

# Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life

## John 11:1-37

*Warm-up Question: What is the longest journey you have ever made on foot?*

<sup>1</sup> Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." <sup>4</sup> When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." <sup>5</sup> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, <sup>7</sup> and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." <sup>8</sup> "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?" <sup>9</sup> Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. <sup>10</sup> It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light" (John 11:1-10).

Chapter ten of the Book of John closes with Jesus making the sharp descent from Jerusalem, which is approximately twenty-five hundred feet above sea level down to the Jordan Valley some eight hundred twenty-five feet below sea level. Jesus, we are told, went to the place where John the Baptist had been baptizing. John the apostle records that this place was Bethany, east of the Jordan. The King James Version calls it Bethabara (John 1:28). Many people believe this place to be three or four miles to the northeast of Jericho, which is 18 miles North East of Jerusalem and down in the Jordan Valley. We do not know how long Christ stayed in that area ministering to John's disciples and others in the general area, but we know that it wasn't longer than three months for He was back at Passover, which is in March or April of our calendar. The climate was warmer down in the valley since it is near the Dead Sea, (which is the lowest place on earth.) Rich Jewish people spent the worst of the winter months in Jericho, not too far away from where Jesus and His disciples were staying.

To get to the Dead Sea area from the city of Jerusalem, one had to cross the Kidron valley and walk up the slope of the Mount of Olives and traverse around it to the south instead of going over the very top. The road winds around and continues eastward, passing through the village of Bethany, just over a mile and a half east of Jerusalem, as one heads for the descent down to Jericho. This is known as the Jericho Road and is the same road referred to in the story of the Good Samaritan. This was a dangerous road, and tradition tells us that was referred to as the Valley of the Shadow of death by King David in Psalm 23:4. It was a road well known for encountering thieves who took the opportunity to steal from travelers coming in and out of Jerusalem. Jesus had some good friends here in Bethany; Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus, whose name means, "*God is my help.*" It's an interesting thought that the village is known as the village of Mary and Martha (verse 1). Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if your devotion to God were such a well-known fact, that it would cause your name to be renowned in your town or city? John, the writer of the gospel we are studying, assumes that his readers have heard about Mary from the other gospel writers (verse 2). He himself does not introduce us to Mary's anointing of Christ with very expensive perfume until the next chapter. The sisters sent word to Jesus that "the one you love is sick," meaning Lazarus. We need to remember that these were close friends of Jesus, people He enjoyed spending time with. They did not ask Him to come, for they knew that it would put such great pressure on Him. The sisters knew that the religious authorities were after Christ and wanted to kill Him. To come anywhere near Jerusalem would be to court disaster, but they could not avoid letting Him know the situation. I'm sure at the back of their mind was the knowledge that Jesus had healed the Centurion's servant from a distance (Matthew 8:5-13), and maybe He would do a similar thing for Lazarus. The Lord's response was that it would not end in death, and that God's Son would be glorified through it. I'm sure the messenger took that message back to Martha and Mary. The problem was that even as Christ was saying it, Lazarus was already dead. Let's think it through. It took a day for the mes-

senger to walk the distance to where Jesus was. We are told that Jesus waited two days (verse 6) before He left, and of course, when He left it took at least a day to get back up to Jerusalem. When He got there, Martha tells Him that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days (verses 17 and 39).

*Why do you think Jesus delayed two days?*

Jewish tradition was such that the soul of a dead person was believed to stay near the body of a dead person for up to three days. When the color of the face changed and signs of discomposure became evident, then they considered the person to be dead with no hope of resuscitation. After three days, they believed that it was impossible for the soul to reenter the body. Even when the messenger got to Him, Jesus knew exactly what was on the Father's heart. Every funeral that the Lord had gone to, He had raised the person to life. There was the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-17), and Jairus' daughter (Matthew 9:18-26) and now Lazarus. If Jesus had gone right away, people could have argued that it was more of a healing than a resurrection, and the Father wanted to teach us all that Jesus is indeed the Resurrection and the Life (verse 25). The Jewish people believed that there would be a resurrection of the dead, and that the Messiah would be the One who would do it.

