

GOSPEL OF JOHN

Encounter Jesus – The Son of the Living God

I AM the Resurrection

How does it affect your view of death to understand the dying of the body as a transition from one life to another?

A friend posted on Facebook this week, “My husband and I were waiting to get our food and I overheard a conversation that broke my heart. There were two girls in their early 20’s talking. One said ‘I don’t accept God and have never sunk so low as to pray’.” What we believe about Jesus, the Son of God, matters because one day each of us will transition from this life to another whether we believe it or not. A local TV station does news segments where viewers send in claims often those trending on the Internet and the station researches and verifies the claim for accuracy. Jesus made a claim to Martha that said: *I AM the Resurrection and the Life*. Today’s lesson will look into the truth of His claim.

Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary was sick. Expecting Jesus’ help, the sisters sent word to Jesus of Lazarus’ illness but Jesus delayed in going to them and Lazarus died. Upon arriving back in Bethany and being confronted by Martha with Lazarus’ death, Jesus told Martha *I am the resurrection and the life...* Our lesson last week concluded with Jesus asking Martha, *Do you believe this?* Today’s lesson begins with Martha’s response.

Read John 11:27-31 (ESV) ²⁷ *She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”* ²⁸ *When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”* ²⁹ *And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.* ³⁰ *Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.* ³¹ *When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.*

The word Messiah is a transliteration of the Hebrew word meaning, “anointed one” that is translated into Greek as *Christos* or as we would say in English ‘Christ’. Throughout the Old Testament prophets of the nation of Israel had foretold that a Messiah or Christ was to be born in Israel who would be their King and Redeemer.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus revealed that He was the fulfillment of those long-awaited prophecies. However, the religious rulers, the very people who should have recognized Him immediately, were busy doing everything they could to deny Jesus as Messiah, Martha, on the other hand, spoke out in faith saying: *Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world*. Undoubtedly, Martha did not understand it all at the time. We don’t have to understand it all ourselves *because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Romans 10:9

Martha told Mary privately that Jesus had arrived. Possibly, she did this because of the tension that was now surrounding Jesus. My personal opinion is that Martha may have wanted Mary to have some private time with Jesus like she had just experienced. But, that did not work because the crowd followed Mary – not for evil intent but because they were concerned for Mary.

Read John 11:32-35 (ESV) ³² Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. ³⁴ And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵ Jesus wept.

Both Mary and Martha believed that if Jesus had been there, He could have saved the life of Lazarus. Jesus dealt with the two sisters differently. He spoke with Martha about her spiritual foundation. Maybe she had been in the kitchen so much she didn’t quite have a handle on spiritual matters yet. I don’t know. Maybe she did and Jesus was just reminding her of where her strength came from. When Mary fell at Jesus’ feet in tears, He sympathized with her and wept with her, without any discussion of biblical truth. She had already been learning biblical truth at the feet of Jesus but like most of us in the midst of her trials, she still grieved.

We need to follow Jesus’ example and be sensitive to the unique personalities of others when we try to comfort or help them in difficult situations. Some may need a word of encouragement, while others just need you to cry with them! There is no one size fits all when comforting others. Just pray to be led by the Holy Spirit in each situation.

Jesus wept is the shortest verse in Scripture and surely it is one we can memorize! ☺ His was a silent weeping (the Greek word is used nowhere else in the New Testament). It was not the loud wailing of the mourners. But why did He weep at all? After all, He knew that He would raise Lazarus from the dead.

When a believer goes to be with the Lord, our tears are not really for that believer. We know they are with Jesus. Our tears are for ourselves and the loved ones of the deceased. Most likely Jesus was not weeping for Lazarus – Jesus wept for those who were living.

The Life Application Bible says, “Perhaps He empathized with their grief, or perhaps He was troubled at their unbelief. In either case, Jesus showed that He cares enough for us to weep with us in our sorrow..”

