

John 11:16-27      “Lazarus Will Rise Again”

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

Our text this morning has to do with our Lord Jesus meeting and comforting the two sisters of Lazarus. But there is something instructive here that we didn't have time for last week and that is the response of Thomas to Christ's statement that they must go to Lazarus.

Remember, Jesus has told the disciples that Lazarus has died. The disciples have also concluded that to go back to Judea would place Jesus and them in danger since the reason they were in the area of Galilee in the first place was because the Jews tried to kill Jesus and so they fled there.

JOH 11:7-8 Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." 8 "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"

Imagine the mind-set of these disciples of Jesus at this point. All the Jews seem to hate the Lord. No one wants to accept the truth of what He teaches, that He is the Son of God sent from the Father.

The Pharisees are doing everything they can to poison the minds of the Jews to reject this Messiah. I'm sure the Elijah complex has begun to set in among the disciples who are probably thinking at this point that only they are willing to follow Jesus, while the rest of Israel is against them.

And now to top off all of this the Jews actually tried to stone Jesus and so they had to flee for their lives, and if that isn't enough bad news their friend Lazarus has died. What's left? What more could happen? And this is the point at which Jesus tells His disciples that it's time to go back to the Lion's den as they go back to Judea.

And with this news Thomas says this.

JOH 11:16 Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Some might look at this and conclude that Thomas seems to be at the end of his rope and that this response is one of fatalism; one which is a last resort to a hopeless situation. "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

And yet, there is something in the attitude of Thomas which is closer to a faithful soldier than to a person who is ready to surrender to the circumstances.

There is a sense in which these disciples, at this point in the ministry of Jesus, were some of the only ones who were left to follow Christ. But they don't abandon our Lord. They continue to follow.

In fact, earlier in this very gospel Peter comes to the same conclusion.

JOH 6:63-69 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. 64 Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. 65 He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." 66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. 67 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we

go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

And so, when Thomas responds the way he does in our text it is a response of faith in the Lord, not a result of some clinical depression he may be experiencing as a result of all the negative things that are happening in their lives at this time.

If their Master says it's time to go to Lazarus then Thomas concludes that if that's what the Lord wants then that's where we will follow Him. "Let us also go, that we may die with him [Lazarus]."

By the way, the apostle John evidently takes into consideration that those who would read this gospel were not only Jews, but Gentiles as well. He gives both names for Thomas; one which the Jews would recognize and one which the Gentiles who speak Greek would recognize: Thomas (called Didymus).

Thomas is the Hebrew name for twin while Didymus is the Greek name for twin. If Thomas was named for the fact that he is one of two children simultaneously born to his parents then we are left with a mystery since there is no mention of his twin, be it a brother or sister.

If you go to the list of the original twelve disciples of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew (Mat.10:2-4), you would find that when these men followed Jesus, that if a brother followed, they were mentioned. In fact, we have two sets of brothers who make up four of the twelve; Peter and his brother Andrew, and James son of Zebedee, and his brother John.

But what is interesting about Thomas' response in our text is the silence of another disciple. Here Jesus gives the order to move out and instead of the fiery Peter leading the charge as he does on other occasions, it is Thomas whose faith comes to the forefront.

And what is interesting to me is that it is this same Thomas who has been branded forever with the designation of doubting Thomas, when he initially questioned the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, when he said, 'I won't believe unless I put my hand in Jesus' side and my finger in His hands.'

Here in our text the faith of Thomas is quite evident along with the resolve to faithfully follow Jesus wherever He leads, even if that means going back into the jaws of death they previously left.

Thomas' loyalty to the Lord is something each of us need to emulate. Despite what may be happening in any of our lives at any given moment we need to join Thomas in being willing to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, knowing that the Lord is with us.

And notice too that Thomas is not speaking for himself.

JOH 11:16 Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Thomas is encouraging the rest of the disciples to follow him as he follows the Lord. He is a rallying point and that's what we need to do for each other. When one person is down or doubting we need to be willing to raise the banner and encourage the others to follow the Lord. And apparently Thomas' example worked because they all end up in Bethany of Judea.

JOH 11:17-19 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18 Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, 19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

After Jesus and His disciples leave the area of Galilee, and upon their arrival in Bethany, we find that Lazarus has been in the grave for four days. Now keep in mind that Bethany in Judea is about one hundred plus miles from where Jesus and His disciples were in the area of Galilee.

I believe I mentioned last week that it appears that as soon as Lazarus died is when Jesus makes the decision to go to him. The reason this is important is because originally when the messengers of Martha and Mary sent word to Jesus, our Lord declined to immediately go to Lazarus, but instead waited two days.

Where Jesus and His disciples were located in relation to Bethany in Judea is over a hundred miles which means that it was at least a three to four day walk. Had Jesus gone immediately when word came to Him Lazarus would still have died before the Lord got to him but he would only have been about a day in the grave instead of four days.

It was important that the disciples and the people in Bethany know for certain that Lazarus was not just merely dead, but as the munchkin Coroner in the Land of Oz so aptly put it, "he was most sincerely dead." There would be no doubt as to the death of Lazarus now in the grave for four days, which is going to have a

great impact on all the people, as Jesus comes to give glory to the Father.

