’s hope for a blessed eternal future is found in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Martha expressed her hope in the resurrection to occur in the future, but Jesus brought her to a deeper faith in

Him by proclaiming Himself to be the object of that very hope. In making His declaration to Martha, Jesus also explained the nature of this life and gave hope concerning both those who were still alive and those who had died physically: “He who believes in Me shall live even if he dies and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). Jesus announced the power and presence of God. He made it clear that He is the means through which believers experience resurrection. Just as the Father has authority and power to raise the dead to life, so too does the Son of God. Jesus made this explicit several times throughout the Gospel of John. He is the living water (John 4:10; 7:38). He is the bread of life (John 6:35). This means that Jesus is the resurrection and the life for us. He is our means of overcoming spiritual death and separation, and our only hope of being reconciled to God. Lazarus had died physically, but that which is actually Lazarus, his soul, is still alive. They would never die or be separated from God. Paul stated this in Romans 8:10-11: “And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the Spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you”. This should have been very comforting to Mary and to us as Christians.

4. vv. 27-31

Again, we see that Martha had a good understanding about who Jesus was. While many of the religious believers failed to grasp Jesus’ explanations that He was the Messiah (John 10:24), Martha understood clearly and declared her belief in Him. She had already come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. After this, Jesus asked Martha to get her sister Mary. Not wanting to attract attention of all the people there, Martha talked to Mary so that the others could not hear. The quickness of Mary’s departure attracted the attention of those who were with her. As the text stated, they thought she was going to the tomb to mourn, and they came along to comfort her.

5. vv. 32-37

Upon seeing Jesus, Mary’s words to Him were remarkably similar to what Martha had said in John 11:21. Mary expressed her own submission and belief in Jesus by falling at His feet which was an act of worship and addressed Him as “Lord”. This was a very emotional scene, and it filled Jesus with intense feelings. He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled, and He wept; that meant He shed tears. Although Jesus is God, He

was also Man. John recorded this expression of a human emotion, the full humanity of Christ as well as His deity. He grieved with the pain and sorrow and the effects of sin on those He loves. The Bible tells us, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). Jesus’ tears were noticed by those who had come with Mary. They saw His tears as evidence of His great love for Lazarus, but there were others who criticized Him. They did not understand why Jesus had not cured Lazarus. They did not believe that Jesus could do anything after Lazarus had died. The Jews questioned both Jesus’ love and His power in Verse 37. They could not reconcile Jesus’ love and power with Lazarus’ death. Jesus’ love for His friends was the reason He stayed two days longer, resulting in Lazarus’ death. The reasoning behind this decision was to allow the people to get a greater vision of God’s glory and increase the faith of the believers. Both of these aims were the reason for Jesus’ delay in going to Bethany.

III. Conclusion

Neither Martha nor Mary or the mourners knew that the story would end with a resurrected Lazarus. Mary saw death as the end, and not even Jesus could fix that. But Martha put her faith to work together with a trust that Jesus can always do something. As Christians, we should be more like Martha.