

John 11:17–27

I AM the Resurrection and the Life

Pt. 1

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

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

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

Introduction

One of the most unsettling aspects of death is that man has no control over it. Just as “no man has authority to restrain the wind,” so also no man has “authority over the day of death” (Eccl. 8:8).

When that day comes man “is torn from the security of his tent, and they march him before the king of terrors”—a poetic reference to death (Job 18:14).

The sobering reality that this life could end at any moment only underscores its brevity.

As Job lamented, “Man, who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil. Like a flower he comes forth and withers. He also flees like a shadow and does not remain” (Job 14:1–2).

“As for the days of our life,” wrote Moses, “they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away” (Ps. 90:10).

The truth expressed in the flippant statement, “You can’t take it with you!” indicates that everything done in this life (apart from serving God) is ultimately meaningless.

For Solomon, that realization reduced all he had accomplished to vanity:

Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control

over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity. (Eccl. 2:18–19)

Job exclaimed, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there” (Job 1:21).

Paul wrote, “For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either” (1 Tim. 6:7).

To a greedy man consumed with his earthly possessions, God declared, “You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?” (Luke 12:20).

As has been noted, there are no pockets in shrouds, and no one ever saw a hearse pulling a trailer.

Tragically, people spend their entire lives accumulating possessions, which death snatches from them in an instant.

But the wonderful truth is that death does not have to be the end of all man’s hopes and dreams.

For believers, it can be faced with joyous anticipation instead of anxious fear, because Jesus Christ has conquered death.

As He promised His followers,
“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die” (11:25–26)

and,

“Because I live, you will live also” (14:19; cf. 1 Cor. 15:20–23). Death marks the beginning of true life in glorified perfection and perfect fellowship with Christ for those who put their faith in the Lord. He will raise them up on the last day (6:39–40, 44), and they will live forever in His presence.

So then as we march toward Death, we don't fear it as the pagan does, or as the unbeliever does. We don't see the end, but rather the beginning.

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (NKJV)

¹³ But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always

be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Proverbs 14:32 (NKJV)

³² The wicked is banished in his wickedness,
But the righteous has a refuge in his death.

1 Corinthians 15:17–22 (NKJV)

¹⁷ And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! ¹⁸ Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

²⁰ But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

Christ's raising of Lazarus vividly demonstrated His power over death (cf. Luke 7:11–15; 8:52–56). The miracle formed a bridge between His public ministry to the nation and His private ministry to the disciples, preparing them for His departure. Thus it both strengthened the disciples' faith (cf. v. 15) and also

provided indisputable evidence to Israel that Jesus was who He claimed to be. Furthermore, the miracle gave credence to Jesus' repeated claims that He would one day rise from the dead Himself (cf. 2:19; Mark 8:31; 9:31; Luke 24:7).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2006). *John 1-11* (pp. 460-461). Chicago: Moody Press.

Review

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- III. The Confession of Christ
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Lesson

- I. The Coming of Jesus

17 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days.

After His journey from Perea, the region across the Jordan River (10:40), **Jesus** arrived at the outskirts of Bethany. Rabbinic writings suggest a possible reason for John's note that Lazarus **had already been in the tomb four days**

The Jews believed that the soul hovered around the body for three days after death, hoping to reenter it. But on the fourth day, after noticing that the body was beginning to decompose (cf. v. 39), the soul departed.

(*Leviticus Rabbah* [a rabbinical commentary] 18:1 [on Lv. 15:1]; for other references cf. SB 2. 544f.)

Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 411). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

Only then would a death be considered completely irreversible. Lazarus had been dead for **four days**, and his body had already started to decompose (v. 39). The Jews therefore would have recognized that only a divine miracle could restore him to life.

It was customary to bury the deceased on the day of their death (cf. Acts 5:5–6, 10), since the climate was warm and the Jews did not practice embalming

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2006). *John 1–11* (p. 462). Chicago: Moody Press.

The Fact that he had been dead 4 days is important also because by this time the decomposition would have been severe.

It helps to know some basics about human death and decay. Though it sounds pretty macabre, it's perfectly normal for your body to go through some radical changes when you die.

To begin with, when your **heart** stops beating, your body's **cells** and tissues stop receiving oxygen. Brain cells are the first to die -- usually within three to seven minutes [source: **Macnair**]. (Bone and skin cells, though, will survive for several days.) **Blood** begins draining from the capillaries, pooling in lower-lying portions of the body, creating a pale appearance in some places and a darker appearance in others.

About three hours after death, **rigor mortis** -- a stiffening of muscles -- sets in. Around 12 hours after death, the body will feel cool, and within 24 hours (depending on body fat and external temperatures), it will lose all internal heat in a process called **algor mortis**. The muscle tissue begins to lose its stiffness after about 36 hours, and within about 72 hours of dying, the body's rigor mortis will subside.

As the cells die, bacteria within the body begin breaking them down. Enzymes in the pancreas cause the organ to digest itself. The body soon takes on a gruesome appearance and smell. Decomposing tissue emits a green substance, as well as gasses such as methane and hydrogen sulfide. The **lungs** expel fluid through the mouth and nose.

Insects and animals certainly take notice of all this. A human body provides sustenance and a great place for insects to lay eggs. A fly trying to find its way in this

crazy, mixed-up world can eat well on a corpse, and then lay up to 300 eggs upon it that will hatch within a day.

Maggots -- the larvae that emerge from these eggs -- are extremely efficient and thorough flesh-eaters. Starting on the outside of the body where they hatched, maggots use **mouth hooks** to scoop up the fluids oozing out of the corpse. Within a day's time, the maggots will have entered the second stage of their larval lives, as well as burrowing into the corpse.

Moving around as a social mass, maggots feed on decaying flesh and spread enzymes that help turn the body into delectable goo. The breathing mechanism of a maggot is located on the opposite end of its mouth, enabling it to simultaneously eat and breathe without interruption around the clock. While a first-stage larva is about 2 millimeters long, by the time it exits the third stage and leaves the body as a **prepupa**, it may be as large as 20 millimeters -- 10 times its initial length. Maggots can consume up to 60 percent of a human body in under seven days [source: [Australian Museum](#)].

The environment in which a dead body is placed also affects its rate of decay. For instance, bodies in [water](#) decompose twice as fast as those left unburied on land. Decomposition is slowest underground -- especially in clay or other solid substances that prevent

air from reaching the body since most bacteria require oxygen to survive.

Now that we know more about human decay, we'll look at a group of people whose workplace smacks strongly of it: forensic anthropologists.

II. The Claim of Martha

⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. ¹⁹ And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

²⁰ Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house.

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

²² But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away.

19 And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

John's explanation that **Bethany was near Jerusalem (about two miles east of the city on the road to Jericho)**

The text specifies that Bethany was fifteen ***stadia*** from Jerusalem.

One *stadion* is approximately 202 yards 9 inches; fifteen *stadia* are therefore equivalent to 3033.75 yards, or just over 1.72 miles (hence niv's *less than two miles*)

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serves a twofold purpose. It highlights the risk Jesus took by coming so near to **Jerusalem**, which was a hotbed of murderous opposition to Him.

And it also implies that **many of the Jews** who **had come to Martha and Mary** came from Jerusalem. That so **many Jews** from the capital came to **console them concerning their brother** suggests that the family was prominent, and probably wealthy (cf. 12:1–3).

From the human perspective, the mourners were there to comfort the sisters in their loss. But from God's perspective, they were there to witness Jesus' stunning miracle. The raising of Lazarus would be done in public before numerous onlookers, many of whom were hostile to the Lord. As a result, not even Jesus'

enemies would be able to deny what He had done (v. 47).

Men and women would walk separately in the funeral procession, after which the women alone would return from the burial site to begin the thirty-day mourning period. The first seven days of mourning were the most intense, and many of the mourners would remain with the family for that entire week. That explains why the **Jews** who came to **console** Martha and Mary were still with them four days after the burial.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2006). [John 1–11](#) (p. 462). Chicago: Moody Press.

Although comforting the bereaved was almost universally regarded as a religious and social responsibility (on the customs, *cf.* Edersheim, 2. 320–321; SB 4. 592–607), 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* (on the term, *cf.* notes on 1:19; there is no negative overtone here) become witnesses of the resurrection of Lazarus (vv. 45ff.). 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 his death.

Carson, D. A. (1991). [The Gospel according to John](#) (p. 411). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

20 Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house.

When word reached **Martha** that **Jesus was coming** into the village she **went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house.**

The actions of the two sisters are in keeping with the picture of them in Luke 10:38–42. Martha was the bustling, active one (“distracted with all her preparations”; Luke 10:40), Mary was the quiet, contemplative one (“seated at the Lord’s feet, listening to His word”; v. 39).

According to Jewish custom, those who suffered the loss of a loved one remained seated while the other mourners consoled them.

But Martha, in keeping with her forceful personality, left her house and went to meet Jesus as He approached.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2006). *John 1–11* (p. 463). Chicago: Moody Press.

21 Now Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.

22 But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”

Martha's opening *Lord* is probably to be taken as in v. 3. Her first words to Jesus are not a rebuke, as if she were saying that Jesus ought to have been there. Rather, they are words of grief and of faith: she is confident that if Jesus had been present while her brother lay ill, Jesus would have healed him.

Verse 22 has been taken by many to mean that Martha's faith runs deeper yet: she is confident that if Jesus asks his Father to raise her brother from the dead, his prayer will be answered.

That is not quite what the text says, and the unbelief reported in v. 39 stands dramatically against that interpretation. Verse 22 must be taken more generally:

Martha is not only persuaded that her brother would not have died had Jesus been present, but even now, in her bereavement, she has not lost her confidence in Jesus, and still recognizes the peculiar intimacy he enjoys with his Father, an intimacy that ensures unprecedented fruitfulness to his prayers.

Carson, D. A. (1991). [The Gospel according to John](#) (pp. 411–412). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

III. The Confession of Christ

²³ Jesus said to her, “**Your brother will rise again.**”

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

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “**I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.**

²⁶ **And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”**

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

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

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

Jesus responded by assuring her, “**Your brother will rise again.**” He meant that Lazarus was going to be resurrected immediately, but Martha missed the point. She assumed that Jesus, like the other mourners, was comforting her by pointing out that Lazarus would **rise again** at the end of the age.

Martha, however, was already familiar with that truth, and so she replied, “**I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.**” The resurrection of the body was taught in the Old Testament (e.g., Job 19:25–27; Ps. 16:10; Dan. 12:2),

Job 19:25–27 (NKJV)

²⁵ For 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,
²⁷ Whom I shall see for myself,
And my eyes shall behold, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!

Psalms 16:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ For You will not leave my soul in Sheol,
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

Daniel 12:2 (NKJV)

² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth
shall awake,
Some to everlasting life,
Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt.

and affirmed by the Pharisees (though not by the Sadducees; Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:6–8).

Matthew 22:23 (NKJV)

²³ The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him,

Acts 23:8 (NKJV)

⁸ For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.

It was also, as Martha knew, the teaching of Jesus (cf. 5:21, 25–29; 6:39–40, 44, 54).

John 5:21 (NKJV)

²¹ For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to *them*, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.

John 5:25–29 (NKJV)

²⁵ Most 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. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself,.....

. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹ and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

John 6:39–40 (NKJV)

³⁹ This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰ And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

John 6:44 (NKJV)

⁴⁴ No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:54 (NKJV)

⁵⁴ Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Ironically, while she believed Jesus had the power to raise her brother in the distant future, she did not think that He could also do so immediately.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2006). *John 1–11* (p. 463). Chicago: Moody Press.

25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

εἶπεν αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ· ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ κὰν ἀποθάνῃ ζήσεται,

Challenging Martha to move beyond an abstract belief in the final resurrection to complete faith in Him, **Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life.”** This is the fifth of the seven “I AM” deity claims in John’s gospel (6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 14:6; 15:1, 5).

John 6:35 (NKJV)

³⁵ And Jesus said to them, **“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.**

John 8:12 (NKJV)

¹² Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, **“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”**

John 10:7 (NKJV)

⁷ Then Jesus said to them again, **“Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.**

John 10:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.**

John 14:6 (NKJV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 15:1 (NKJV)

15 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

Martha’s focus was on the end of the age, but time is no obstacle for the One who has the power of **resurrection** and **life** (cf. 5:21, 26). Jesus will raise the dead in the future resurrection of which Martha spoke. But He was also going to raise her brother immediately. The Lord called her to a personal trust in Him as the One who alone has power over death.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2006). *John 1–11* (pp. 463–464). Chicago: Moody Press.

25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

αἱ πᾶς ὁ ζῶν καὶ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα· πιστεύεις τοῦτο;

Jesus' next two statements, “**he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die,**” are not redundant. They teach separate, though related, truths. The one **who believes in Jesus will live even if he dies** physically because He will raise him on the last day (5:21, 25–29; 6:39–40, 44, 54). And since **everyone who lives and believes in Him** has eternal life (3:36; 5:24; 6:47, 54), they **will never die** spiritually (see the discussion of 8:51 in chapter 32 of this volume), since eternal life cannot be extinguished by physical death. As a result, all who trust in Christ can exult, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55
 MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2006). *John 1–11* (p. 464). Chicago: Moody Press.

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

λέγει αὐτῷ Ναί, **κύριε**· ἐγὼ **πεπίστευκα** ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἐρχόμενος.

When Jesus challenged Martha, “**Do you believe this?**” He was not asking her if she believed that He

was about to raise her brother. The Lord was calling her to personally believe that He alone was the source of resurrection power and eternal life. R. C. H. Lenski writes,

To believe “this” is to believe what he says of himself and thus to believe “in him.” It is one thing to hear it, to reason and to argue about it; and quite another thing to believe, embrace, trust it. To believe is to receive, hold, enjoy the reality and the power of it, with all that lies in it of joy, comfort, peace, and hope. The measure of our believing, while it is not the measure of our possessing, since the smallest faith has Jesus, the resurrection and the life, completely, is yet the measure of our enjoyment of it all. (*The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* [Reprint; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998], 803)

Because of His infinite love for Martha’s soul, Jesus pointed her to the only source of spiritual life and well-being—Himself.

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Martha’s affirmation of faith in Jesus stands with the other great confessions of His identity in the gospels (1:49; 6:69; Matt. 14:33; 16:16).

John 1:49 (NKJV)

⁴⁹ Nathanael answered and said to Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

John 6:68–69 (NKJV)

⁶⁸ But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Matthew 14:33 (NKJV)

³³ Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, “Truly You are the Son of God.”

Matthew 16:16–18 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

What made the Nathaniel, the disciples, Peter and Martha and Mary different from all the others who did not believe and confess
v. 17

¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, “**Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.**”

IV. The Comforting of Mary

²⁸ And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, “The Teacher has come and is calling for you.”

²⁹ As soon as she heard *that*, she arose quickly and came to Him.

³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him.

³¹ Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, “She is going to the tomb to weep there.”

³² Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”

V. The Compassion of Jesus

³³ Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.

³⁴ And He said, “Where have you laid him?”

They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.”

³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, “See how He loved him!”

