

John 11:17-46
Jesus Solves the Mystery of Death
4/17/22

ILL: On **March 31, 2011**, I attended the funeral of **Rudy Acosta**, a **19-year-old GI**, whom an **Afghan "ally"** had treacherously murdered a few weeks earlier.

Now, this Rudy was Christian, and as such, he had attended a local Christian church and Christian school in **Santa Clarita** during his young life. So, when his body finally arrived home, his church, his school, and his community turned out in massive numbers to honor his memory and support his family.

In fact, about **600** people attended his funeral and several **1,000** people more lined the roads as the funeral procession escorted his body to the cemetery.

But, one of the most profound moments of this young Christian man's passing came during his funeral when his pastor addressed us and said, **"Many of you are probably wondering why did this have to happen? Or, why did God let it happen?"**

And, I thought to myself, **"If I were presiding at this funeral, how would I answer such timeless questions, questions that every family member has asked since Cain murdered Abel to the day that an assassin murdered this 19-year-old GI."**

Now, I could give some theological answers such as, **"When Adam sinned, he cursed the race w/ death."** Or I could say, **"The power of sin in the assassin's heart caused this murder."** Or I could say, **"God has appointed a time of death for every man."**

And, although these statements are True, none of them bring comfort nor do they answer a far deeper and more important question: **"What has God done about the sentence of death—either untimely or expected—which comes for us all?"**

This morning, the Bible will answer what God has done about death w/ a story about a man, who died b/f his time, and left his family wondering, **"Where was God?"** And, from this story, we'll not only learn why God let it happen; we'll learn what God has done about the death, which ultimately comes for each of us.

[PRAY]

Please turn in your Bibles to Jn 11:17-46. Today, we're going to study **why** Jesus raises **Lazarus** from the dead, and what this **Miracle** means for us.

*As background to this story, earlier, a messenger tells Jesus that His dear friend, Lazarus, is deathly ill, and his sisters, Martha and Mary, want Jesus to come and help. But, