

JOH 11:21-36 "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." 28 And 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." 29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 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. 32 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." 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. 34 "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. 35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

As we come to our text this morning I want to pick up on a statement I made last week in reference to Martha's response to Jesus who, after He proclaimed that He is the resurrection and the life, then asked Martha the question, "do you believe this?"

And you might remember that I intimated that if we were to give Martha a grade for her answer it might be a C or C+. Now, I realize that many people would have graded Martha higher since she did concur that Jesus was no mere man or prophet.

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."

The reason it is important to look at her response is not to criticize Martha, but to consider how we view Jesus Christ and how we should trust that He is a God who is faithful to do all according to His will, whether we understand it all or not.

Now, let me say at the outset that for Martha to answer this way is no small thing. I believe that Martha understood that Jesus was the Messiah. I believe that she understood that He was sent from the Father. And I believe that this was something she understood, not merely because she had intellectually figured this out, but as with Peter, the Father revealed this to her.

Remember what Jesus said to Peter when he made a similar statement in response to the question from Jesus, who do you say I am?

MAT 16:16-17 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for *this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.*

The same can be said of Martha, and for that matter, can be said of all of us who have come to faith in Christ for the forgiveness of our sin. It was God who opened our eyes and enabled us to see our need for a Savior.

This is precisely what Paul told Titus when he pointed out how it is the Holy Spirit who enabled us to come to Christ.

TIT 3:5-7 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal [regeneration] by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

The word for renewal or regeneration in the Greek is *anakainosis* and it intimates a complete change for the better, which is to say that it is the Holy Spirit who has made this complete change in our lives so that we can now turn around, or repent, as we embrace Christ by faith.

And this is what Martha has done and it is commendable that she acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God sent from the Father, prophesied in the Scriptures, which is what she meant when she said, "I believe that you are the One who was to come into the world."

The only reason she or anyone would have known He was to come into the world is because God announced He was to come into the world through His written word; the first announcement given to

Adam and Eve after they sinned in the Garden, when the Lord promised to send a Savior through the seed of the woman.

The problem with Martha's answer is that she doesn't answer Jesus' question. Jesus didn't ask her if she believed He was the Christ, or the Son of God. He asked if she believed that He was the resurrection and the life in reference to Him raising Lazarus from the dead.

Let's keep the context in mind. A man has died. This man was a close friend of Jesus. And now Jesus comes to Bethany where this man has been laid in a tomb and speaks with the sister of Lazarus and tells Martha that He has come to raise Lazarus from the dead.

Martha's response to that is, yes, Lazarus and all believers will be raised from the dead at the last day. But Jesus points out that He is the resurrection and the life, which is to say that wherever He is there is life and when He says He will raise Lazarus He meant now, not just at the last day. "Do you believe this Martha?", was Jesus' question.

And as important as it was that Martha believed that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God, it was more important in that context that she trust that Jesus knew what He was doing in her life and the life of Lazarus at that moment.

And so, when Jesus asked if she believed that He was the resurrection and the life, as it pertained to Lazarus being in the grave, her answer essentially was that no I don't believe that you are going to raise my brother from the grave at this time. This is why I said last week that this answer, in my estimation, earned her a C.

In fact, when we go to verse 39 of our text we know for certain that she didn't believe that this is what Jesus was going to do, or might be able to do.

JOH 11:39 "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

In other words, there's not much you can do for Lazarus now because the only thing Lazarus is able to do is stink. Let dead men lie.

Now, what does her answer have to do with us? Everything. You and I are asked all the time by the Lord, do you believe Me? Do

you believe that I do all things for the good of those who love Me and are called according to My purpose?

Do you believe that I love you with an everlasting love and that nothing will separate you from Me? Do you believe that even in the midst of trials I will be with you, even if that means being in the valley of the shadow of death, knowing that I will walk with you in that valley?

And often times our response is like Martha's. Yes, Lord I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God. But that's an answer to a different question. The question we often face in our lives is connected to when life doesn't go our way, or when trials and tribulations seem to overcome us.

At that point, can we walk by faith as people who serve a risen Christ who is interested in our present situation and is able to be there with us?

We, like Martha, often times acknowledge that Jesus is our Savior and the One who loved us so much that He died on the cross for our sins; the one who gives us eternal life. But then we end up with spiritual brain cramps when it comes to trusting Him for our daily lives.

Martha had no problem trusting Christ for what was to come at the last day, but she couldn't trust Christ that day. And sometimes neither can we. But the problem is not on God's part, it's on our part.

Now granted, it is often very hard, from a human standpoint, to trust a God we can't see, especially when things happen in our lives that we can't explain and then wonder where God is.

This is partly what Paul meant when he said that "we live by faith, not by sight." (2CO 5:7)

But our faith is not some blind faith. It's not faith in faith. It's faith in a God who has proved Himself faithful. It is faith in a God who has demonstrated His love toward us as is seen in the cross. How can any of us question His goodness? How can any of us question His faithfulness?

