

# The Word Resurrects the Dead

Bible Background • John 11:17–44

Printed Text • John 11:17–27, 38–44 | Devotional Reading • John 3:18–21

## Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE Mary’s and Martha’s faith relationships with Jesus; EMBRACE with the confident expectation that Jesus has the power of God to save, heal, and raise people from the dead; and ENGAGE with Jesus honestly and faithfully, even when faced with impossible situations.

## In Focus

Franklin hesitantly ascended the steps of the church. It had been a long time since he’d been in any church, but he couldn’t stay away from DeShawn’s funeral. He still couldn’t believe that his friend had died so suddenly. He knew that DeShawn was in heaven, but that didn’t help the ache in Franklin’s heart.

The funeral started, and one by one, people shared how much DeShawn had meant to them. Franklin was touched when he heard the many testimonies of how DeShawn had shown God’s love to others. His cousin said, “DeShawn lived his life in the certain hope that he had a place in heaven ready for him. But he also had hope that his mighty God could change this world too. That’s why he fought so hard for change in our community.” Finally, the preacher came up to give the message. “Jesus said, ‘I am the resurrection and the life.’ Those of us who have believed in Jesus Christ as our Savior know that we will see DeShawn again. We do not mourn as those who have no hope! We do have hope, and His name is Jesus.”

Franklin thought about the preacher’s words for several days afterwards. It had been a long time since he had hope of any kind. Maybe now was the time to gain new hope—the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

*Because Jesus has conquered death, we have hope. What can we do to keep our hope vibrant in the face of impossible situations?*

## Keep In Mind

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” (John 11:25-26, KJV)

## Words You Should Know

**A. Raise again** (John 11:24) anistemi (Gk.) – To stand up, raise up from sitting; to raise up from death

**B. Believe** (v. 27) pisteuo (Gk.) – To accept as true, be persuaded of, credit, or place confidence in

## Say It Correctly

**Furlongs.** FUH-longs

**Eschatological.** ess-ka-toe-LOG-ih-kal

## KJV

**John 11:17** 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.

28 Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

29 Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.

30 Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?

31 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.

32 And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

33 And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

34 And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

## NLT

**John 11:17** When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he was told that Lazarus had already been in his grave for four days.

18 Bethany was only a few miles down the road from Jerusalem,

19 and many of the people had come to console Martha and Mary in their loss.

20 When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. But Mary stayed in the house.

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

22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask."

23 Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again."

24 "Yes," Martha said, "he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day."

25 Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying.

26 Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?"

27 "Yes, Lord," she told him. "I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God."

38 Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance.  
39 “Roll the stone aside,” Jesus told them. But Martha, the dead man’s sister, protested, “Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible.”  
40 Jesus responded, “Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believe?”  
41 So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me.  
42 You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.”  
43 Then Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!”  
44 And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him go!”

## The People, Places, and Times

**Martha.** Most scholars believe that Martha was the elder sister of Mary and Lazarus. This is because she is referred to as the owner of the house (Luke 10:38). In an earlier meeting with Jesus, it was Martha who became distraught when her sister Mary sat at Jesus’ feet instead of helping her serve (Luke 10:39–42).

**Bethany.** This is a village on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, almost two miles east of Jerusalem. It appears that Jesus preferred to lodge there instead of in Jerusalem while He was in the area for the pilgrimage festivals of Passover, Tabernacles, and Pentecost. It was here in the house of Simon the Leper that Jesus was anointed days before his death. The name means “house of figs.” Today, it is known as el-Azariyeh (i.e., “place of Lazarus”).

## Background

Only in the book of John do we find the recounting of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. This is a family that Jesus loved, and He was loved by them. When He needed a rest, He knew He could find it with these three adults.

At the start of John 11, Martha and Mary notify Jesus that their brother Lazarus is deathly sick (v. 3). But instead of rushing to Bethany, Jesus stays where He is for two more days. Therefore, by the time Jesus finally arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has been dead four days.

Obviously, Jesus was not in a rush to get to Bethany. He informs His disciples that Lazarus is in fact dead and that He is glad that He was not there to keep Lazarus from dying, so that they may believe (John 11:15). This statement shapes the theological heart of today’s lesson.

### At-A-Glance

1. Jesus Is in Control (John 11:17–20)
2. Jesus Is Always Right on Time (vv. 21–24)
3. Jesus Is the Resurrection and the Life (vv. 25–27)
4. Jesus Is Lord over Death (vv. 38–44)

## In Depth

### 1. 1. Jesus Is in Control (John 11:17–20)

When Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus had already been dead four days. The professional mourners had arrived, and the situation looked hopeless to the human eye. Everything around Martha and Mary was telling them that it was time to give up hope—that there was nothing more to be done. Ultimately, Jesus is in complete control of the situation. His delay is for the benefit of His disciples and Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary, so they may come to trust in the Lord with all their hearts, instead of leaning on their own understanding (Proverbs 3:5).

