



**Sunday School Lesson for February 11, 2007
Released on February 7, 2007**

"Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life"

**Printed Text: John 11:1-7, 17-27
Background Scripture: John 11:1-44
Devotional Reading: Jude 17-23**

John 11:1-7, 17-27

1 Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.

2 (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.)

3 Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.

4 When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

5 Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.

6 When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.

7 Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judaea again.

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17 Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already.

18 Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off:

19 And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

20 Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.

21 Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

22 But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.

23 Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

24 Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

27 She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Describe the mind-sets of Jesus, the disciples, Mary, and Martha just before the resurrection of Lazarus.
2. Explain how Martha is a model of faith in Jesus, as well as how her faith fell short.
3. Show how he or she can use Jesus' teaching to comfort someone in grief.

Introduction - The One You Love is Sick

My family originally came from western Kentucky. Not so long ago it was common for women there to marry at a young age. My grandmother was married at 14 and had three children by age 17. I was born when my mother was 19, and as a result I enjoyed the blessing of young grandparents.

My grandmother was a second mother to me. She figures large in almost every one of my childhood memories. She loved all of us dearly, and I cannot count the number of wonderful hours I spent in her home. Even now her house symbolizes peace and comfort and love to me.

I recently had the privilege of holding her hand while she died, someone who loved me unconditionally. As we stood by the hospital bed in her final days, I often wondered what Jesus would have done about her situation. I wondered why God had not healed her.

Since then I have come to see that such feelings reflected my own grief and selfish desires more than a real concern for my grandmother. In death she has now found a true life in God that I cannot yet comprehend. Do we maintain our trust in Jesus when death hits so close to home?

Lesson Background

John 1:19–12:50 has been called The Book of Signs within that great Gospel. The raising of Lazarus is one of the signs in the Gospel of John through which Jesus revealed himself to be the Son of God (compare John 2:11; 4:54). What we may call the “purpose statement” of John’s Gospel stresses the importance of the signs: “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:30, 31).

While the earlier signs demonstrated Jesus’ divine power, the resurrection of Lazarus revealed Jesus’ authority over the grave. One can scarcely ignore a deed of this magnitude. The account is significant to the larger flow of John’s Gospel in that it leads the chief priests and Pharisees to plot Jesus’ death (11:45–53). Today’s lesson is not about Lazarus’s resurrection itself, but rather it is about the facts and beliefs that preceded it.

Death Prevailing (John 11:17 - 22)

1. Where did Mary, Martha, and Lazarus live (v. 18)? Where was Jesus at the time that Lazarus died?

Verse 18 tells us that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived in Bethany, a village located about two miles southeast of Jerusalem. Jesus was currently in Jerusalem, which was a day’s journey away from Bethany.

2. How could Lazarus have already been in the tomb four days by the time Jesus got there?

We know that Bethany was a day’s journey away from Jerusalem. It would have taken at least that long for a messenger to get the message about Lazarus’ death to Jesus. Jesus was not in a big hurry to rush to Bethany. He remained where he was for an additional two days, and then decided to take a day’s journey to Bethany. We have one day for the messenger to get the message to Jesus, two days of Jesus remaining where He was, and one day where Jesus journeyed to Bethany. That adds up to four days. Lazarus apparently died as soon as the messenger left. In the natural mind, it was too late, even for Jesus, to do anything for Lazarus.

3. What did Mary and Martha do when Jesus arrived at their place? (v. 20)

Two sisters have different responses when Jesus was arriving on the scene. In the usual Jewish custom, there was a lengthy time of mourning following a death. That period of mourning was in progress when Jesus and His disciples arrived. Lazarus' body had probably been buried on the same day of his death due to the rapid deterioration of the body caused by the climate.

As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she left the house to go meet Him. Mary, on the other hand, stayed sitting in the house. This certainly fits the picture of what we know about Martha and Mary. In Luke 10:38-42 we are told about an earlier time that Jesus visited their home. At that time Martha hustled around preparing a meal while Mary quietly sat in front of Jesus and listened to Him teach. Martha was an activist; Mary was a contemplative person. It was the activist who immediately left the house to go meet Jesus.

Before criticizing Mary, we must understand the process of mourning a little better. The Greek word *kathzomai* means to "sit down." It was the custom of those who were bereaved to remain seated in the house as their guests came and sat in silence with them. Mary chose to remain where she was, while Martha knew about Jesus' coming, so we should not criticize Mary.

4. Why is death so deceptive to people who are not believers?

For those who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, death appears to be very final. Many believe that physical death marks the absolute end of existence. The Bible states otherwise, where eternal existence for everyone is clearly taught. That existence will be in either heaven or hell, depending to our response to the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is wise to trust and believe in Jesus' work at Calvary.

5. What did Martha express to Jesus when she met Him, and what was she trying to say to Him (v. 21-22)?

Martha expressed both regret and confidence. She regretted that Jesus had not arrived in time to heal Lazarus. She expressed confidence in knowing Jesus had the power to do whatever He wanted. Was she expressing hope that Jesus would revive her brother? The rest of the conversation seems to indicate otherwise. Instead, she must have been expressing confidence in the fact that Jesus' will was being accomplished in spite of her sorrow.

That is the same kind of confidence we can have today. We do not enjoy going through sorrowful experiences, but since we know that God is in complete control of our situations, we can have confidence in His ability to help us. Unlike Martha, we do not have Jesus standing beside us; so we must live in faith that His perfect will is being done.

Death Conquered (John 11:23 - 27)

6. What assurance did Jesus give Martha, and how did she interpret that? (v. 23-24)

Jesus simply stated, "Thy brother shall rise again." Since we already know what happened next, we know that Jesus meant Lazarus would rise right away in his physical body. Martha, however, did not understand His statement that way. She understood resurrection in light of Old Testament teachings.

Martha thought in terms of the end times, which Isaiah 26:19-20 and Daniel (12:2-3) points out. She knew a resurrection was coming in the future, but that knowledge did not help her pain and sorrow that day.

We must cling to the truth about a future resurrection when we find ourselves in sorrow over the death of a loved one. Jesus died for us and rose from death Himself, guaranteeing eternal life after death for all who receive Him as personal Savior. The time is coming when we will be reunited with our loved ones and freed from such separation forever.

7. What statement did Jesus make to Martha to help her understand His deity and what he could do? (v. 25-26)

Jesus makes the fifth of the seven "I am" statements that are recorded in the book of John. Jesus spoke of being two specific things: the Resurrection and the Life. The previous lesson taught us that Jesus is the Good Shepherd as well. Only Jesus has the power to lay down His own life and to take it up again (10:18). Not only would He arise from death, but He would also be the source of resurrection for all who die. Resurrection is not just an event, it is a Person. This is one of the many proofs of Jesus' deity. Our guarantee of eternal life is Jesus.

Because of that truth, Jesus could also say that even though some died physically, they would live again. Biblical death always refers to separation. Physical death refers to the separation of the soul from the body; eternal death is the separation of the person from God forever. Both believer's and unbeliever's will experience physical death, but unbeliever's will experience both physical and spiritual death. Jesus died to save us from spiritual death. Our relationship with Christ promises us life in heaven forever.

8. Why did Jesus stress belief in Him as He spoke to Martha? (v. 26)

Jesus stressed that the most important thing a person can do is believe in Him. In two phrases we see this truth: "he that believeth in me" (11:25) and "whosoever liveth and believeth in me" (v. 26). Only the person who believes in Jesus is the one who receives eternal life. Unbelievers do not have this promise. John emphasizes this truth throughout his gospel. Jesus alone is the means of having a relationship with God and the way by which we can go to heaven.

9. What truth do the different “I am” statements in John’s Gospel point out?

The use of the “I am” statement of Jesus by John was one of his means of stressing the importance of this truth. It is like saying, over and over again, “Jesus is the Son of God, and it is only by belief in Him that a person can be certain of going to heaven when he or she dies and leaves this earth. Jesus followed His statement with this important question for Martha: “Believeth thou this?” This is a question every one of us must answer, for if we believe in Jesus, we will have eternal life; if not, we will have eternal separation.

10. What did Martha’s response say about her, and what should that say to us? (v. 27)

Her response revealed a genuine and deep faith. “She confessed her faith in His person, calling Him the Son of God, and confessed faith in His work, referring to Him as Christ or the Messiah who was to redeem and reign. Martha’s fears were now at rest because of her faith in the person of Jesus Christ” (Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, Zondervan).

The miracles that were recorded in the Gospels serve as proof of Jesus’ power and purpose. No matter what happens in our lives, we should have enough faith to trust in Jesus no matter what. He has the power to do all things, and we should have confidence that He will keep his promises to His believers. Only by putting our faith in the person of Jesus Christ can our fears be put to rest.

Conclusion

Perhaps you think it strange that today’s lesson text does not include the account of the actual resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:38–44). We all like to read “a happy ending,” don’t we? That resurrection itself is indeed marvelous. But by leaving out that event, today’s lesson has forced us to examine the faith and emotions of Martha.

Jesus’ question *Believest thou this?* in verse 26 is applicable not only to Martha but to all of us. It’s easy to sit in a Bible study class and say, “Of course, I believe that Jesus can grant us eternal life”; it’s harder to feel that way as we stand beside the grave of a loved one.

As we close the lid of the casket, or as we face serious health problems ourselves, how will we answer the question, *Believest thou this?* Do we really believe that Jesus has conquered death and that He has the power to grant eternal life? Real faith is tested at the final breath, whether ours or that of someone we love.

Several years ago the wife of a retired Bible college professor died. The funeral exhibited what a Christian funeral should: sadness and grief over the loss of a loved one, but also a confident realization of an eternity with Jesus into which she had crossed. The husband she left behind said it best: “Of course I’m going to miss her. But let’s face it—I haven’t been preaching fairy tales all these years!” He had no doubt where she was. He had real faith that passed the test.

Prayer

Father, we do not want to die in disbelief, and we do not want to lose people that we love. Help us find peace in the knowledge that Christ is the source of resurrection life. Help us share that peace with everyone who suffers grief. Give us the faith to really believe that Jesus has conquered death for us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thought to Remember

Christ still has power over death.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Some say that there are many ways to heaven. Various religions present various formulas for eternal life. Jesus claimed that He is the one and only way to the Father.

Lesson Summarized By

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