**JESUS, THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE**

April 16, 2017

John 11:17-44

Key Verse 11:25,26 “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?’”

Jesus did not say, “I will give you the resurrection and the life.” He said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” What does it mean to believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? Let me start with an example. A father and a son got lost in the desert. A son could not endure the heat and thirst, and said to his father, “I cannot go on any more. I am about to die of thirst.” But the father encouraged his son, “Be strong, and endure. We will find a village.” So they went on, but the son was giving up hope. Then they discovered a grave. The son was shocked to see the grave, and said to his father in despair, “Look, we will end up dead like this guy. There is no hope.” He had no strength and will to go on. But the father put his arm around his son and said quietly, “No, my son. The fact that there is a grave means that there is hope. There is a village not far from here. There is no grave where people do not live.” Indeed they found a village nearby and they lived. Those who believe in Jesus, the resurrection and the life, are those who find hope in front of a grave. They can find hope in hopelessness.

Look at verse 17. “On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.” At that time, the Jews buried the body on the day they die. The initial shock of Lazarus’ death had now given way to the cold reality. Martha and Mary felt sharply the loss of their brother. When we examine how the sisters were dealing with their loss, there is a marked difference between them. Look at verse 20. “When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.” Though Martha was very sad, she was not powerless. She had a strong sense of responsibility. She was doing what she could to manage the situation. She must have greeted all the guests and seen to their needs. When she heard that Jesus was coming, she did not sit down and wait for his arrival. She got up and went to meet him. On the other hand, Mary stayed at home. The news that Jesus was coming must have gone into Mary’s ears. But Mary did not move. Mary was a woman of heart. When her heart was touched by affection, she would perform extraordinary acts of devotion. However, when her heart felt dead, she had no strength at all. So she stayed at home.

Look at verse 21. “‘Lord,’ Martha said to Jesus, ‘if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.’” These words reveal the mixed emotions in Martha’s heart. She called Jesus Lord. She really wanted to trust Jesus. But she was also deeply disappointed. She said, “...if you had been here....” She knew that Jesus could have saved Lazarus from death. Yet Jesus did not. Jesus had deliberately delayed coming and Lazarus died. Martha could not understand Jesus’ action. Although Martha did not come right out and say it, she doubted the love of Jesus. At the same time, she really wanted to have a right relationship with Jesus. So she tried to affirm her faith in Jesus. But her heart was sick with doubt. Many people say, “Where was God when I needed him? I thought he was supposed to love me. How could he have let this happen? He does not really care.”

What did Jesus promise her? Look at verse 23. “Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’” Jesus meant that he had come to raise Lazarus from the dead. And Jesus would do it soon. It was time for Martha to say, “Amen.” Instead, Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Let’s consider the contents of Martha’s faith. Martha believed in the resurrection at the last day. Most likely, it was because she had accepted Jesus’ teaching. In John 6:39,40,44,54, Jesus repeated four times the words, “I will raise him up at the last day.” These words remained in Martha’s mind. So she was much better than the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection and live a hedonistic life in this world. But her faith was not what Jesus wanted her to have. Her head knowledge of future resurrection did not give her victory when she confronted death personally.

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life.” We will think more deeply about Jesus’ words in a minute. First, let’s see how Martha responded. Look at verse 27. “‘Yes, Lord,’ she told him, ‘I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.’” It sounds good. But she did not answer Jesus’ question. She was not listening to Jesus or communicating with Jesus. There was an invisible barrier between Jesus and Martha. They were separated by the doubt in Martha’s heart. What about Mary? When Mary heard Martha’s words about Jesus, she got up quickly and went to him. She was very sensitive toward Jesus’ affection. The moment she felt that Jesus had spoken lovingly to her, she jumped up and ran out to meet him. When she reached the place where Jesus was, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Mary was weeping. She cried and cried before Jesus, as did people with her.

The sisters reacted to Lazarus’ death in different ways, but their spiritual problem was the same. They doubted the love of Jesus. When they doubted the love of Jesus, their spiritual relationship with him was cut. Actually, they had been receiving divine training from Jesus from the moment he said, “This sickness will not end in death.” They were receiving real spiritual love. Admittedly, this training was hard for them. Jesus had allowed their beloved Lazarus to die. Nevertheless, their real problem was that they doubted the love of Jesus. There is a danger to doubt the love of Jesus in the time of hard training. Knowing the truth about Jesus in our minds is important, but it is only a beginning. To experience the truth in our hearts, we need training. We must go through many hardships. During those times, we are vulnerable to doubt. Therefore, we must learn to trust the love of God and hold onto the word of God when Jesus gives us hard training.

