

<sup>17</sup> On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. <sup>18</sup> Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup> and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. <sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup> “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” <sup>24</sup> Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” <sup>27</sup> “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”

<sup>38</sup> Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. <sup>39</sup> “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.” <sup>40</sup> Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” <sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” <sup>43</sup> When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” <sup>44</sup> The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.” <sup>45</sup> Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.

In the name of the one who holds the power over death—our Lord Jesus, dear friends,

You, along with countless funeral directors, accountants and insurance agents, have heard it many, many times: there are two things that are inescapable: death and taxes. The taxes part is on the minds of many people right about now because if you haven’t done yours yet, you only have 9 more days. As far as death goes? Well, we all know that even though many have cheated the taxman, no human being has cheated death.

How we handle death is interesting too. Some don’t like to talk about it or even think about it. Many people don’t know what happens after death, so they ignore it or are afraid of it or foolishly embrace it with strange, ungodly views about it. When their lives are touched by the death of a loved one, there is often grief that knows no bounds or limits because they have no hope.

Christians are different. Why is that? Because God talks plainly about death in the Bible. Oh, we grieve for our loved ones who die, but not in the same way as the world—that is, without hope. That’s because we have an understanding of what happens when we die. In fact, the Word of God before us this morning helps us to understand death and God’s promise of a resurrection.

Today, in the midst of the Lenten season, we have the opportunity to catch a glimpse of the Easter message—a preview of sorts—of our resurrection celebration coming up in 2 weeks. Today we look into chapter 11 of John’s gospel to consider

### **THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF A FRIEND**

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| <b>1. AS VIEWED BY JESUS</b>  | <b>(17-18, 25, 38, 41-42)</b>       |
| <b>2. AS VIEWED BY MARTHA</b> | <b>(19-24, 26-27, 39-40, 43-44)</b> |
| <b>3. AS VIEWED BY US</b>     | <b>(45)</b>                         |

First, let’s consider how Jesus viewed the death of Lazarus, as his friend. We know that Lazarus was indeed a friend of Jesus. Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha and it seems that whenever Jesus came to Jerusalem, they opened their home to him, as they lived in Bethany, a village just outside of Jerusalem.

Many people know what is commonly referred to as the shortest verse in the Bible. It is found in John chapter 11, but in a verse that is not included in our text. It simply says, **Jesus wept**. As Jesus visited the grave, prior to the miracle, he cried at the death of his friend Lazarus. Just hearing that helps us, doesn't it? It helps us to know that even Jesus was sad at the death of his friend. Our sadness at a death is not necessarily sinful, in fact, it is part of our human makeup. That Jesus cried, reminds us that he, in his humility, being true man, shared those same kinds of feelings. In his great love for sinners, God himself became a human being and endured the things you and I endure. His friends died, and when they did, he was sad—just like us. In this account, we can see his humanity and we find comfort as we see that Jesus understands *our* pain and grief over the death of a loved one—because he went through it too.

But Jesus viewed THE DEATH OF HIS FRIEND another way—not just from his human nature, but as true God and Savior. The divinity of Jesus is obvious in this account—only God could do and say what Jesus did here.

Think about the situation. Lazarus had been dead four days by the time Jesus got there. The Savior had been out away from Bethany and Jerusalem across the Jordan River. He had to travel back to Bethany to be with the grieving family. It took him so long to get there, not because the journey was long, but because he intentionally waited until 2 days after he got the news that Lazarus was deathly ill before he headed back to Bethany.

After he had gotten word of the illness, Jesus spoke with the disciples about the situation. But they were slow to catch on, so Jesus told them plainly: Lazarus was now dead. He even told them that he was glad that he wasn't there to prevent it so that he could build up their faith by what he would do.

As true God, Jesus viewed THE DEATH OF HIS FRIEND as an opportunity to teach. As Jesus is arriving at Bethany, Martha comes rushing out to meet him and Jesus begins teaching her and building her up in her faith. As he speaks with Martha about her brother's death, he says, ***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die (v.25-26)***. If you listened to that closely, you noticed that Jesus didn't say that the resurrection *comes about* through him, he says, ***I am the resurrection and the life***. He actually *is* the embodiment of the resurrection. If Jesus had not come into the world, there would be no resurrection. Even though Martha believed in the resurrection on Judgment Day, she needed her faith to be reinforced. Jesus wanted her to know that he himself was the resurrection—and not only the resurrection, but life itself!

Jesus uses this time to teach all the people there as he prepares to do this miracle. It says, ***Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said (v. 38)***. At this point, his humanity shows as he is deeply moved. However, he now speaks with the authority of the Son of God and he commands some of those who were there to move the gravestone away.

I know that a number of you have visited Israel. I went with some of you many years ago. I think a standard stop on any tour there takes you to 'Lazarus' tomb' in Bethany, which is pictured on the front of your worship folder. At least they say that it is Lazarus' Tomb! I remember entering that narrow, steep staircase of 25 steps or so. It was a tight fit going down into what was the actual burial chamber at the bottom and only a few of us could fit in there. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that this was in reality Lazarus' tomb, even though there has been a church atop that site since at least the 4<sup>th</sup> century which claims that it is. Instead of that photo and my description of the site, we should be picturing a cave in the side of a hill which had a large stone rolled in front of the entrance. This was the normal gravesite at the time and it appears that the family owned this particular tomb, which Jesus now commands them to open.