<sup>19</sup> But your dead will live, LORD; their bodies will rise—let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy—your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead (Isaiah 26:19).

<sup>2</sup> Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. <sup>3</sup> Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever (Daniel 12:2-3).

The fact that Lazarus was dead for four days meant that there would be no room for doubt in people's minds. Evidence of One who could raise the dead was a sign to the Jewish people that this was indeed the Messiah of Israel.

When Jesus told the disciples that it was time to leave and go back to Judea, they all knew that He was talking about Jerusalem. They had to go through Bethany and Jerusalem to get to the Judean plateau. They immediately began to question His decision knowing that

this decision was very risky to all of their lives. They were all marked men as disciples of Jesus, the renegade against the Jewish religious elite. They could not see any reason why they should be going back up to Jerusalem. As far as they knew all was well with Lazarus. Jesus had himself said that Lazarus' sickness would not end in death, so they thought that he was well until Jesus made it plain that he was dead (verse 14). So when Jesus spoke to the messenger that it would not end in death, do you think that Jesus got it wrong? Of course not! He had said that it would not *end* in death, emphasis being laid on the word *end*. He reassured them that all would be well while they continued in the light. Time was counted in hours, the day being twelve hours and the night also. Of course, it could not be counted as accurately as it is today. The time would come when darkness would reign from the His crucifixion until He rose again. Jesus knew that His time was coming, but until that time, He had nothing to fear as He walked in the light and went about His Father's business.

<sup>11</sup> After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." <sup>12</sup> His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." <sup>13</sup> Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. <sup>14</sup> So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, <sup>15</sup> and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." <sup>16</sup> Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." <sup>17</sup> On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. <sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup> and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. <sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup> "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup> Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup> "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:11-27).

*Jesus used the term fallen asleep to describe the death of a believer; will we that are also believers be unconscious and asleep until He comes? What happens to us*

*when we die?*

Jesus describes the death of a believer as ‘sleep.’ It is the separation of the soul and spirit of a man from the body. The body is in the grave asleep, but the spirit, the invisible part of us that is the real ‘us’ goes to be with the Lord. The first martyr, Stephen, when the Jews were stoning him for his faith, saw the Lord standing at the right hand side of God the Father (Acts 7:56), and then the scripture says that he fell asleep in the Lord (Acts 7:59). His body was there in a pile of stones, but the Lord Jesus had stood from His normal seated position at the right hand side of the Father, to receive the spirit of Stephen to Himself. When Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead, we are told that her spirit returned (Luke 8:55). If her spirit returned, where had her spirit been? She had been with the Father, even while her body was in the physical realm lying there before Jesus. Paul the apostle, in writing to the church at Thessalonica, said:

<sup>10</sup> He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him (1 Thessalonians 5:10).

Even when our body is dead (asleep) we will be very much alive and living with Christ. Paul writes elsewhere about this particular thought:

<sup>22</sup> If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! <sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is **better by far**; <sup>24</sup> but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body (Philippians 1:22-24).

He says that his desire was to depart and be with Christ. If he believed that he would be unconscious, it would definitely not be “better by far.” No, Paul believed that the instant he died, he would be with Christ. When we really believe like Paul, that death is better by far, this attitude of faith in Christ will prepare us to be ready for anything.

Thomas, my namesake, has been called the doubter too often, but when we read that Jesus said to the disciples that they were going up to Jerusalem and Judea, Thomas (called Didymus, which means twin) was packed up and ready to go. He fully expected to die with Christ. Death may be the king of terrors to many people but Jesus is the King of kings and has overcome death and

hell for us that have entrusted our lives to Him.

