

I AM THE RESURRECTION

John 11:1-44

Key Verse 11:25

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.'"

These days there are many who believe in the [resurrection of Jesus](#) whose faith is based on theological arguments. Since pragmatism and mammonism have begun to rule and overrule people's minds, most people have lost the faith that man is an immortal being. They have all become flesh; they have lost the awareness of spiritual reality in their hearts. They live in time and space, which is temporal. They do not live by resurrection faith. Those who do not live by resurrection faith do not know God. Those who do not live by resurrection faith want to live in this world forever with wisdom and money. As a result, they become restless, nervous, fatalistic, selfish and heartless. This is the reason Jesus wanted to plant resurrection faith in the hearts of perishing souls. Jesus performed many miraculous signs so that the people might see them and put their faith in him. But the apostle John recorded in his gospel only seven miraculous signs. The first one is Jesus' changing water into wine (2:1-11). Second is the healing of the official's son (4:46-54). Third is the healing of the paralytic (5:1-9). Fourth is the feeding of the 5,000 (6:1-15). Fifth is Jesus' walking on water (6:16-21). Sixth is the healing of the man born blind (9:1-12). Seventh is the raising of Lazarus, which is recorded uniquely in John's gospel (11:1-44). The raising of Lazarus is the last sign in John's gospel, and it is said to be the greatest sign, for it is the picturesque preview of Jesus' glorious resurrection, which gives a living hope to all mankind. Today Jesus wants to plant resurrection faith in our hearts.

First, Lazarus' family (1-3). In the quiet village of Bethany, one of the [satellite](#) towns of Jerusalem, there lived a family of three members: Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Martha was known as a hardworking woman. According to 12:3, Mary was the one who brought the expensive perfume she had saved for her own future marriage, poured it on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. To Mary, Jesus was more precious than the whole world. Jesus was the meaning of her life, because she found a new life in Jesus. While Mary was studying the Bible with Jesus person to person, she was very attentive to his teaching, except for blinking her eyes once in a while. Luke 10:39,40 says, "She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'" Mary was indeed a romantic woman. Many say that Mary may have been the woman in Luke 7:36-50. But this is precarious. Lazarus was between two sisters and was always so sickly that he could not work to support the family. Nevertheless, his sisters loved him dearly, because he was the mainstay of the family. The family of Lazarus was sorrowful. But as long as Lazarus was there, they were as happy as any family in the world. However, we cannot deny that they were sorrowful women; their sorrow of losing parents and leaving sick Lazarus at home frequently weighed

their hearts down. For the sake of gloomy Lazarus, they decided not to cry. But when the weather was gloomy, they also became gloomy. When the gloomy weather produced a thunderstorm, and soon the thunderstorm drove the heavy rain, they hugged each other and began to cry endlessly. Sometimes, Martha cried when Mary looked tired. Sometimes Mary cried when Martha looked overworked. But they felt strength in their bodies when Jesus visited their family from time to time to teach them the Bible and to feed his hungry disciples (Lk 10:38-42). To this parentless family, Jesus was like a good father.

One day, Lazarus, who had always been sickly, became very sick and lay in bed. When they saw their brother Lazarus suffering to the point of having breathing difficulty, the sisters were greatly distressed. They were overwhelmed by Lazarus who was hovering between life and death. They hugged each other until they collapsed. Soon, a beam of light shone in their hearts. They remembered Jesus. Immediately they sent to Jesus for help with a message, "Lord, the one you love is sick." No doubt, they expected Jesus to come immediately and heal Lazarus with his miraculous power.

Second, it is for the glory of God (4). How did Jesus respond to the news? Look at verse 4. "When he heard this, Jesus said, 'This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.'" Here Jesus said that this had happened so that God's glory might be displayed through him. Jesus did not see Lazarus' sickness as a misfortune: It was an opportunity to display God's glory. There is a great difference in the way of thinking between spiritual people and physical people. The best example might be Jesus' death on the cross. When good Jesus died on the cross, many people saw it as the most sorrowful event ever since the world was made. But it was not. Luke the historian saw Jesus on the cross as the most glorious event. Luke 2:14 says, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." Nothing can end in tragedy in Jesus. What Jesus said also teaches us that we must live for the glory of God throughout our lives and deaths. This reminds us of 1 Corinthians 10:31, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." This also tells us crystal clearly that the purpose of man as he lives in the ever-changing world should be to glorify God. We should not depend on sick "Lazarus." We should not cry because of the "Lazarus." We must live for the glory of God. In other words, what Jesus said teaches us that man needs a life purpose. Without a clear purpose of life in God, no man can escape from the purpose of getting worldly fame and wealth. But such a lifestyle leads them to the conclusion that they must crush their bones and melt their hearts in order to eat three meals a day. It is because their purpose and meaning of life is temporal, like grass in the field. On the other hand, when man lives for the glory of God, God blesses him and his descendants. He also gives man eternal life and the kingdom of God as his inheritance. We should be good students. We must be good citizens who pay a fair amount of taxes to the IRS. Furthermore, we should be men and women of clear purpose of life in God. Those who have life purpose in God can overcome the world. They are blessed, and God is glorified.

Third, there is no death in Jesus (5-16). Still, Jesus' words that Lazarus' illness was to display God's glory were inscrutable to his

disciples. Jesus' reaction is too hard to understand. How can illness display God's glory? What's more, Jesus loved Lazarus. Verse 3b says, "...the one you love is sick." So he should have gone to Lazarus immediately. But Jesus stayed there two more days after receiving the urgent news. After two days had elapsed, then Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." His disciples did not understand why he had stayed there two more days after receiving the news. They also did not understand why he urged them to go back to Judea when it was already too late to do anything for Lazarus. Now Jesus was about to go to Judea, where the Jews opposed him violently (10:31). They did not understand. So they said in verse 8, "But Rabbi, a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" The disciples loved Jesus, but they had an unsolved fear problem. They were deathly afraid of the Jews who were filled with murderous jealousy of Jesus. In reality, the disciples were not afraid of the Jews, but they were afraid because they were under the power of sin and death. More fundamentally, they were afraid of the Jews because they had no faith at all in the resurrection of Jesus. An old man visited a servant of God to complain about his daughter that she lives a life of faith. When he confronted the man of God, he was overpowered by the man of God. So he could not say anything. But he said, "I never love my wife. I came here to complain to you. But in fact, I have no complaint to you. I have many complaints to myself." Then he slowly disappeared from the sight of the man of God. Fear makes a man hate others. Fear makes a man extremely unhappy about himself all the time.

Look at verse 9. "Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light.'" The implication is that just as there are 12 hours in a day according to Jewish time, so each man has an appointed span of lifetime. No one will die before living out the lifetime appointed to him by God. In verse 9, "by day" refers to a person's lifetime, "stumble," to death, and "this world's light," to Jesus. Jesus' disciples were with Jesus all the time, but they were full of fear that they would die by chance or by accident. One bodybuilder ran away during Christmas dancing practice, thinking he would die if he practiced dancing intensively.

Look at verse 11. Jesus said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples were puzzled by his words and said, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better" (12). His disciples thought sleeping was the best medicine for a sick person. They assumed that it was natural sleep. But Jesus meant that Lazarus had died. Here Jesus teaches that death is not a dreadful thing; it is like a short time of sound sleep. When we wake from a sound sleep, we feel good. Likewise, to God's children death is like a moment of sweet sleep. To Jesus, death is a momentary transition from an earthly body to a spiritual body (1 Co 15:44b). There is no death in Jesus. Many Bible verses compare death to sleeping. Matthew 9:24 says, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep." In Acts 7:60 Stephen said, "'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he fell asleep" (cf. 1 Co 15:6b). When we have faith in Jesus, we have no fear of death. When we have faith in Jesus, the peace of God flows in our hearts.

How did the disciples respond to Jesus' teaching? Look at verse

16. Thomas said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Thomas sounded as if he were a brave soldier who decided to join a suicide squad for Jesus' name's sake. But in reality, what he said came from his fear of the Jews. All the disciples had the same fear problem. They were afraid of being stoned to death by the Jews. As long as the disciples were fearful in their inner men, they could not be normal men, not to speak of becoming disciples of Jesus. The disciples were fearful because they had no faith. The antonym of faith is not unbelief but fear. In Jesus we can overcome our fear problem. In Jesus we can live a victorious life every day.

How did Jesus help his disciples in this situation? In verse 15 Jesus said, "And for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe." Jesus knew that they had a fear problem. Jesus wanted them to have faith in him so that they might solve their fear problem. We must also help others to solve their fear problem by having faith in Jesus.

Fourth, "I am the resurrection" (17-37). The situation Jesus found in Bethany was very grotesque: Lazarus had already been wrapped in grave clothes and put in the tomb four days before. The bad odor was pervading. Many Jews had come from Jerusalem to comfort Mary and Martha in the loss of their brother. The atmosphere was filled with sorrow and was under the shadow of death. When Jesus arrived at Bethany, Martha went out to meet him and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (21). In this, she said the most regretful words in the world to Jesus, thinking that he came too late to help Lazarus. Still, she wished that Jesus would do something for her dead brother (22).

Humanly speaking, it might be good for Jesus to say, "Sorry. Don't cry." But he did not do so. Jesus gave her the words of life: "Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again'" (23). But Martha did not believe his promise. Instead, she understood his words as a theological argument. She said, "I know he will rise...on the last day." We must believe the thought of the last day. In the last day God will punish the ungodly and put them into eternal condemnation; on the other hand, the righteous men who shed many tears will be accepted into the glorious kingdom of God.

Jesus knew that she had superficial Bible knowledge. Moreover, she was tottering under the power of death. Martha was very fatalistic and unbelieving. Still Jesus gave her the most glorious promise of God. Read verses 25-26. "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?" This is the best promise of God. We cannot find such a life-giving promise in any other book in history, even though there are ocean-like books and libraries in the world. If we believe this promise, we live forever in Jesus.

How did Martha respond to Jesus' words? Martha knew about the resurrection (24), and she knew that Jesus was the Christ (27). But her faith was no more than head knowledge, which had no spiritual power to deal with her practical life involved in her younger brother's death (21,22,24,27,39). So, her life problem remained unsolved. Throughout history many people have tried to conquer other nations. Some have

tried to conquer happiness. The best kind of people have tried to conquer their sinful nature. However, no one dared to challenge the power of death. Before the power of death, all became fearful and despaired. Martha was the same. She loved Jesus, but she had not really believed in Jesus' words that he is the resurrection. Her head knowledge only made her complain about precious Jesus. Her head knowledge did not give her spiritual strength to overcome her despair.

Now let's see about Mary. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was, she said the same thing Martha had said (21,32b). She fell at his feet and said the most regretful words since the world was made: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." She had studied the Bible with Jesus one-to-one. But she did not believe his words in her heart either. At the moment, Mary was weeping at the death of her brother. All the townspeople were weeping. Professional mourners came from the funeral home, and they made weeping sounds. It was their tradition. Anyway, they all knelt down before the power of death. One boxing champion, both in the Olympic Games and as a professional, is known as the champion of the boxing world. But he did not know there was a formidable opponent he could not challenge--the power of death. So with his big mouth, he would say, "I am the greatest." Now he suffers from Parkinson's disease. Mary was the same as the champ. Human beings are not victorious without Jesus. But we have true victory in Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life. Resurrection is victory over death. Jesus is the only one who has won the victory over death.

Fifth, "you would see the glory of God" (38-44). The unbelieving atmosphere was overwhelming. What did Jesus do? Jesus' heart was troubled. Look at verse 33b. "...he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled." Why was he troubled in spirit? Obviously, Jesus participated in their sorrow and anguish at the death of Lazarus. But Jesus had a deeper reason for being troubled in spirit. Jesus was troubled in spirit because all of them were weeping, having been overpowered by the power of death. The people at Mary's house wept louder and louder at the sound of the drum beating of Satan. Jesus was sorry that they were under the power of death.

In this situation, some of the Jews stirred up people not to believe in Jesus by saying, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Verse 35 says, "Jesus wept." This is the shortest Bible verse. But it has a deep spiritual meaning. Jesus weeps when we harden our hearts and remain unbelieving. Jesus weeps when we are perishing under the power of death.

Look at verse 39. When Jesus came to the entrance of the cave tomb, he said, "Take away the stone." Martha talked back, saying cynically, "Lazarus has been dead and in the tomb for four days." She could not believe that her brother who had died four days ago could rise again. At the moment, Jesus rebuked Martha's unbelief, saying, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" (40)

In this verse we learn that we must remove the stones of unbelief in our hearts so that we can believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Also, we must have a yearning desire to see the glory of God through our faith and obedience. In 1985 Russian evangelism seemed impossible. But we began to pray for Russian evangelization in

obedience to Jesus' world mission command. Each time we prayed, we had to remove the stones of unbelief from our hearts and put our faith in Jesus. When we did so, we could see the glory of God. God heard our prayers and enabled us to have the first and historical UBF Russian Summer Bible Conference at St. Petersburg, Russia, with more than 80 Russian students from August 22-25, 1991. I must decide to see the glory of God by faith.

At his rebuke, they regained their strength and took away the stone at the mouth of the cave grave. Then Jesus began to pray. Look at verse 41b. "Then Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me.'" Jesus believed God would raise Lazarus from the dead. From time to time we want to do the work of God and surprise others. This is a common factor to all Christian workers. But 99.9% of them fail to surprise others by their achievements. They fail because they want to raise dead Lazarus with their own zeal. Here Jesus prayed before raising Lazarus from the tomb. He prayed to God that God would perform a miracle, not done by the human Jesus. Through this we learn that we cannot do anything, but we can do everything when we have faith in God through prayer. The purpose of Jesus' raising Lazarus was not only to give dead Lazarus life: It was to plant faith in God in the hearts of his people. Look at verse 42. "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." When the stone was taken away, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" (43) What happened? Look at verse 44. The dead man staggered out of the tomb in his grave clothes. In this way, Jesus planted faith in the people that he is the resurrection and the life.

Let's bow our heads and pray to God that we may remove the stones of unbelief in our hearts. Let's pray to God that we may believe that the resurrection of Christ is more important than the whole world, because the world perishes and fades away someday, but God's promise of Jesus' resurrection remains forever and gives man eternal life and the kingdom of God as their inheritance.