After Jesus and His disciples arrive in Bethany we're told in verse 18 that Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem. This is important for a couple of reasons. The first thing is that it was in Jerusalem where Jesus was almost stoned to death.

And so, to come back to a place so close to Jerusalem gives credence to Thomas' concern, and apparent resignation to a possible death, as the Pharisees would most certainly learn of the return of Jesus and His disciples.

But the second reason this is important is that it allows friends of Lazarus who live in Jerusalem to come a relatively short distance to mourn his death and comfort Martha and Mary. And so, you've got a greater number of people who will witness the miracle of Jesus, many who live in Bethany, and some who live in Jerusalem and who will go back to Jerusalem to report what God has done through Jesus.

So, now the scene is set. Hundreds of people are gathering in and around Bethany to grieve with Martha and Mary. Some are near the house of the two sisters and some are near the grave site on the outskirts of town.

There's weeping and wailing. There's a mood of darkness which has descended upon this little town and now the friend of Lazarus, Jesus, has apparently come back to grieve and mourn also. Both of the sisters of Lazarus learn that Jesus is back but only one of them goes to him.

JOH 11:20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

It would appear that Martha was a take charge sort of person who was always trying to solve problems rather than merely sit by and watch things happen. And when she learns that Jesus is back in town she, unlike her sister Mary, who's probably in shock and unable to think clearly at this point, goes immediately to Jesus. Mary instead, stays at home.

JOH 11:21-22 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

This is an interesting response from Martha because on the one hand it demonstrates faith in the Lord and yet it also gives a hint of doubt and lack of trust in the power of Christ.

"If you had been here, my brother would not have died." Martha knew that Jesus could have healed her brother. This is precisely why she sent word to Jesus in the area of Galilee. And so, she has a great deal of faith in what Jesus can do.

But where her lack of faith comes in is in trusting that Jesus knows what He's doing and trusting that He does all things for our good. She also seems to doubt our Lord's ability to heal unless He is actually at the bed side of Lazarus.

If she believes that Jesus is the Son of God, then distance would have had nothing to do with His ability to heal Lazarus. In fact, not unlike the Centurion whose slave lay near death and who simply asked Jesus to heal him without coming under his roof, Martha could have sent word to Jesus to simply heal Lazarus without coming to Bethany.

But as to her lack of faith in trusting that Jesus knows what He's doing and trusting that He does all things for our good, Martha assumes that Jesus has simply neglected them. "If you had been here, my brother would not have died."

This is not to suggest that Martha was being belligerent. Some have implied that she was rebuking Jesus. But in the context her tone doesn't support that conclusion. Rather, she is saddened that Jesus wasn't there at their moment of need, knowing that the outcome would have been different if He were there.

And so, what we've got here is not unlike how we sometimes view our Savior, especially in our time of need.

We believe that our Lord has the ability to meet whatever need we've got but we're often surprised when He actually meets it. Why? Because we somehow think that He's more interested in the lives of other people rather than personally being there for us.

This could not be further from the truth. To suggest that simply because Jesus doesn't answer our prayers in the way we ask, or in the time frame in which we ask, doesn't mean that He doesn't know what's going on in our lives or that He isn't actively involved in being there for us.

This was the point He was making to His disciples in the gospel of Matthew.

MAT 10:29-31 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

In other words, God will never let anything happen to you that is not part of His plan which is always designed to move you towards Him and to help you love and serve Him better.

The problem arises, however, in the way we view things of life. We sometimes view life out of the context of God's sovereignty. And so, when stuff happens in our lives we think it's just bad luck, or a natural part of life no one has control over, or whatever.

But God makes it plain that that is simply not true. If He has numbered the very hairs on your head, and knows the beginning from the end, then we can be assured that there is not a moment of our lives that He is not aware of, and in fact, is actively involved in shaping to cause us to live to His glory.

This is the part of life that Martha had missed; not that she lost faith in Christ, but that she took God's sovereignty out of the equation and assumed that things would have been different if she had anything to say about it; namely had Jesus come when she asked.

God simply wants us to trust Him and to trust that He knows what He's doing at any given moment in our lives. This doesn't mean that He will always give us the why's and wherefores but it does mean that the truth of God's word is always available to us. And this is what Jesus does for Martha.

Notice that Jesus doesn't go into a long explanation for Martha as to why He didn't come when she asked. He could have. He knew she was grieving for her brother. He knew she trusted that He could heal Lazarus. He knew she could use some sort of explanation, but He simply gives her a truth which was meant to be for her immediate need, and yet she even misses this.

JOH 11:23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

How simple is this and how awesome is this truth. But again, Jesus doesn't put it into any time frame. He doesn't say, your brother

will rise again in about a half hour. He simply says, that he will rise again.

How simple it would be for us if we were given a time frame, even in the midst of trials. Imagine what a wonderful thing it would be, for example, if when we lost a job the Lord would come and tell us that we are not to worry because in one week we'll not only get a new job but it will be a job that doubles our income.