*After being told about Lazarus, Jesus waited two days before He left for Bethany. Share a time when you have been frustrated with the timing of God. Did you later see a reason for the delay?*

I remember a time when for three and a half years I battled with the US Immigration Service over trying to get my Resident Visa. It was a trying time because I could not receive any wage for the full amount of the time while I was waiting. We had to trust the Lord to provide for us. This waiting period was very frustrating. Had it not been for our friends and the grace of God, I don’t know how we would have made it through that time. Looking back, I became stronger in my faith due to the many times the Lord sent people to us with finances to help us through that difficult experience.

Verse seventeen opens by telling us that Jesus arrived, but it could not have been at the house of Martha and Mary, because Martha was told that Jesus was coming, not that He was there (verse 20). She went out to meet Him, while Mary stayed. To where did He arrive? My conjecture is that He arrived at the outside of the village, at the place where many tombs were, and Martha came to that place where He was waiting (verse 20). Martha’s house was inside the village, further along the road from the tomb. I’m sure Jesus and the disciples were tired after ascending all the way up the sharp incline from the Jericho Road. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, it was instinctive, she stopped whatever she was doing and dashed to meet him without Mary. But the Lord would not raise Lazarus until Mary was there as well. He wanted them both to greet their brother as he is awakened out of the sleep of death.

Martha, Mary and Lazarus must have been well known in Jerusalem for we are told that many Jews had come to comfort the sisters when they heard that Lazarus had died. John omits telling us why Mary is left at the house. We know that Martha was a perfect hostess, always caring for her guests. Maybe she had learned her lesson from Mary staying at the Lord’s feet listening to Christ’s words. Now she was determined to put Christ first and her responsibilities to her guests second. We are left to wonder why Mary was left at the house. When Martha came to Christ she was full of, “if onlys.” “If you had been here, my brother would not have died” (Verse 21). We can often regret things that happen in

our lives, whether by our own choice, or by random misfortune. Life is full of “if onlys” and “what ifs.” However, if we stay focused on the “if onlys” in our life, we can miss the more important question, which is, “what now?” No problem or situation is so big or complicated that it escapes a solution, especially when we invite the Lord into the equation and ask for Him to step into our situation. Here, Martha is expressing her regret. However, she also knows that nothing is too hard for the Lord, so she ventures further to say; “I know that even now, God will give you whatever you ask” (verse 22). We are often hard on Martha when we read about her and her sister, but Jesus, I believe, looked on her grief with tenderness and felt her pain. As we read on in this passage, she gets a lot right! She dares to hope and declares that she believes He is the Messiah, the Son of God, who has come into the world! We may recognize Jesus in our situation, but have you reached out to Him in expectation? Mary’s faith has been brought to a point where she can say, “I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask” (verse 22). But she doesn’t ask Him! Many of us have come to the place where we have a faith that is strong, but we don’t ask Him to move in a miraculous way. It is like the story of the man who had a son that was demonized:

<sup>21</sup> Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood,” he answered. <sup>22</sup> “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” <sup>23</sup> “If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.” <sup>24</sup> Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; **help me overcome my unbelief!**” (Mark 9:21-24).

This man, like Mary, had a battle with his unbelief. He believed that Jesus could heal and deliver his son, but like many of us, including Mary, our faith is focused on the situation that is so dire and impossible before us. We need help from God in battling our unbelief! The Great I AM THAT I AM (Exodus 3:14) is in front of Mary looking for an expression of her faith. He shares with her just who He is—“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. Do you believe this?” (verse 25-26). This is the fifth I AM statement of Christ. It is as if the Lord is saying to Martha, “I am all you need me to be.” So often we see the Lord seeking to stretch the faith of His disciples. This is what He is doing with Mary and perhaps with each of us, lifting our eyes to invite Him into our

situations and expect the Lord to do something in answer to our faith. We have not because we ask not, said James (James 4:2). In this situation that confronts Martha, He is the One who has life and resurrection power in Himself, for He is the Life and the Resurrection. The Lord wants to get our focus off of our “If only” questions, and instead, ask the Lord “What now?” “What do you want to do now, Lord?”

Has there been a difficult time or experience in your life when you have said, “If only this would not have happened,” or, “if only I would have made this decision instead,” etc. If you have regrets or sadness about a past situation or present difficulty, invite Jesus into the situation now.

