

# The Resurrection and the Life – *John 11:17-44*

**Introduction** – Having set the context (the death of Lazarus and the sovereign delay of God, vv1-16), we now come to the seventh sign itself. This is the climax of all the signs, the glory of God revealed in His power over our greatest enemy, and John records this for us so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we may have life in His name (20:31). The sign and Jesus' declaration, "*I AM the resurrection and the life*," are not simply to correct our vision from the distant future to the immediate present, but also to fix our eyes on Jesus Himself. We are to be occupied with the Person of the Lord and not simply future events (like "where will you go when you die?") and this will change the way we live in the here and now.

**The Word of Life Speaking with Martha about Death** (vv17-27) – Jesus came to Bethany after Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. It was the custom of the Jews to have a time of mourning that lasted seven days which would explain why there are many at the home comforting Martha and Mary. It seems this family was wealthy and prominent and living less than two miles from the center of Judea, they are visited by many of the Jewish authorities.

There are parallels here with Martha and the woman at the well (ch 4). That woman wanted water but didn't realize that living water was right before her. She was thirsty but Jesus shows her how much deeper that thirst really was. Martha knows Jesus could have healed Lazarus if He had been there (and hints He could even do something now, v22), but doesn't realize her deeper need than just life from the grave. She believes there will be a resurrection at the last day (v24) but she doesn't see that resurrection and life are right before her in the Person of Jesus.

To the woman at the well and to the worshippers at the Feast of Booths, Jesus promised to give those who asked Him living water (4:10, 7:37f). To Martha, He promised that her brother would rise again (v23). But ultimately He will do so because He is "*I AM*" (8:58). "*In Him was life...*" (1:4) John told us in the prologue. Jesus does not just give life. He is life. He is the resurrection and the life.

To make sense of all of vv25-26 we must see that Jesus is talking about far more than physical life. This "sign" is declaring the deadness of mankind (Eph 2:1) and our total inability to save ourselves. And it is pointing to the first resurrection for those who are called by Christ out of their state of spiritual deadness and into new life in Him (Eph 2:4-5).

In this world, we might see we need some deeper thirst quenched or hunger satisfied, we might see the need to be enlightened, we might see our need for a shepherd to protect and guide us. But ultimately, what this world cannot see but must see, is that we are dead in our trespasses and sins, dead in our nature, and that Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

**Weeping with Mary, Snorting over Death** (vv28-37) – Martha, full of action, went and met Jesus as soon as she heard He was coming (v18). Mary, more the ponderer, remained at home with the mourners until she was summoned by Jesus (v28f). As she gets up, many of the mourners follow her (v30f). When Jesus sees her weeping, "*He groaned in the spirit and was troubled*" (v33). That word, "*groaned*," *embrinaomai*, originally described a horse snorting. It could be expressing deep sorrow, but it more often had the idea of great indignation. Jesus is shaken by the grief death brings, but even more by the death-impregnated world. "*Perhaps He is even realizing that in a matter of days He will be the One Who is dead and in the tomb*" (Card).

As much as John brings forth Christ's full deity, so he reveals Christ's full humanity (1:1-2, 14). John tells us of Christ being weary from His journey (4:6), of thirsting as He hung upon the cross (19:28) and of His weeping with those He loved over the loss of a friend (11:35). This is comforting when we find ourselves mourning over the death of a loved one even when we know they are now with the Lord if they died in Christ. Jesus hates death and all that death comes from and points to. God sent Him to do something about it (3:16). And so, in this sign-story, Jesus said, "*Where have you laid him?*"

**Faith to See the Glory of God** (vv38-42) – Who can Jesus save? Four days dead, the stench of death and decay all around, "*Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?*" (v40). Jesus thanked the Father, teaching us to do the same with our deepest needs (Phil 4:6). His miracles had been blasphemously attributed to Satan (Mark 3:22) and so He prays openly to the Father that "*they might believe that You sent Me*" (v42). To see the glory of God is to see the dead raised to life, to see sinners forgiven, to see lives transformed, to see men and women once lost, found. As Christians gather on the Lord's Day, look around and see the glory of God.

**The Resurrection...** (v43) – Jesus cried with a loud voice, not because He needed to shout. He was speaking with his divine authority, with the voice that had spoke the cosmos into being (Gen 1:3, John 1:3, Heb 11:3). That which was not was brought into being and that which was dead He speaks into life. Lazarus is called by name (unconditional election, definite atonement, irresistible grace are all here). Peter tells us that we have been born again *“through the Word of God which lives and abides forever”* (1 Pet 1:23).

**...And the Life** (v44) – Lazarus came out bound in graveclothes and Jesus said, *“Loose him, and let him go.”* It is all of grace that we are brought to life in Christ. All we contribute to our salvation is the stench. Now we are to live a life of grateful obedience. But we often forget that this is all of grace as well. Obedience is to occur from a position of grace and spirit-filled power, the same grace and power that brought us out of the grave. We need to take off the graveclothes if we are alive and instead, put on Christ (Eph 4:22-24).

If Jesus is the resurrection and the life now, in His Person, and you are in Him now, then that resurrection life is yours to walk in (Col 2:6-7). What graveclothes still have a powerful pull on you – sexual immorality, anger, covetousness, bitterness, worldly sorrow? You could fight them with a whole lot of effort, with lists and strict regimens. Imagine dead Lazarus rolling around in the tomb while Jesus tells him to come forth. Imagine revived Lazarus wanting to keep his graveclothes on. That is the weight and guilt, grief and sorrow of the death in which you once lived and were bound. It was the voice of Christ that called you into life and it is His Word in you now by His Spirit that directs you now – by grace, through faith. As one great preacher used to say, “quit trying and start trusting.” We are called to obedience, but obedience for a regenerate Christian is very different than obedience for someone dead in their tomb of sin. Walk out of the tomb with resurrection life, that is, with Jesus.