And yet, we sometimes do. We say, well I know one day I'll leave this world and be with the Lord and all will finally be well. But, like Eeyore in the Winnie the Pooh stories, in the meantime we just carry on and know that bad things will happen to us.

I know God is there but He's not interested in my situation. Maybe someday.

God says, 'you can trust Me today even if you don't get the answer you were looking for when you came to Me in prayer.' He hasn't gone anywhere. And as in the case with Martha, whether she realized it or not, the Lord of glory was standing right in front of her trying to tell her that her brother would rise from the dead.

By the way, we can praise God that it was not her faith which was the determining factor as to whether or not Lazarus would come out of that grave. Praise God that He is merciful and compassionate even when we sometimes don't exercise our faith. And I guess that's the upside to this portion of God's word.

The Lord Jesus still loved Martha and still had every intention of doing all according to His will, which in this case is going to be a marvelous blessing for Martha and her family. And this should be an encouragement to all of us, and hopefully an incentive to trust the Lord with all gladness and joy, even when life doesn't go our way.

He is still right there standing by our sides telling us that He is the resurrection and the life; the Almighty God who loves us with an everlasting love. But let's move on.

JOH 11:28-29 And 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." 29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

In some of your translations it reads something like, "And when she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, "The teacher is here and is calling for you."

Evidently, when Martha got back to the village there were many people who were in and around Mary as she mourned for her brother. And she wanted Mary to have some time alone with Jesus. And so, instead of announcing that Jesus was near the grave site, Martha may have whispered that the Teacher was there and calling for her.

Some may wonder why Martha referred to Jesus as the Teacher instead of the Messiah or the Son of God calling for her. Well, keep in mind that Jesus was a personal friend of the family. He loved them very much. And so, Martha addresses Jesus on an

intimate level by calling Him Teacher which had more to do with the relationship Jesus had with Mary.

Remember that it was Mary, not Martha, who spent most of her time at the feet of Jesus, learning from Him and being taught those things about the Messiah. But more than that she spent time at the feet of Jesus worshipping Him.

It was Mary who anointed the feet of Jesus in an act of adoration. It was Mary who humbled herself at the feet of Jesus when He came to visit and eat with the family. It is Mary who is about to fall to the feet of Jesus in our text.

I once heard the statement that Elijah could boldly stand before King Ahab because he had first humbly knelt before God. This was the attitude of Mary. She loved being at the feet of Jesus. He was her teacher and she loved learning at His feet. And this is the place we ought to spend our time; at the feet of Jesus in worship, in seeking His face and seeking His will in His word.

And so, when Martha says that the teacher is calling for her this was a special invitation Mary couldn't refuse.

JOH 11:29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

It's interesting that when both Martha and Mary learn that Jesus has come from the area of Galilee, and is now in town, only Martha went out to meet Jesus. It wasn't as though Mary didn't know Jesus was in Bethany when Martha told her that the teacher was calling for her.

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

We don't know why Mary stayed at home. There could be a variety of reasons from staying with friends and family who were mourning with her and she felt compelled to stay at the house with them.

I'm sure there are those who felt she was upset with Jesus and was staying at home stewing about it. My feeling is that this was not the case as we'll see later. It may have been something as simple as allowing Martha to have some alone time with Jesus as Martha now comes back to let Mary know secretly that she now can have some alone time with the teacher.

In any event Mary wastes no time when Martha tells her that Jesus is calling for her. She got up quickly, or to put it another way, she bounced up and ran to the Lord. There was no hesitation at this point.

JOH 11:30-31 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 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.

It's interesting that Jesus didn't come into town to see Mary but stayed near the outskirts of Bethany. In fact, our text tells us that Jesus had not moved from the place where Martha was talking with Him.

And of course, what Martha was trying to accomplish in telling Mary secretly about Jesus asking for her, Mary undoes by getting up as quickly as she does. Instead of being able to be alone with Jesus Mary arouses the attention of everyone who supposes that she is going down to the tomb to continue mourning.

As we said last week, in this part of the world and with this Mideast culture, it would be considered bad manners to let the grieving person mourn alone. It was customary to gather around the grieving person and wail and cry out loud with that person.

And so, when Mary runs off the mourners don't let her get away with that. They follow after her.

You and I might conclude that this defeats the whole purpose of being alone with Jesus. Well, that would be true if the purpose were left up to Mary. The fact is that the purpose of Jesus was being served as now the whole town and the visitors from Jerusalem were about to experience what the Lord had in mind the whole time. This would not be a secret event.

JOH 11:32 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."

When we compare the two sisters' response to meeting Jesus they are almost identical.

JOH 11:21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Those who study the Greek language however, point out that these statements, though very similar are not identical. The order of the words in Greek are actually different. And as A.W. Pink says in his commentary on John the order of the words in Martha's statement showed that what was uppermost in her thoughts was her brother's death.