His teaching continued as he prayed: ***So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me (v.41-42).”***

Obviously, Jesus prayed silently at first asking God the Father to be with him as he did this miracle. Then he prays aloud so that those who witnessed this might know that he and his Heavenly Father were of the same will.

Jesus viewed THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF HIS FRIEND Lazarus from a human standpoint, displaying grief and sadness over the loss of a loved one. But more importantly, he saw it as an opportunity to teach, to build up the faith of the disciples, the Jews who were there, and the sisters: Mary and Martha. He wanted to teach them that he was the Savior and the resurrection and the life.

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Also interesting to us, I think, is how MARTHA VIEWED the DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF A FRIEND, her brother. Outside of Jesus, Martha is the central figure of this account. You might remember her—the busybody of the story of Mary and Martha when they had Jesus as a guest in their home. She was running around trying to prepare a nice dinner for Jesus and Mary just sat there listening to her Savior. Well, once again, Martha is a woman of action. She rushes out to meet Jesus as Mary sits at home grieving. She says, ***Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*** Jesus could have prevented this—especially if he had not waited two days before coming! Actually, Mary says the same thing to Jesus once she sees him. Obviously they had discussed this during the illness of their brother.

Martha’s faith really comes shining through though, doesn’t it? She felt that Jesus could have prevented this, that he had the power to do such things. She also said, ***...I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask (v. 22).*** Jesus responds, ***Your brother will rise again (v. 23).*** Martha’s faith-filled response to that is interesting: ***I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day (v. 24).*** This woman had all the confidence in the world in what Jesus had previously taught her and what she probably knew from the Old Testament as well—that there is a resurrection of all people on the Last Day. MARTHA’S VIEW OF THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF HER FRIEND and brother was that he would rise to be in heaven and that she would eventually see him there. She comforted herself and, I’m sure Mary and others, with her belief in Jesus’ promise. She handled it much like we do, wouldn’t you say?

To that Jesus responded with words that comforted Mary and countless thousands since: ***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this (v. 25-26)?*** Martha displayed her faith by answering, ***yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world (v.27).***

Martha knew that Jesus was the promised Savior! She appeared to be just fine spiritually—even during her loss. She handled death in much the same way we do, I hope. After hearing this from Jesus, Martha goes to get Mary, and the rest of the mourners follow them to the tomb. As they approach the gravesite, Jesus is deeply moved once again and commands them to remove the stone from the entrance. But Martha interrupts the miracle! They don’t step forward to remove the stone, because Martha is concerned about the smelling decay of the body and probably concerned that seeing the body in that condition and smelling the stench of decay was only going to upset everyone all the more. Still, we might wonder why she did that. Didn’t she know what Jesus was going to do? Actually, no. Jesus never said that he was going to physically raise Lazarus right then. When he spoke of the resurrection, it seemed to be in a more general way. Martha’s mind was on the Day of Resurrection, the Last Day, Judgment Day.

***Then Jesus said, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone (v.40-41a).*** Jesus quickly thanked God and then said, ***Lazarus, come out (v.43)!*** There was no suspense or anything—Lazarus immediately appeared—alive! Jesus then instructed them to unwrap his burial cloths and let him go.

Now it doesn't say, but you have to believe that, as Martha and the others witnessed this powerful miracle, they were filled with joy over Lazarus.

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The last thing to consider today is how THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF A FRIEND IS VIEWED BY US. The last verse of the text tells us that many of the Jews who saw this miracle believed in Jesus. I don't think that it would be stretching it at all to say that once they had seen what happened, they began talking like crazy with one another about what had just taken place. *"Did you see that?!" "Who is he, that he can command the dead to come to life?!"* This gave those who knew that Jesus was the Savior the opportunity to tell them more about Jesus. And we are told that as the day went on, many believed in him. When we VIEW THE DEATH OF A FRIEND we often experience sadness like Jesus did. We sometimes wish that someone could have done something to prevent it, especially if circumstances lead us to view the death as tragic or senseless. We cry like they all did over Lazarus. We comfort each other like the mourners especially did for Mary. But we also have a certain hope like Martha had.

Jesus has also instructed us. We know that he is the resurrection and the life. We know the Easter story—that the perfect life of Jesus, willingly given up on the cross, was not the end of the story. On Easter Sunday morning, he rose from the dead, proving that he was the Son of God and our Savior. It means for us that *all* his promises are good.

We know all that, yet you and I sin in many ways when it comes to death. We fear it unnecessarily. We sometimes grieve as if we don't have the assurance of a resurrection and a reunion with believers in heaven. We may even doubt Jesus' resurrection or his power and promise to raise believers to eternal life in heaven. Even though our lives are filled with these and other sins, Jesus promises that he forgives all of them. His life, death and resurrection paid for those sins and because we DO believe that he is the resurrection and the life, we have the confidence of forgiveness and salvation! We should live that confidence like Martha did.

As we VIEW THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF OUR FRIEND IN CHRIST, LAZARUS, we see Jesus, the one who holds the power over death. We see him do what a sinful and skeptical world says is impossible—he restores life. He has restored our earthly lives so that we are filled with peace and love. He will also restore our lives in heaven, the place where grieving and sorrow and pain and sickness and sin and a lack of understanding and death itself will all be non-existent!

When we VIEW THE DEATH OF A FRIEND IN CHRIST in Scripture (like Lazarus) or here and now in our lives, we are comforted by Jesus' own words and promises: ***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*** AMEN!

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.