John 11:36-40 (ESV) ³⁶ So 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 also have kept this man from dying?” ³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”

The Jews buried their dead within 24 hours if possible. Although spices were used, the Jews did not embalm people like the Egyptians did. The body was washed, anointed with perfumes and wrapped. All of these things had been performed on Lazarus and he had now been in the tomb four days. There was a Jewish tradition that

said that the spirit would hover near the body for three days on the hopes of re-entering the body but that on the fourth day it would depart. According to that tradition, all hope would be gone for Lazarus to resurrect.

The one person who declared her faith during all this was Martha, and even she faltered at the last minute!. By now, he stinks, she said. She knew the decaying would have set in by this time. Jesus gently reminded her of the message He had sent at least three days before. **John 11:4 (ESV)** ... *“This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”*

Read John 11:41-44 (ESV) ⁴¹ *So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” ⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”*

I have heard more than one sermon that the power and authority of Jesus over death and the grave is so great that if Jesus had not specifically called Lazarus by name, all the tombs would have opened and all the dead would have come out. I like that thought but when Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter He referred to her as “maid” and the widow’s son He raised as ‘young man’. What matters is – Lazarus heard the call!

Today, we hear a lot about ‘near death’ experiences and many books have been written concerning the topic. Lazarus left no records of his experience. Wouldn’t that be a book to read? But, **Psalm 119:105** says *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.* What happened to Lazarus was for the glory of God not to satisfy our idle curiosity.

Contemplate the shouting of Jesus for Lazarus by name that day and then turn your thoughts to a day in the future. One glad day, Jesus Himself will descend from heaven with a shout and every believer will hear the shout and the trumpet call – the dead in Christ will rise from the grave and then those who are alive will follow! **1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (ESV)** ⁵¹ *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.*

Read John 11:45-48 (ESV) ⁴⁵ *Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, ⁴⁶ but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”*

Some believed but others ran to the Pharisees. Surely, they knew these Pharisees were the enemies of Jesus. The council known as the Sanhedrin consisted of 70 men, presided over by the high priest, and was modeled after Mosaic law. Ironside comments, “According to God’s original institution, when a son of Aaron was inducted into the office of high-priest, he remained in it until his death. But the nation had fallen so low that the Romans sold the office of high-priest from year to year to the highest bidder.” The Sanhedrin answered to the Roman governor while trying to stay in favor with the Jews. There were a lot of political issues involved;

however, simply put the dilemma they faced was that if the Jewish people acknowledged Jesus as Messiah, the Romans would remove **them** from office and **they** would lose **their** privileged position over the temple and the people. It was becoming increasingly difficult for the Sanhedrin to move against Jesus, because of growing popular support for Him.

Read John 11:49-53 (ESV) ⁴⁹ *But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” ⁵¹ He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³ So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.*

In Caiaphas, we see the typical politician. He knew that Jesus was innocent of the charges that were being brought against Him. This high priest should have been the protector of the Messiah, but for policy's sake, Caiaphas moved against Jesus.

Unknown to himself or to the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas uttered a divine prophecy that Jesus would die for the nation so that the nation would not perish. John added his own inspired explanation by saying Jesus would die not only for the Jews, but for all of God's children who would be gathered together into one heavenly family. The official decision that day was that Jesus must die in order for them to maintain their control. The leaders did not realize they were participating in God's plan. God was working out His predetermined plan that included the death of Jesus to make atonement for the sins of the world.

Read John 11:54-57 (ESV) ⁵⁴ *Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples. ⁵⁵ Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. ⁵⁶ They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, “What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?” ⁵⁷ Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.*

Jesus withdrew to Ephraim, about 15 miles north of Jerusalem. He was now on the ‘most wanted’ list since the Sanhedrin declared that anyone who knew where Jesus was must report His whereabouts to the officials.

John 11 reveals the deity of Jesus Christ and the utter depravity of the human heart. The rich man in Hades had said in **Luke 16:30 (ESV)**, ... *if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.* Lazarus came back from the dead, and the officials wanted to kill Lazarus! The stage had been set for the greatest drama in history, during which man would do his worst and God would give His best.