

**The Gospel of John (67);
Jesus with Lazarus and His Sisters (2)**

Introduction:

This is the second occasion that we have considered this account before us of our Lord Jesus raising His friend, Lazarus, from the dead. The narrative unit encompasses the entire chapter. As we set forth last Lord's Day, this narrative unit, or pericope, as it is also termed, has four discernable parts. These include the following:

1. The *introduction/setting* of the episode is presented (vs. 1-16), in which the location, setting, and people are identified.
2. The *conflict* is set forth (vs. 17-37), which is the death of Lazarus and the crisis of faith of his sisters and some of the Jews who were present.
3. The *resolution of the conflict* is then set forth (vs. 38-44), in Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead and Jesus exhorting his sisters to full faith in Him.
4. The *conclusion and interpretation of the event* closes the account (vs. 45-57), in which the result is great glory given to Jesus by some and the intractable opposition of others who desired His death.

We addressed the introduction or setting of this episode last week, which is contained in the first 16 verses. In those verses we learned of the ones involved in this account besides the Lord Jesus and His disciples. There was Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary. They were very good friends of Jesus. We read in verse 5 that "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." Lazarus had been sick, and his sisters sent for Jesus that He would come to heal their brother. Jesus and His disciples were some distance away, at least one day journey, perhaps two days, from Bethany near Jerusalem, which was the home of this family. Jesus had purposely waited two days before leaving to travel to Lazarus. It was after Lazarus had died that Jesus purposed to go with His disciples to Bethany in Judea. Traveling there would have brought them into great danger due to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem.

We now arrive to the second section of this episode. This is the most lengthy of the four parts of the episode, which is contained in verses 17 through 37. Today we will only address verses 17 through 27. Here we see the conflict stage of the narrative unit introduced. This conflict involves not just the death of Lazarus, but it also includes the crisis of faith that his death brought to his sisters, Martha and Mary. Here is **John 11:17** through **27**.

¹⁷So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. ¹⁹And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

²⁰Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. ²¹Now Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

This first portion of this conflict stage of the story contains a dialogue between Jesus and Martha regarding her brother who had died. Next week, Lord willing, we will consider the dialogue between Jesus and Mary, the other sister of Lazarus.

In **verse 17** we read that Jesus had arrived to Bethany, “*So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days.*” It is significant that the body of Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. This detail will become more significant as the account unfolds, but the primary significance of this detail would have confirmed to all present the certainty of his death. No one would be able to deny the miracle that Jesus would perform by claiming that Lazarus had not really died. “There is no room for the ‘swoon theory’ here.”¹

But the fact that Lazarus had been in his tomb for four days served to dismiss what was a popular belief among the Jews of that time. They thought that up until the body began to decay, which was after three days, that the soul hovered about the body, hoping to re-animate it. But after three days the soul departed never to return. As one explained,

Although raising Lazarus from the dead one day after his burial would not have been less of a miracle than after four days, most expositors refer at this point to an idea among the Jews that for three days after death the soul of the deceased returned to the grave, then leaving the body for good, because then the process of decay became obvious.²

But this detail of the body of Lazarus having been in the tomb for four days has also served to thwart and discredit the efforts of those skeptics who have attempted to explain away this miracle as having been a non-miracle, that Lazarus had not really died, but that a hoax was perpetrated by the followers of Jesus in order to promote His cause.

I have always appreciated the manner that **Alfred Edersheim** (1825-1889) expressed the Jewish context in his classic work, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Although it is a dated work, it yields riches to the reader. But in addressing the details of this episode, he also wrote of the importance that this miracle has had through history in the validation of the Christian faith. Here are his words:

The raising of Lazarus marks the highest point (not in the manifestation, but) in the ministry of our Lord; it is the climax in a history where all is miraculous - the Person, the Life, the Words, the Work. As regards Himself, we have here the fullest evidence alike of His Divinity and Humanity; as regards those who witnessed it, the highest manifestation of faith and of unbelief. Here, on this height, the two ways finally meet and part. And from this high point - not only from the resolution of the Sanhedrists, but from the raising of Lazarus - we have our first clear outlook on the Death and Resurrection of Christ, of which the raising of Lazarus was the typical prelude. From this height, also, have we an outlook upon the gathering of the Church at His empty Tomb, where the precious words spoken at the grave of Lazarus received their full meaning - till Death shall be no more. But chiefly do we now think of it as the Miracle of Miracles in the history of the Christ. He had, indeed, before this raised the dead; but it had been in far-off Galilee, and in circumstances essentially different. But now it would be one so well known as Lazarus, at the very gates of Jerusalem, in the sight of all men, and amidst surroundings which admitted not of mistake or doubt. If this Miracle be true, we instinctively feel all is true; and Spinoza was right in saying, that if he could believe the raising of Lazarus, he would tear to shreds his system, and humbly accept the creed of Christians.³

¹ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 501.

² Herman Ridderbos, **The Gospel of John; A Theological Commentary** (William B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 393.

³ Alfred Edersheim, **The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah**, 3rd edition, vol. 2 (E. R. Herrick & Company, 1886), pp. 308f. His reference to “Spinoza” was of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1657), who was a notable sceptic of the historicity of the Bible and the claims of the Christian faith. According to Edersheim, Spinoza had stated that if he could believe that this miracle were true, he would have embraced the Christian faith.

We next read in **verse 18** of the location of Bethany with respect to Jerusalem. **“Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away.”** The town itself had been mentioned earlier in verse 2. But here it is said to be just two miles from Jerusalem. Actually the detail in Greek is quite precise. Bethany was **15 stadia** from Jerusalem. One **stadion** in English measurement was 202 yards, 9 inches. Fifteen stadia was 1.72 miles from Jerusalem.

We then read of what was taking place with respect to the two sisters of Lazarus and the others that were still mourning his death. **Verse 19** records, **“And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.”**

What may be gleaned from the details of verses 18 and 19? **Donald Carson** (b. 1947) wrote:

The implication is that the *many Jews* who came to comfort Martha and Mary were from Jerusalem, which in turn suggests that the family was rather prominent. Although comforting the bereaved was almost universally regarded as a religious and social responsibility, not every villager would have been consoled by ‘many’ Jews from the nearby city. The same suggestion of prominence is supported by the expense of the perfume lavished on Jesus by Mary (12:1ff). The *many Jews* become witnesses of the resurrection of Lazarus. Mention of the proximity of Jerusalem also heightens the reader’s awareness of the immense risks Jesus is taking by coming so close to the capital, and thus anticipates death.⁴

The reader of this Gospel understands the peril that Jesus and His disciples were encountering by making this trip to the town of His friends.

We read that the sisters learned that their friend, Jesus, was coming. Martha immediately went to Him, while Mary stayed at home. **Verse 20** states, **“Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house.”** It would seem that Martha was more active and maybe more assertive than her sister Mary, who may have tended to be more contemplative. This would be in accordance with the other account we read last week in Luke 10:38-42. I appreciated what **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote about these sisters and their “natural tempers” that served each of them well in one situation, but less so in another.

Comparing this story with that in Luke 10:38, etc., we may observe the different tempers of these two sisters, and the temptations and advantages of each. Martha’s natural temper was active and busy; she loved to be here and there, and at the end of every thing; and this had been a snare to her when by it she was not only careful and cumbered about many things, but hindered from the exercises of devotion: but now in a day of affliction this active temper did her a kindness, kept the grief from her heart, and made her forward to meet Christ, and so she received comfort from Him the sooner. On the other hand, Mary’s natural temper was contemplative and reserved. This had been formerly an advantage to her, when it placed her Christ’s feet, to hear His word, and enabled her there to attend upon Him without those distractions with which Martha was cumbered; but now in the day of affliction that same temper proved a snare to her, made her less able to grapple with her grief, and disposed her to melancholy: *But Mary sat still in the house.* See here how much it will be our wisdom carefully to watch against the temptations, and improve the advantages, of our natural temper.⁵

We read that when Martha approached Jesus, she expressed a note of sorrow as well as giving forth a word of faith and hope. **Verse 21** records, **“Now Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.’**

Her first comment to Jesus seems to express a measure of regret and sorrow. She knows that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus from dying. And so, we see that in this first statement there was an expression of faith. She knew and believed that Jesus could have healed her brother of whatever it was that took his life.