Jesus wants us to put our complete confidence in Him because He is in control of all the affairs of life. When things look bad and we cannot see any way out, Jesus wants us to run to Him, like Martha, and place all of our trust in Him alone.

*What benefit do we think we gain by handling things ourselves rather than trusting Jesus?*

### 2. Jesus Is Always Right on Time (vv. 21–24)

Some scholars suggest Martha's first remarks to Jesus were ones of reproach instead of grief. In a positive light, however, we recognize Martha's faith in Jesus' ability to heal her brother is undiminished. She knows God will do whatever Jesus asks, which implies she believes Jesus is a righteous man for whom nothing is impossible. When Jesus tells her, "thy brother shall rise again" (v. 23), Martha's response implies that she does not yet grasp Jesus' full implication. She understood that in the "last day" all would rise, but she does not expect an immediate miracle.

The way Martha addresses Jesus is similar to how we often address Him when things do not go the way we think they should. The Lord may not show up when we think He ought to, but we can be sure that He is always right on time.

*How have you misunderstood God's meaning when He tries to comfort you?*

### 3. Jesus Is the Resurrection and the Life (vv. 25–27)

When Jesus heard Martha's reply, He responded to her by stating emphatically, "I am the resurrection, and the life" (v. 25). In essence, Jesus was telling Martha, "You keep looking forward to some event in the future, but what you are looking for is standing right in front of you." Jesus challenged Martha to place her trust in Him as the One who holds the power of life and death in His hands. The Lord wants us to know that all power in heaven and on earth is in Jesus' hand (Matthew 28:18), and for this reason we should place all of our trust in Him.

Placing faith in Jesus has implications for the present and is not relegated to the afterlife. Jesus wants to effect change in our lives right now. As Christians, we must reach the point where our trust in Christ transcends our understanding of the world around us.

*When has God surprised you when you thought the situation was beyond hope?*

#### **4. Jesus Is Lord over Death (vv. 38–44)**

Mary comes to meet Jesus on the road and interacts with Him much as Martha did. Seeing the sorrow of the sisters and the mourners, Jesus is still upset when He comes to the grave. There, He begins to work a miracle. Martha still objects pragmatically, but Jesus insists.

Jesus' prayer to God here is largely for the benefit of those listening rather than for God Himself. Jesus will have it known that this miracle is to bring glory to God, above anything else. Then using only His voice, which created all things and therefore has authority over all things, He calls for Lazarus to come out.

Lazarus obediently comes out. He is still dressed as a corpse and must be freed from his wrappings, but his resurrection is a lasting testament to the power of Jesus' words.

*Why do we, like Martha, object when God wants to work a miracle for us?*

#### **Search the Scriptures**

1. How does Martha understand Jesus' words about her brother rising again (v. 24)?
2. What does Jesus say are the results of believing in Him (vv. 25–26)?

#### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. Jesus tells Martha, "Thy brother shall rise again" (from John 11:23), and raises him. Do you think that Jesus wants to demonstrate His resurrecting power in our lives even today? Give some examples of His power at work in your life.
2. What did Jesus mean when He said, "he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (from v. 25)? How does this affect our lives right now?

#### **Liberating Lesson**

We have many euphemisms when discussing death. We care for our health, take security precautions, create safety devices, and so much more, because we fear our death. And when we are faced with death, we do not always know how to comfort others during times of grief. The whole situation makes us uncomfortable. This is largely because of all the uncertainty surrounding death.

Christians know, however, that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. He came to show us the way to an abundant life of bringing glory to God. We can trust Him to bring Christians a bodily resurrection and a heavenly home. The exact details of what that looks like are unclear, but the Christian's hope for eternal life frees us from fear of death.

#### **Application for Activation**

We have all been in situations that looked hopeless. Undoubtedly, we have been tempted to give up hope and count our losses. Think about some of the times that you have given up hope and the Lord came in and "resurrected" the situation. Think about the effect this had on you and what effect it should have on your faith. What would it look like for you to trust Jesus to resurrect the situation today?

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

---

---

---

---

## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

---

---

---

---

## More Light on the Text

### John 11:17–27, 38–44

**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.**

Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days. The KJV translates that Bethany is “about fifteen furlongs” from Jerusalem. A furlong is a unit of measure used in the medieval period, based on the length of a field, roughly equal to 220 yards. The Greek word translated as furlongs, however, is stadion (STAY-dee-on), which is the length of an ancient Greek race track, roughly 200 yards. Fifteen of them would be 9,000 feet, or 1.7 miles. John draws attention to this fact because it shows how close they were to Jerusalem. Therefore, there were many Jews from Jerusalem who had come to Bethany, who would witness the great miracle that was about to take place. Jewish custom provided for a 30-day period of mourning. To console the bereaved during this period of mourning was considered a pious act among the Jews.

These traveling visitors also call to question Jesus’ delay in going to see Lazarus. He knows exactly what is taking place. But why does He linger and not rush to the scene? Could it be that He waited to demonstrate His power until all hope in human effort was exhausted?

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

Upon hearing of Jesus’ arrival, Martha hastened to meet Him, while Mary sat in the house. The different responses of Martha and Mary may indicate their personality types: Martha was the outgoing activist and Mary was the contemplative type. It can also be said that because Martha was the older of the two sisters, it was her duty to go out to meet Jesus. Martha rushes out to Jesus and leaves Mary in the house to continue the mourning rituals with the other mourners.

**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.**

Martha's words were a confession of her faith in the Lord; they were not intended as a reproach of Jesus, but were the response of a person in great grief. Martha believed that through Christ nothing was impossible with God. She firmly believed that Jesus would have saved Lazarus from death had He been present. But even now that Lazarus was dead, she believed that Jesus could still bring him back to life. In verse 22, the use of the phrase "thou wilt ask" (Gk. aiteo, eye-TEH-oh), which means "desire, call for, or crave," implies that she hoped that Jesus would and that He should pray for an immediate resurrection in spite of Lazarus' decomposing body.

## **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.**

The phrase "rise again" (Gk. anistemi, ah-NEESE-tay-mee) means to "stand up." Even though other writers often use this word in a common way, John rarely uses it except to mean resurrection. The idea of resurrection, though, can have a double meaning. It relates to the recall of Lazarus from death to life that was about to take place, as well as to his final resurrection at the close of time. Martha seems to understand Jesus' words to mean that her brother will rise again during the last days. If she understood Jesus' words only in this sense, the assumption is that she had no thought of Lazarus' immediate resurrection (v. 22). Jesus had already taught some about the final Resurrection, which John will later write more about in Revelation. Some Jewish traditions also awaited a Resurrection, prophesied by Daniel (12:2) and Isaiah (26:19). This was understood as a time when the Messiah would recall all the faithful dead to eternal life during His blessed reign on earth in Jerusalem. Martha affirms that she holds to this basic tenet of Judaism, looking forward to the end of days but not hopeful for the present.

## **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?**

Like many Jews, Martha believed in the final resurrection of the dead and the coming rule of God. Therefore, when Jesus stated, "I am the resurrection, and the life," He was saying that the promise of resurrection and life is not only some future event, but also was immediately available. Lazarus' bodily resurrection in a few moments would be a sign that Jesus has the power which He claims. To Martha, this would have been a startlingly new revelation. Christ embodies the kingdom of blessings for humankind for which Martha and her people hoped. This revelation was an assurance of both a resurrection to the eschatological kingdom of God, and an abundant life in the present through Him who is Life (Gk. zoe, see below).

It was crucial that Martha grasp the full importance of what Christ was about to do for Lazarus. In Christ, death will never triumph over the believer. Moreover, Jesus was saying that the person who believes in Him, though they die, will live; and the person who lives and believes in Him will never die. This saying might have helped spur rumors like the one mentioned after Jesus' resurrection that the disciple John would not die (John 24:22–23). As John himself affirms there, however, Jesus does not mean that no Christian will ever suffer physical death. It means that Jesus has that sovereign power, but also that this life we experience now is nothing compared to the abundance of eternal life.

In verse 26, Jesus asks Martha a question that is the basis for determining her faith and the faith of all believers: "Believest thou this?" Jesus asks Martha if she has the faith to believe what He says. Did

she believe that He (Jesus) is the Resurrection, and that He has the power of life over death? That is, does she believe in His sovereignty? Unless a person believes in Jesus and His Word, the eternal life He offers cannot be found.

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

Here, Martha's reply is a full-fledged confession of her faith in Jesus. In her confession, Martha states, "I believe" (Gk. *pisteuo*, peese- TEW-oh), which means "to accept as true, be persuaded of, credit, or place confidence in." This is a belief that includes commitment. Martha was agreeing with Jesus' exposition about eternal life for those who believe in Him. Martha's magnificent confession contains some principal elements of the Person of Christ: Jesus is the Christ (God's anointed One) and the Son of God. In acknowledging Jesus as the coming Messiah, Martha also suggests that she believes He will even now recall the dead to life, as the Messiah was to do during His reign.

When things look impossible from a human perspective, we cannot let this diminish our faith in the One who upholds "all things by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3). With just a word, Jesus can change anything. Jesus cares about the troubles of our lives, and more important than that, He has the power and desire to do something about it.

