

I Am the Resurrection

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Introduction.

- A. A couple of months ago, when my friend Cary was very sick and in the hospital, Lauren and I went to see him. It was unknown just what his illness was, but it was evident to all the doctors who examined him that if they didn't figure out how to treat him, he would die in just a few days. So anyway, Lauren and I walked into the room to see him, lying there in the hospital bed, and the first thing he said to us was, "Matt and Lauren, I have some news for you. I'm going to die." Both of us just kind of looked at him for a second, and he smirked a little bit and continued, "By which I mean, of course, that we're all going to die unless the Lord returns first."
- B. Now, thankfully, Cary is out of the hospital and doing fine, although they still haven't found a cure for his sense of humor. Underneath the joke, though, what he said is exactly true. If nature takes its course, we will die, every last one of us, from the oldest grandmother to the youngest babe in arms. It's a matter of time.
- C. In a very real sense, that's why we're here. Death is about as serious a problem as a problem can be, and it's not a problem we can solve for ourselves. The Bible makes many amazing claims about Jesus, but perhaps the most amazing of them all is the claim He makes to have power to raise the dead. If this is true, and if this is a gift He gives only to His disciples, we literally cannot afford to be anything else. We need to look into this. Let's turn to John 11 then, to see what Jesus means when He says, "I am the resurrection."

I. Prelude and Martha.

- A. To understand the action of this chapter, we have to start at the beginning by examining the **PRELUDE** to Jesus' miracle. We see this prelude in John 11:1-7, 11-15.
- B. Even in this chunk of narrative Scripture, there are several important lessons that we need to learn. First, this passage tells us that **God considers the ultimate end, not the intermediate end**. We see this in John 11:4, where Jesus comments that the sickness of Lazarus would not end in death. In a sense, that's a strange comment to make, because Lazarus' sickness DID end in him dying. From this, we learn that Jesus wasn't thinking about the intermediate stages. He was referring to the end result, when Lazarus would be alive.
- C. Here's what we need to take from this: we need to learn that in our lives too, God is looking at the final result, not the intermediate one. There are all kinds of promises that God makes in Scripture to us about the blessings we will see as His children, but that doesn't mean that we'll see them now. As was true of Lazarus, for God to get us where He wants us in the end, sometimes He will lead us through some rough patches first.
- D. Second, in a related idea, we learn that **sometimes God delays in helping the righteous**. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were all good people. The text tells us that Jesus loved them. If Jesus had chosen to answer them as soon as they called to Him for help, He could have hopped on a cherub and been in Bethany in about five minutes flat. But He didn't. He waited two more days before WALKING to Judea. He delayed His help.
- E. Sometimes, then, as all of us probably know from experience, God will delay His answers to our cries for help too. In my own life, I prayed for YEARS about finding a godly woman and getting married before it finally happened. Does that mean that God didn't love me and wasn't listening to my prayers? No! It just meant that He knew what was best, and right then, getting married wasn't it. When any of us are in similar situations, we need not to become embittered against God. He does love us, but it's His call what happens.
- F. Third, we see here that **the purpose of the miracle that Jesus planned was to create belief**. He says as much in John 11:15. He didn't just go around healing people because healing people was a good thing to do. He had the mission of bringing the gospel to the world, and He worked miracles because without them, no one would believe in Him and He would fail. Today, God produces belief through another means: His word. Consider with me John 20:30-31. If we're talking to someone who believes in miracles today, it's completely fair to ask them if the record of the Bible alone is enough to produce faith. If they say no, they're contradicting this passage. If they say yes, they're admitting that miracles are unnecessary, and God never provides that which is not needed. We need to see that miracles produce belief.
- G. Next in line, when Jesus arrives in Bethany, we see His encounter first with the grieving sister **MARTHA**. The resulting dialogue is contained in John 11:17-27.
- H. As with the previous section, there's a lot of relevant stuff in here, and the first thing we need to notice is that **sometimes, human faith won't go as far as God will**. Consider Martha's waffling on the subject in John 11:21-24. She begins by rebuking Jesus for not being where she thought He should be. She says that Jesus can get whatever He wants from the Father, but she doesn't really believe it. When Jesus tells her that Lazarus will rise again, her answer makes clear that she expects it to happen at some time in the distant future, but certainly not now. Jesus calls her on it, and she expresses her belief, but later on, when she and Jesus are at the tomb, her words show that she still doesn't really have the faith she claims.