⁴ Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 411.

⁵ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 4 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 1050.

She had faith in the *power* of Jesus to heal her brother of his sickness. She also had faith in the *pity* of our Lord that He would have done so had He come and had seen the poor condition into which His friend had fallen.

And yet her words also reveal a weakness in her faith. She thought that it was too late, for although Jesus could have prevented his death, once it had occurred, and particularly after he had been buried four days, it was now past possibility. It did not occur to her that Jesus might even now have the power to raise her brother from the dead.

Martha, in her complaint, looked back, reflecting with regret *that Christ was not there*, for then, thinks she, ‘my brother would now be alive.’ We are apt, in such cases, to add to our own trouble, by fancying what *might have been*... Christ directs Martha, and us in her, to look forward, and to think what *shall be*, for that is a certainty, and yields sure comfort: *Thy brother will rise again.*”

Note, it is a matter of comfort to us, when we have buried our godly friends and relations, to think that they shall *rise again*. As the soul at death is not lost, but gone before, so the body is not lost, but laid up. Think you hear Christ saying, ‘Thy parent, thy child, thy yoke-fellow, shall rise again; *these dry bones shall live.*’⁶

Martha’s statement to Jesus need not be understood as a veiled rebuke of Him, though we might think so upon a casual reading. “On the whole it is more likely that her remark expresses regret rather than rebuke. It had probably echoed what she and Mary had said often to each other (cf. v. 32) during the past few days.”⁷ It would seem that her words were not intended to be a rebuke of Him. She addressed Him as “Lord.” In this context this address would not have been a recognition and confession of His deity, but it would have been an acknowledgement of Jesus as her Master and she being His disciple.⁸

Now **verse 22** is somewhat enigmatic--it is not clear what she was expressing to Jesus. Again, it reads, “***But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.***” It may seem at first reading that Martha was affirming that she knew that Jesus was able to raise her brother from the dead even then and there. However, the larger context would suggest that this could not have been her meaning. Later when the Lord Jesus commanded that the stone be removed from the entrance of Lazarus’ tomb, it was Martha who protested, for he had been dead four days (v. 39). She was not anticipating Jesus raising her brother from the dead at that time. More likely she was simply saying here that she knew that whatever Jesus asked of God, God would grant His request to Him. In other words, even though He had not been there to heal her brother, to spare him from dying, nevertheless, her faith in Him was not diminished. She knew that His relationship with God was of such a nature that God would not refuse to grant any request that Jesus made of Him.

But here, too, Martha revealed a lack of understanding and therefore a lack of faith in her friend Jesus. Yes, God would answer anything that Jesus would ask of Him. But the Lord essentially told her that it would not be necessary for Him to ask God to intervene, for He Himself is God, who had the power to raise her brother from the dead.

We then read Jesus’ word of promise in **verse 23**, “***Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’***” **Verse 24** records Martha’s response as one of faith in her affirmation: “***Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’***” Martha was in no doubt of the future bodily resurrection from the dead of her brother. Perhaps that was what she thought that Jesus was affirming to her. But although Martha was in no doubt about the blessed future, it did not seem to console her greatly at this moment in her grief. This is true to the experience of many of us: “Thus, by our discontent under present crosses, we greatly undervalue our future hopes, and put a slight upon them, as if not worth regarding” (Matthew Henry). May the Lord forgive us for this slight on His blessed promises to us.

⁶ Ibid, pp. 1050f.

⁷ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 548.

⁸ Carson, p. 406.

Now all devout, informed Jews of faith believed that God could and would bring forth life from death. Their faith was in God who will raise the dead. That is not to say, however, that *all* Jews believed in a future resurrection. We know that one of the major difference between the two Jewish parties, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, was a difference in belief regarding the resurrection of the body.

The Pharisees were zealous for what they believed. They believed in the coming of the Messiah and of the future resurrection of the dead. There were perhaps tens of thousands of Pharisees who lived and served among the Jewish people throughout the Roman world. They tended to be leaders in the Jewish communities and the Jewish synagogues. The Sadducees were much fewer in number, perhaps only several thousand of them, who lived for the most part in and around Jerusalem. They were men largely comprised of men from the aristocracy. They were not a group of the people; they were the privileged class. Josephus wrote of the Sadducees, “they only gain the well-to-do; they have not the people on their side.” They had control of the political institutions of the day. But more importantly, they were the group which represented the Jewish priesthood. Most priests were of the Sadducees. They were centered in Jerusalem and controlled the temple.

The Sadducees regarded written Scripture alone as authoritative, but that to them was restricted to the Torah, the writings of Moses. They rejected the authority of the written tradition which the Pharisees adhered to so strongly. They were regarded as secular by the devout. They denied immortality. They denied a future judgment. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the body.

Of these two groups, the Pharisees and Sadducees, Josephus wrote:

But then as to the two other orders at first mentioned, the Pharisees are those who are esteemed most skillful in the exact explication of their laws, and introduce the first sect. These ascribe all to fate [or providence], and to God, and yet allow, that to act what is right, or the contrary, is principally in the power of men, although fate does co-operate in every action. They say that all souls are incorruptible, but that the souls of good men only are removed into other bodies, - but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment. But the Sadducees are those that compose the second order, and take away fate entirely, and suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil; and they say, that to act what is good, or what is evil, is at men’s own choice, and that the one or the other belongs so to everyone, that they may act as they please. They also take away the belief of the immortal duration of the soul, and the punishments and rewards in Hades. Moreover, the Pharisees are friendly to one another, and are for the exercise of concord, and regard for the public; but the behavior of the Sadducees one towards another is in some degree wild, and their conversation with those that are of their own party is as barbarous as if they were strangers to them.⁹

But the vast majority of the Jews throughout history and throughout the world believed in a future resurrection of the body of the one who had salvation. This was certainly true of **Abraham**. This truth was seen in his faith at several important junctures in his life. He showed forth his faith in God who could raise the dead when God had first promised him that He would bring forth a son from his “dead” body, since he was old and past the age of fathering a child. Sarah, too, bore witness of faith in God who raises the dead when she gave birth to Isaac, although she was an old woman past child-bearing age. Abraham also showed his faith in God that could raise the dead when He was willing to offer his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice to God. God had promised that He would bless Abraham and his future through his son Isaac. But if he were to sacrifice his son as God had commanded him, God must purpose to raise his son from the dead, for he knew that God did not lie and that He would bring to pass what he promised through Isaac.

The writer to the Hebrews argued that Abraham and Sarah believed that God could raise the dead through these events in their lives. We read in Hebrews 11:

¹¹By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. ¹²Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

⁹ Josephus, **The Wars of the Jews**, Book II, Chapter 8, paragraph 14.

¹⁷By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, ¹⁸of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” ¹⁹*concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead*, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. (Heb. 11:11f, 17-19)

The apostle Paul similarly argued the same points in Romans 4:16ff when he was affirming that sinners are justified by God through faith alone. The faith that justified Abraham was his faith in God who could raise the dead to life. Paul wrote:

¹⁶Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all ¹⁷(as it is written, “I have made you a father of many nations”) in the presence of Him whom he believed—*God, who gives life to the dead* and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; ¹⁸who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, “So shall your descendants be.” ¹⁹And not being weak in faith, *he did not consider his own body, already dead* (since he was about a hundred years old), *and the deadness of Sarah’s womb*. ²⁰He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, ²¹*and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform*. ²²*And therefore “it was accounted to him for righteousness.”*

The faith that Abraham had in God that resulted in him becoming justified, that is, pardoned of his sin and declared and treated as righteous. His faith was in God who raises the dead to life.

We could return to Genesis and also read of the faith of **Joseph**, Abraham’s great grandson. When Joseph was an old man dying in Egypt, he gave instruction regarding his bones—his body. Why? Because he believed that God would one day raise his body from the grave unto everlasting life.

Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.” ²⁶So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. (Gen. 50:25f)

Job believed in the resurrection of the body. We read this affirmation of his faith even in the midst of his great difficulty and suffering in life:

“Oh, that my words were written!
Oh, that they were inscribed in a book!
²⁴That they were engraved on a rock
With an iron pen and lead, forever!
²⁵For I know that my Redeemer lives,
And He shall stand at last on the earth;
²⁶*And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,
That in my flesh I shall see God,
²⁷Whom I shall see for myself,
And my eyes shall behold, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!* (Job 19:23-27)

King David believed in his own resurrection. He knew one day he would go to be with his infant son who had died in infancy (2 Sam. 12:23). He wrote in a psalm of his resurrection.

⁷I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel;
My heart also instructs me in the night seasons.
⁸I have set the LORD always before me;
Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.

⁹Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;
 My flesh also will rest in hope.
¹⁰For You will not leave my soul in Sheol,
 Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.
¹¹You will show me the path of life;
 In Your presence is fullness of joy;
 At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psa. 16:7-11)

We know, of course, from the Apostle Peter's interpretation of these words on the Day of Pentecost that David was actually prophesying of the body of the Lord Jesus. His body would not undergo decay in the grave, for He would be raised from the dead on the third day (cf. Acts 2:25-32).

One more Old Testament reference we will cite is the prophet **Daniel**, although we could call on many other Old Testament witnesses to the resurrection of the body. Daniel declared toward the end of his life these words:

“And at that time your people shall be delivered,
 Every one who is found written in the book.
²And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,
 Some to everlasting life,
 Some to shame and everlasting contempt.
³Those who are wise shall shine
 Like the brightness of the firmament,
 And those who turn many to righteousness
 Like the stars forever and ever. (Dan. 12:2f)

And so, to return to our text in John 11, when Martha responded to our Lord's words, “**Your brother will rise again**” with her words, “**I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day**”, she was affirming what all Jews of faith believed and confessed. She was convinced there would be a future bodily resurrection from the dead of all those who had salvation given to them by God's grace. Martha was in no doubt of the future bodily resurrection from the dead of her brother.

Notice also, however, her understanding as to when the future resurrection would take place. She said to the Lord, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection **at the last day**.” We saw this expression, “at” or “on” “the last day” earlier in this Gospel. This is a phrase found in six places in John's Gospel. It is in John 6 on four occasions (6:39, 40, 44, 54), and then it is here in John 11:24 and is also in John 2:48. It speaks of a future single day, the last day of human history, in which the general resurrection of the dead will take place and Jesus Christ will execute judgment on the entire human race. All the elect will be delivered from condemnation that Day. They will all be raised, that is, resurrected from the dead unto eternal life. All others will be judged and damned for their works, and will be sent into everlasting punishment.

Not everyone believes there will be a single last day of history when the Lord Jesus returns to raise the dead and judge the world. Many well-meaning, but mistaken evangelicals (so-called “Bible-believers”), claim there will be a number of future last days. They make the doctrine of eschatology (“last things”) much more complicated than the Scriptures set forth. There will be a final day of history when Jesus returns and the end of this world will take place and the judgment of the human race will be conducted by King Jesus. On that day one of two destinies will be assigned to every human being, either eternal punishment for the damned, or eternal life for all those who have Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior (cf. Matt. 25:31-46)

How did our Lord respond to Martha's affirmation of faith in the future bodily resurrection of the dead? We read in **verses 25 and 26**, “**Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’**”

There are several matters we may point out respecting our Lord's declaration. First, here is another “I AM” (Ἐγώ εἰμι, *ego eimi*) statement of Jesus, in which He was declaring Himself to be Jehovah, the

covenant God of His people. This is fifth of seven “I am” statements in John’s Gospel. It may perhaps be regarded as our Lord going beyond the true statement that Martha made in verse 22, when she said, “But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” Here Jesus may essentially saying, “Yes, the Father does indeed grant Me whatever I ask of Him, however, I am God, and I am the source of life, and it is I who gives life to whom I will.” This was what **Richard Lenski** (1864-1936) was conveying by his comments on our Lord’s words:

Here is another mighty “I AM,” Ἐγώ εἰμι. This makes every notion, such as that the Father merely grants something to Jesus at His request, disappear completely. The inadequate is set aside by the adequate... No resurrection and no life exist except as they are embodied in Jesus. When He is absent, resurrection and life are absent; when He is present, resurrection and life are present.¹⁰

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) described our Lord as exalting His own person greatly in His words, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

In this and the following verses, our Lord corrects Martha’s feeble and inadequate notions, and sets before her more exalted views of Himself. As Chrysostom (349-407) says, “He shows her that he needed none to help Him.” He tells her that He is not merely a human teacher of the resurrection, but the Divine Author of all resurrection, whether spiritual or physical, and the Root and the Fountain of all life. “I am that high and holy One who by taking man’s nature upon Me, have ennobled his body, and made resurrection possible. I am the great First Cause and Procurer of man’s resurrection, the Conqueror of death, and the Savior of the body. I am the great Spring and Source of all life, and whatever life any one has, eternal, spiritual, physical, is all owing to Me. All that are spiritually quickened (made alive) are quickened by Me. Separate from Me there is no life at all. Death came by Adam: life comes by Me.”¹¹

In other words, where Martha confessed her confidence that God would grant any request that Jesus requested of Him, Jesus declared that He had the power in Himself to do whatever He purposed to do. “Martha believed that at His prayer God would give anything, but He would have her know that by His word He could work anything” (Matthew Henry).

Jesus had said unto Martha, “***I am the resurrection and the life.***” What is the difference between these terms, “resurrection” and “life”? “Resurrection” is the coming to life from death, and “life” is the blessed existence enjoyed upon that resurrection. “Resurrection” precedes and makes possible “life.”

Now it would seem by our Lord’s words to Martha and the way in which the narrative unfolds, there is somewhat a delay in our Lord’s actions. He did not immediately raise His friend Lazarus. He had a greater desire to see realized in His disciples than just raising Lazarus. Our Lord similarly delayed His action in an earlier case, when a man came who was desperate to have his son healed of a deathly illness (cf. John 4:46ff). Here are the comments of **Herman Ridderbos** (1909-2007):

He continues to delay because, before manifesting His glory, He seeks to unite His disciples to Himself on a level deeper than can be achieved by removing their sorrow over Lazarus. Jesus deals pastorally with Martha in a way strongly reminiscent of the course of His earlier encounter with a royal official (4:46ff). There, too, a person in great personal distress turns to Jesus, and there, too, the miracle is delayed, as it were. At stake in the encounter with Jesus is not just and not primarily that a man gets his deathly ill son back or a woman her dead brother. The “life” and “resurrection” which Jesus speaks and that he imparts are more than that. It is this that the delay is designed to make us see.¹²

The Lord’s delays may be distressing to us, but we may be assured that they are also beneficial for us. The Lord does all things well and has our best interests on His heart.

¹⁰ R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel** (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), p. 800.

¹¹ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 298.

¹² Herman Ridderbos, **The Gospel of John; A Theological Commentary** (William B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 395.

But our Lord was pressing something quite profound through these words. The Jews understood the resurrection and life as primarily *future* realizations of God's promises in history. Resurrection and true life that can only be experienced upon the resurrection, could only lie in the future, and that perhaps being the distant future. Clearly this was Martha's understanding. But our Lord was declaring something else, that God's promise of resurrection and life were *now present* in His person. And so, "what to the Jews is a future hope is to Christians a present reality."¹³

We saw this same idea conveyed in our lord's words back in John 5:24ff. There He declared,

²⁴"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but *has passed* from death into life. ²⁵Most assuredly, I say to you, *the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.* ²⁶For as the Father has life in Himself, *so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself,* ²⁷and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.

Here He was speaking of spiritual death and a spiritual resurrection that takes place when a person is converted to Christ. Life is in Jesus Christ Himself and He imparts it to people that He calls unto salvation, those whom He has purposed to raise from spiritual death unto spiritual life. And those who have heard Him calling upon them to believe on Him as Lord and Savior and respond in faith, have already encountered a (spiritual) "resurrection" and have already entered into "life." One need not wait until the last day to enjoy the blessings of resurrection and life, for these things are in Jesus Christ and the one who has Christ now, has true and eternal life now.