We could probably handle that. But it's when we don't know something that our trust and faith in the Lord is sometimes stretched to the limits. But again, this is part of what God is doing in all of our lives, even in the life of a family whom Jesus had a special human relationship with.

Not even Mary, Martha or Lazarus would escape the Lord's design to make their faith in Him grow. And so, it will be for us as well. It's not a lack of concern or love on our Lord's part, it's actually His infinite love for us which is for our ultimate good and His glory.

Jesus gives her the truth. "Your brother will rise again." Martha shows her understanding and trust in God's word, but doesn't apply it to her immediate need.

JOH 11:24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Many Jews understood that man was not created to be a disembodied spirit for eternity. They understood that their bodies would rise from the grave according to God's word.

PSA 49:15 But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.

ISA 26:19 But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You 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.

Again, as I pointed out a couple of weeks ago, this doesn't suggest that until we rise from the dead, we're in some sort of soul sleep. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. But it does mean that David and other Old Testament saints understood that their bodies would one day be gloriously reunited to their spirits to be with the Lord forever.

Martha understood this and she longed for this, especially in light of what has happened to her brother and in light of what Jesus has just said.

But what she failed to take into account is that Jesus not only will bring resurrection life to His people, He is that resurrection life. It's the same thing that we can say about love. We can say that God loves us, but it is much more. Not only does God love us, He is love.

And so, when Jesus says that Lazarus will rise again, He is saying that as long as He is there for Lazarus he will indeed rise again, not just at the general resurrection of all men, but very shortly. This is why Jesus responds to Martha the way He does.

JOH 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

This is an amazing response from Jesus in that it clearly shows how He is fully God as well as fully man. To suggest that a mere man could make such a statement, let alone prove it, shows that Martha is speaking to the God who not only created Lazarus, but who also has the ability to give his life back again.

Jesus appears to be teaching a couple of things here. The first is that the physical death we all experience does not hinder in any way the true life we have in Christ, which means that we continue to live even when our physical bodies die. Along with that it gives the hope that one day even our physical bodies will once again live as we are reunited to them in glory.

But verse 26 shows us that life in Christ starts the day we believe and that death no longer has mastery over us. "Whoever lives and believes in me will never die." Obviously, Jesus is not talking about physical death, because it is certain, that unless Christ comes in our lifetimes, we will certainly die.

So, what He means by verse 26 is that once we have received Christ as Lord and Savior, we will never be separated from God. The reason for this is because once we have received eternal life, once we have been born again, we cannot be unborn.

We will never die. And of course this is a reference to the second death. When we think of death we think of a one-time event. But with God there is a second death if we have not believed. And of

course this goes back to the promise made to Adam and Eve in the Garden, when God said, in the day you eat of the fruit that I have forbidden you will surely die.

He was speaking of two deaths. Physical and spiritual, both of which speak to a separation from something; a separation from the body, along with a separation from the presence of God forever.

And so, even if we die physically, we who are in Christ will never die spiritually. We will never taste the second death.

REV 2:11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

And of course the second death is that spiritual death which results in separation from the love of God in eternal torment.

REV 20:14-15 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

This is what Jesus is saying to Martha. He is implying that even if Lazarus' body continues in the grave as the first death has separated his body from his spirit, which is now with the Lord, he will not suffer the second death because he is in Christ through faith, and nothing can separate him from the love of Christ, not even the grave.

But more important is the fact that Jesus is making it clear that He is the one who has all authority and power and has every intention of bringing Lazarus back from the dead, even though Martha assumes Jesus is speaking about the resurrection on the last day.

But then Jesus adds something which forces Martha to consider what she has just heard. After all He has brought up a very important truth concerning Lazarus' future, but more than that is Christ's ability to be a part of that future.

He has laid out for Martha that He is the resurrection and the life and then asks this question: do you believe this?

It's one thing to theorize the truths of God's word. It's one thing to logically study His word and come to certain conclusions, but it's quite another thing to personalize these truths.

It's the same for you and me. We can study God's word, we can believe the truths of God's word. The question is will we follow God as we believe His word? Will our lives be conformed to His word on a daily basis?

Jesus was asking Martha if she was willing to live her life at that moment in the reality of who Jesus was claiming to be; the resurrection and the life.

Do you believe this Martha? Are you willing to put Lazarus' future in my hands? Are you willing to put your future, as well as your present, in My hands? Are you willing to trust that I know what I'm doing or is your theology one which is only in your head instead of your heart?

Notice Martha's response.

JOH 11:27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

Next week we'll see how this response gives Martha a grade of C, maybe C+, which is probably better than the grade I would have received. But be encouraged. Jesus is not going to squash Martha because her faith at this moment is not as sterling as we might think it should be. The Lord loved her and is only there to encourage her; and the Lord loves you and me even when we falter.

But as with Martha He has a plan for us to advance in our faith so that we don't continue to be tossed like the sea, but are found on a straight and level plain to walk with Him in His power and strength to His glory, on the path He has placed us.