The word Jesus used for "life" is the Greek word *zoe* (dzo-AY), which speaks of life in the fullest sense. Jesus has the power to give life because He is Life itself. The power that Jesus has extends beyond merely the physical; He also holds the power to give life to the spiritually dead. Paul later explains this tenet of Christianity that we "were dead in trespasses and sins," and God "made us alive" or raised us from our spiritual death (Ephesians 2:1, 5). On another occasion, many Jews were angry that He claimed equality with God, Jesus explained, "For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will" (John 5:21).

**38 Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.**

**39 Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.**

Jesus is moved deeply by all the sadness surrounding Lazarus's death. His friend is buried in a cave, as was common at the time. A stone was in front of the tomb, just as it would be in front of Jesus' tomb.

Jesus knows the kind of miracle He is about to implement, so He asks for the stone to be removed. Martha still does not fully understand. John's Gospel gives no indication that Jesus has done anything before for those who are already dead. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record Jesus' resurrection of Jairus' daughter, but she had only just died earlier that day. Luke also records Jesus' resurrection of the son of a widow in Nain (Luke 7:11-17), but as stated previously, Jewish burials happened soon after death. Even with knowledge of those miracles, one might not assume that Jesus could do anything after so much decay. While we all know today what Jesus can do, Martha can be excused for thinking only of the physical world she knows. Even though she believes Jesus is the long-awaited Christ, she also believes there is nothing to be done to reverse the decay that has already begun to consume her brother's body.

**40 Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?**



Jesus has indeed recently spoke to Martha about those who believe in Him living and not dying. The verses we looked at so far did not mention seeing the glory of God. John writes this to remind his audience of Jesus' words to Martha about life, but also His words to His disciples earlier about how Lazarus' sickness would bring glory to God (John 11:4). When Jesus is first told that Lazarus is sick, He says, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." John's Gospel records much of when Jesus speaks of Himself in relationship with the Father. Jesus is clear all He does is for the Father's glory and by the Father's power and instruction. Because the Son and the Father are so entwined, however, whatever benefits the Father also benefits the Son (cf. John 10:30).

Jesus' insistence that Lazarus' sickness was for glorifying God shows us how God can use the evil things of this world for good. Even though Lazarus had to survive through a deadly illness, it ended up that Jesus used the opportunity to enact His greatest miracle yet: resurrecting a long-dead person. When we go through similar trials, we ought to recognize that God can be glorified even in events that we see as wholly negative.

**41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.**

**42 And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.**

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus urges those who hear Him to believe Him based on the evidence of His miracles. He knows He does not need to be near Lazarus to work this miracle, He does not need to say any magical words, He does not need the stone removed, He does not even need to pray beforehand. All that Jesus does in working this miracle is for the benefit of those who will see it, and hopefully believe in Him because of it.

Jesus here also models a helpful method of prayer. He begins with thanksgiving for a miracle He will do in the Father's power, but which He has not actually done yet. Even before the deed is done, He thanks God for hearing Him. Whenever we bring our concerns to God in prayer, remember to begin with thanksgiving. You can thank God for past miracles in your life, or for hearing all prayers, or anything else about God's constant nature. This will reframe your petition in your thoughts, calming you and reminding you that God is in control of everything. As the song says, "He's got the whole world in His hands." This is a simple message we learn early in our lives, but which we often forget when we grow older.

**43 And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.**

**44 And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.**

Here again we have foreshadowing of Jesus' burial. John mentioned the stone in front of Lazarus' grave (v. 38), and here mentions the "napkin" (Gk. soudarion, soo-DAR-ee-on) wrapped around his face, just like there will be a "napkin" as part of Jesus' graveclothes (John 20:7). No one who reads this Gospel should disbelieve that Jesus could raise from the dead, when there is already proof that He has performed such a similar miracle on another.

The graveclothes in Lazarus' resurrection offer an interesting contrast to Jesus' resurrection, too. Lazarus has to come out of his grave bound hand and foot, blinded and stifled by a cloth over his

face. He needs others to come help him out of his restrictions. In Jesus' resurrection, on the other hand, His graveclothes are left behind, and His napkin neatly folded and placed to one side (John 20:7). Even in the way Jesus is resurrected, He shows His power over everything.

# Daily Bible Readings

## **MONDAY**

Awake, O Dead, and Sing!  
(Isaiah 26:12-19)

## **TUESDAY**

The Dead Shall Be Raised  
(1 Corinthians 15:12-19)

## **WEDNESDAY**

In Christ All Are Made Alive  
(1 Corinthians 15:20-28)

## **THURSDAY**

Wake Up!  
(Daniel 12:1-4)

## **FRIDAY**

The Dead Will Hear Christ's Voice  
(John 5:25-29)

## **SATURDAY**

Jesus Travels to Lazarus  
(John 11:1, 3-16)

## **SUNDAY**

The Raising of Lazarus  
(John 11:20-27, 38-44)