Without Jesus Christ, it is not possible for one to experience true life, both spiritual and the future physical resurrection. The Bible must be more than a mere source of good and sound principles by which we live. The Bible must reveal the person of Jesus Christ so that faith in Him results and that faith in Him continues. This is the reason for the reservation we have for all "twelve step" programs that attempt to help people through biblical principles, but attempt to do so apart from faith in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ alone is life and that life is mediated to those who believe on Him.

Again, Jesus had declared unto Martha in verse 25, "I am the resurrection and the life." Then He said, "*He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.*" The word "believes" is a Greek present participle, which emphasizes continual believing. Saving faith is a continuous trusting, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. The one "who believes", not "the one who once believed," but "who believes" shall live, even if he dies physically. Faith brings us into the enjoyment of the life that is in Jesus Christ. Physical death does not cause the possession or enjoyment of life to be interrupted or diminished in any way. Even physical death will not impinge on the life that has been given to the true believer both by and in Jesus Christ. Some have said that our Lord's words recorded in verse 25 speak to Christ as the "resurrection," but then our Lord's comments of verse 26 speak to Him as the "life."¹⁴

After mentioning that death cannot cause life to cease or to be experienced, He addressed the life itself in **verse 26**. Jesus then said to Martha, "*And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.*" He was not saying that the one who believes on Him would never experience physical death, for that is the common experience of all believers until the day of the resurrection. "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this, the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). "But He means that he will not die in the sense that it has any eternal significance. He will not die with reference to the age to come. He has eternal life, the life of the age to come."¹⁵

Verse 26 ends with our Lord's challenge to Martha, "*Do you believe this?*" He was not asking her to believe that He could and was about to raise her brother from among the dead unto life. He is also not asking her if she believed in the future resurrection of the dead on the last day, for she had already confessed her faith and confidence in that reality. Jesus was asking Martha if she believed that He was the resurrection and the life, that the blessing of life itself was in Him and in Him alone.

¹³ Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, **The Fourth Gospel** (Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), p. 389.

¹⁴ F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 244.

¹⁵ Morris, p. 550f.

He is not asking if she believes that He is about to raise her brother from the dead, but if her faith can go beyond quiet confidence that her brother will be resurrected at the last day to personal trust in Jesus as the resurrection and the life, the only person who can grant eternal life and promise the transformation of resurrection. If she answers positively, the raising of Lazarus becomes a paradigm, and acted parable of the life-giving power of Jesus.¹⁶

And of course we read in verse 27 that she does confess her belief in Jesus Christ as the resurrection and the life. In response to the Lord's question, "*she said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."*" In this confession she declared her confidence that Jesus Christ was God incarnate, that He was the promised "Christ", that is, the anointed promised King of Israel, but also that He was "the Son of God, who is to come into the world." She confessed her faith in both His deity and His humanity, and that He had the authority to impart to people resurrection life. This is one of the clearest, most certain affirmations of the person of Jesus Christ in all of Scripture. It stands forth as a statement of faith on the part of this woman that is full, complete, profound, and settled in her mind and life.

These words of Martha do not always receive the attention they should. When Martha and Mary are spoken of, Martha is not to be characterized as the lady of whom Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, thou art anxious about many things: but one thing is needful: for Mary has chosen the good part..." (Luke 10:41f). But Martha with all her faults was a woman of faith. Hers is a significant declaration. First, she agrees with what Jesus said. She is not choosing her own way but accepting His. She may not understand fully the implications of what He just said, but as far as she can she accepts it.... Her faith is not a vague, formless credulity. It has content, and doctrinal content at that.¹⁷

As we close, let us pose the question to you that Jesus posed to Martha regarding these matters: "Do you believe this?" If so, then stand forward and confess that you do. Confess to a friend. Confess to a family member. Better, confess your faith in a public display of your discipleship, that being in baptism. But most importantly, confess your faith to the Lord Himself. The promise of Scripture is this:

That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." (Rom. 10:9-13)

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus,
after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.
To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 5:10f)

¹⁶ Carson, p. 414.

¹⁷ Morris, p. 551.