Now let’s think about Jesus’ words. Look at verses 25-26. “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?’” Jesus’ words were the words of life to Martha. Jesus’ words could solve her inner problems at the root. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection.” Jesus did not say, “I will be resurrected.” Jesus said, “I am the resurrection.” Jesus told Martha who he was. Simply speaking, Jesus is God. When Jesus said, “I am,” he referred to God’s revelation to Moses in the wilderness. In Exodus 3:14, God had told Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” When he called himself “I AM” God emphasized that he exists by himself. God is eternal. God is the Almighty Creator God and the Sovereign Ruler of heaven and earth. This God has power to raise the dead. This God has life in himself. Those who live in his presence do not suffer from the thought of death. They can serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness, before him all their days (Lk 1:74,75). Jesus is this Eternal, Almighty God. Jesus is the source of life and power. Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Why is it so important to believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? It is because there is only one alternative; it is to live under the power of death. We live as slaves of death. We had presentation on Slavery of Death last Good Friday. The power of death permeates our lives, our thinking and actions. If we do badly in one exam, we feel like we failed and we become fearful of ending in failure. We become fearful wondering whether my life will be over without making any mark in this world. Even after we struggle very hard to find a job, when we do not find a job, we become fearful, fearful that “I will end up in a temporary position all my life.” If we believe in Jesus, the resurrection and the life, we will not be under the fear of death. We can believe “This sickness will not end in death.” We can believe “This problem, this misfortune and this sickness will not end in a meaningless struggle.” It will not end in death. It will end in glorifying God.

When Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life,” he wanted Martha to accept him as God at that moment. She did not have to wait for the last day to experience Jesus’ power over death. Jesus wanted her to have victory over death immediately by believing in him. Jesus wanted her to receive eternal life and to live for the glory of God. Look at verses 25-26 again. “Jesus said to her, ‘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?’” Jesus gives us eternal life from the moment we believe. In fact, Jesus himself comes to dwell in our hearts. Jesus gives his life to us. It is life with Jesus that never ends. Jesus solves our future security problem. Jesus solves our death problem. Jesus gives us peace. Jesus gives us great joy and the meaning of life. Jesus wants each of us to enjoy his life right now and forever. We can do so when we simply believe in Jesus. However, Martha and Mary did not take Jesus at his word. How did Jesus deal with them?

Look at verse 33. “When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.” In fact, Jesus was so moved that he wept. Of course, it was out of compassion for those suffering under the power of death. But Jesus’ weeping had a deeper, divine element. Jesus wept over the unbelief of those he loved. Unbelief makes Jesus weep. Jesus’ emotional response reveals that he determined to help them overcome their unbelief as a matter of life and death. How did Jesus help them overcome unbelief? Look at verse 39a. “‘Take away the stone,’ he said.” Jesus gave a command to take away the stone. Jesus wanted them to challenge the power of death through an act of faith based on his word. Jesus wanted them to live by his word instead of their senses and feelings. Jesus could have simply raised Lazarus from the dead. But by telling them to take away the stone, Jesus helped them to make an act of faith based on his word. Jesus wants us to challenge unbelief with an act of faith.

Was it easy to take away the stone? No. Jesus’ words evoked an immediate response from Martha. She was afraid that opening the tomb would release a bad odor. Her mind was filled with the thought of death. She imagined the rotting corpse of Lazarus so distinctly that she could smell the bad odor he emitted. When we want to learn resurrection faith, we must expel the thought of death from our minds. We cannot do this by human effort. We must hear Jesus’ word. Look at verse 40. “Then Jesus said, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God.’” According to Jesus’ word, what was waiting for Martha behind the stone was not a rotting corpse. It was the glory of God. This is what Jesus had promised from the beginning, when he 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 we see Martha’s problem. She did not remember Jesus’ words. When she did not remember Jesus’ words, she suffered under the thought of death. She fell into doubt and became unbelieving. But at this time, she did not remain in her unbelief. She accepted Jesus’ word and took away the stone.

Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” Jesus was thankful that God listened to him. No one else had been listening to Jesus. Everyone had been wallowing in the power of death and the misery of unbelief. But God was with Jesus and comforted and guided him. Now, Jesus made a deliberate display of his prayer to reveal that God Almighty was working through him. Soon Jesus himself would leave this world and go back to his Father. His disciples would see him no more. Before that time, Jesus wanted to plant faith in God in their hearts. Jesus wanted them to learn how to pray so they could experience the power of God. When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” Lazarus came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. At Jesus’ word, Lazarus walked out of the grave alive. Jesus is the Almighty God. Jesus is the Son of God who gives life to the dead. Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Jason Perry was a graduate student in computer science at Princeton University in 1999 when I first met him. But he was kicked out of Princeton University after 5 years when he did not make progress in his research. It was one year after he got married. So he and his wife struggled financially. One time they did not have money and gas in their car to go to work. So they gathered all the changes in the house which came up to $5. Strangely they did not worry. They believed that Jesus would provide and opened their home and served many people. His wife Anastasia said, “I do not need a Ph.D. husband, but I need a husband who loves Jesus.” By the power of resurrection, he challenged again the Ph.D. study at Rutgers University, not because he needs a Ph.D. but to overcome the sense of failure. After 7 years of struggle, he got his Ph.D. and obtained a professor position at Lewis University in Illinois. It took him 16 years ever since we prayed for him to become a professor shepherd. Jason Perry demonstrated the power of Jesus’ resurrection.

In this passage we learn that Jesus really wants us to believe that he is the resurrection and the life. Jesus wants to live in our hearts and give us victory over death. Jesus wants us to live for the glory of God and do great things for God. Therefore, let’s take away the stones of unbelief from our hearts by making practical decisions to challenge our situations and problems. Let’s live by resurrection faith for the glory of God.