- I. Sometimes, we're the same way. Sometimes, in our heads, we write a script for God. We lay out what He is and is not going to do, and we limit our faith accordingly. Friends, there's no point to that. We need to stop worrying about what God will or won't do, ask for what we want, and believe that God will do what He wants.
- J. Second, this passage teaches us that **the resurrection is a person, not a time**. In John 11:25, Jesus brushes aside Martha's doubting by telling her that He Himself is the resurrection. His point is that wherever He is, whenever He is, there He has the power to raise people from the dead, both physically and spiritually. This is an audacious claim. Many of Jesus' other miracles are not so spectacular. After all, sick people get well by themselves all the time. Dead people, though, uniformly stay dead. Only Jesus can change that.
- K. However, the resurrection that Jesus promises is only available to the believer. This is the point that Jesus makes in John 11:26. Sure, on the day of judgment, all who are in the tombs will hear the voice of the Son of God, but only those who have put their trust in Jesus will rise to a resurrection of life. Everyone else will rise to a resurrection of judgment. They will merely exchange physical death for an eternal spiritual death in hell. Folks, there's no road to eternal life but Jesus, and if we want it, we must believe in Him.

II. Mary and the Glory of God.

- A. After Jesus finishes His discussion with Martha, we next see His interaction with the other sister, **MARY**. This interaction makes up the content of John 11:28-37.
- B. From this, there are two main conclusions that we need to draw. First, this passage teaches us that **Jesus sympathizes with us**. To me, there are few passages that are as moving as the description of Jesus weeping before the tomb of Lazarus, and there are few passages that reveal as much about His character. He isn't weeping because of Lazarus' death. Instead, He is weeping because of the grief of Mary whom He loved.
- C. It's touching not just because of what it says about Him, but for what it says about His attitude toward us. If He wept for Mary in her grief, He will weep for us in ours as well. The Bible tells us in Hebrews 4:15 that Jesus sympathizes even with the weakness that causes us to sin. If that's so, how much more does He sympathize with the griefs we suffer on earth through no fault of our own? We can be sure that Jesus cares.
- D. From this, we can draw the corollary that **sometimes our pain is necessary**. God does not cause our suffering, but sometimes He does allow us to suffer. From this story, though, which does so much to depict the compassion of Jesus, we can be sure that God does not grieve us lightly. After all, it hurts Him as much as it hurts us. There are many reasons why we must go through suffering, some knowable, some not, but one of the most Biblically prominent is in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. Let's look at what it says. The point is, I believe, that sometimes, our most spiritually important lessons are learned through suffering. As we suffer and turn to God for comfort, it teaches us how to bring others to the comfort of God. Not pleasant, but important.
- E. After Jesus finishes His dealings with the two sisters, we see the punchline of the story, where the **THE GLORY OF GOD** is revealed. This is found in John 11:38-46.
- F. The first lesson we can take from this story is that **the miracles of Jesus were spectacular and incontestable**. This is certainly not the case with the so-called miracle workers of our day. It reminds me of a story I heard about a charismatic preacher in Houston back in the '30s who announced a special service at which he was going to raise the dead. It was brilliantly staged. They had everybody come to the service wearing black, the corpse lying in a coffin front and center, and everybody who came had to file by the casket. Among the attendees was a preacher from a local church of Christ. As he was passing by the departed, he asked the lady in front of him if her could borrow her hatpin. She handed it to him, and he jabbed the corpse. There, with that hatpin, he became the first gospel preacher in the modern era to raise the dead!
- G. I don't have to tell you, folks, that Lazarus was hatpin-proof, exactly as Jesus wanted him. One of the things I saw about this story as I studied it this time is that even though Jesus only waits two days to go to Bethany, Lazarus is four days dead when He gets there. Even if Jesus had set out as soon as He got word, Lazarus would have died before He got there. Jesus, then, didn't wait to give Lazarus time to die. He wanted enough time to pass so that everyone knew for certain that Lazarus was dead. If the modern-day miracle workers want us to believe in them, they need to work the same kind of undeniable miracle.
- H. Second, this teaches us that **the power of God is greater than we can imagine**. This is not divine CPR that we see here. Remember: the Jews did not embalm their dead. This means that four days after dying, Lazarus hadn't just started to decay. He was well on his way already. Every cell in his body had corrupted, and God had to repair all of those in one instant of power. That's power, folks! That's the power that God always has, the power to raise Lazarus, and someday, if need be, the power to raise us.
- I. Finally, we learn from this that **Jesus' miracles were worked in public and convinced unbelievers**. Once again, this is not a standard that the faith healers of today and their adherents can stand up to. They work their supposed miracles before an audience that expects to see a miracle and comes away having seen what they wanted to. Jesus' audience had no idea was He was going to do anything. They just followed Mary to the tomb. Some of them believed in Him after the fact, but others didn't. They went off to tell the Pharisees about what He had done. Even though they rejected the Messiah, they accepted the miracle.

Conclusion. If you want to share in this resurrection, you need to be a faithful disciple of Jesus.