*What is your “if only” situation? What comes to mind? Share this if you feel able (You are free to pass, if not). Later, before the end of the message we will present these needs to the Lord with our next question; “What now, Lord?”*

Martha returns to the house to get Mary, for the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus will not take place until she arrives. When Mary dashes out of the house, all the people there also follow her, to weep alongside them:

<sup>28</sup> After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” <sup>29</sup> When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup> When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. <sup>32</sup> When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” <sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. <sup>34</sup> “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. <sup>35</sup> Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup> Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” (John 11:28-37).

When Mary arrived where Jesus was, presumably near the tomb, we see her devotion to the Lord again—she falls at His feet (verse 32). She also says the same thing as Martha, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother

would not have died.” Then we see an outbreak of emotion in Mary and Martha and the Jewish people who have come to grieve the death of Lazarus: 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was **deeply moved** in spirit and troubled (verse 33). The Greek word that is translated as ‘deeply moved’ is *embrimaomai*. John uses this word only here and in verse thirty-eight of chapter eleven, which is again translated as, “Jesus, once more **deeply moved**.” This Greek word is also used by Matthew and Mark in their gospels, where it is translated, “Jesus warned them sternly” (Matthew 9:30) and, “Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning” (Mark 1:43) and again of the disciples in expressing their anger, “and they rebuked her harshly” (Mark 14:5).

*When John used the Greek word, embrimaomai, to describe the response of Jesus to the outpouring of emotion at the tomb, what was he trying to communicate and why?*

It seems as if John was describing sternness or anger that he saw in Jesus that day. I cannot communicate it better than commentator William Barclay:

“Why the anger? It is suggested that the display of tears by the Jewish visitors to Bethany was sheer hypocrisy, that this artificial grief raised Jesus’s wrath. It is possible that this was true of the visitors, although there is no indication that their grief was synthetic. But it was certainly not true of Mary and it can hardly be right here to take *embrimaomai* to imply anger. Moffat translates it: “Jesus chafed in spirit,” but chafed is weak. The Revised Standard Version translates: “Jesus was deeply moved in spirit,” but again that is colorless for this most unusual word. Rieu translates: “He gave way to such distress of spirit as made the body tremble.” With this we are getting nearer the real meaning. In ordinary classical Greek the usual usage of *embrimaomai* is of a horse snorting. Here it must mean that such deep emotion seized Jesus that an involuntary groan was wrung from His heart.

Here is one of the most precious things in the gospel. So deeply did Jesus enter into men’s sorrows that His heart was wrung with anguish.”<sup>1</sup>

Here we see a beautiful picture of our Lord Jesus entering into our sorrows with us. The prophet Isaiah spoke of Him as being a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering (Isaiah 53:3). The Lord here is the perfect model of Psalm 51:17: My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. I have known men who have so put on the Lord Jesus that they often weep very easily around pain and suffering. What a beautiful thing it is to have a broken and contrite heart to be able to so enter into the pain of others and weep with them when they weep (Romans 12:15 KJV). What an example the Lord is to us as we live our lives in this world. We have to be careful what we pray for when we look at the Lord Jesus and desire to be like Him in having a broken and contrite spirit, for God will take us at our word. We often forget the times of longing and desire to be like Jesus, for when the Lord applies the heat to our lives to refine us, and breaks our hearts to mold us into humble men and women of God, He is only doing what we have asked Him to do—make us like His Son, the Lord Jesus.

Next session we will look at Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, but to close our study, what is your “if only you had been here, Lord” situation? This would be a good time to break out into groups of two and pray for one another that the great I AM THAT I AM would step in and be your help in whatever situation you are going through. Ask Him the question, “What now, Lord?”

Prayer: Father, thank you for the perfect example of your Son, the Lord Jesus, in being able to enter into our pain and suffering. Please help us to learn to live like Him in every way. Amen!

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<sup>1</sup> William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of John, Published by Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, page 97.