But the order of the words in Greek in Mary's statement, in essence, demonstrates that Mary was saying none could die in the presence of Christ. "Her words then, [according to Pink], were an expression of worship, as the casting of herself at Christ's feet was an act of adoring [reverence]."

In other words, Mary acknowledges that Jesus is life and none can cease to live in His presence. Therefore, Lazarus could not have died if Jesus had been there because of who Jesus is.

But, be that as it may, Mary finds herself in the presence of Jesus still grieving that her brother has died.

JOH 11:33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

You've got to picture this scene. Mary runs up to Jesus and reverently humbles herself at His feet. She is speaking to Jesus through her tears and by this time the rest of her friends have caught up with her and they too are all crying and grieving with Mary for Lazarus.

There is nothing really joyous in this reunion. Despite how both Martha and Mary knew Jesus could have made a difference if He had been there, the damage has been done and as far as they are concerned it can't be reversed at this time. They are not thinking in a resurrection mode even though Jesus is.

And yet, notice that Jesus is not rejoicing either, despite the fact that He knows in a matter of minutes He will bring Lazarus back from the dead.

JOH 11:33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

Why was Jesus moved in spirit and troubled? Because despite the fact that He is God He is also a man as He has assumed flesh,

being born into this world through a woman as promised by God in the Garden of Eden.

He is fully God and fully man. And as a man He is acquainted with the grief of these people as He too has lost a friend to death.

He wasn't pretending to be grieving. He wasn't putting on some show so as not to look out of place. He was truly moved in spirit and was troubled. The KJV uses the expression, "He groaned in the spirit and was troubled."

This came from deep within Jesus. The Greek word used for groan is sometimes used to express indignation or anger. But sometimes it's used of deep feelings of sorrow. And here is a case where the feelings of Jesus cannot be contained as He is moved because of the grief of Mary and the others.

To suggest that Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life, doesn't understand the awfulness of the results of sin found in death, is not to consider how God views sin. It was sin that separated man from God in the garden. It grieved God then and it grieves God now even as it did on this day when Jesus comes into Bethany.

These are true feelings being expressed by the Son of God. How He wants us to come to Him to have our relationship restored and yet how it grieves Him to know that all who reject Him will suffer much more than their physical bodies dying, but a death which separates them from God forever.

I'm sure that Jesus was grieving not just for the death of His friend, but for how sin has separated mankind from Him. And yet, as is demonstrated here in our text, Lazarus, a friend of Jesus, a believer in the Lord, did not escape death as none of us will unless Jesus comes back first.

Sin is a horrible thing and we need to view it in that light. We need to see sin as God does and to understand that if we've been delivered from its penalty and power, as we've placed our faith in Christ, then it no longer should have dominion over us, because we are new creations in Christ.

Jesus sees the results of the curse of sin in the life of His friend firsthand. And as a man who understands the penalty of sin seen in death He cannot contain Himself as He longs to gather His sheep from its grip.

ROM 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

And yet, in the midst of entering into the grief of losing His friend He hasn't forgotten His mission for the Father.

JOH 11:34-37 "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. 35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

"Where have you laid him?" It's not as though Jesus was ignorant of where Lazarus was buried, but again He enters into their loss and allows them to lead Him to the place where death has claimed their brother.

And as they show Him Jesus no longer can contain Himself. He has been moved in the spirit and He has groaned as one who tried to hold in the grief but verse 35 is a verse, which is not only the shortest verse in the Bible, but shows once and for all that Jesus was truly man in a way that demonstrates His love for us as He identifies with all of our grief and weaknesses.

Jesus wept.

We don't get the full picture here in English but the thrust of the words, Jesus wept, could be better translated, Jesus burst into tears. He sobbed as He was lead to the grave site.

Again, these were not empty emotions despite the fact that Jesus knew what He was about to do. I like the way J.G. Bellet puts it. "His soul was in the sunshine of those deathless regions which lay far away and beyond the tomb of Lazarus, but He could visit that valley of tears, and weep with those that wept." (A.W. Pink)

And there's one thing we should never forget in this response of Jesus. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. When you and I experience sorrow or hurt or weakness He not only knows that we feel that way, He still enters into it with us.

HEB 4:15-16 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

He takes no delight in any of our trials or tribulations. And yet, He is a God who desires that we trust Him through it, knowing that one day we will come through it, either in this world or the next. And in that sense He delights in the outcome, though in the meantime He is able to sympathize with us.

But He's a God who then points us back to Himself for strength and comfort as only He can give. O, how He loved Lazarus, was the response of those who saw Jesus that day, but oh how He loves you and me as well.

We'll visit this place in Bethany again next week and finish this business of death with a victorious shout to life as the Son of God, the resurrection and the life, brings life where there was death.

As the Lord told the prophet Jeremiah.

JER 31:13 ... I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.

And may our response be that of David's.

PSA 30:11-12 You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, 12 that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever.

Life, in Christ, is worth rejoicing in. Eternal life is worth shouting about.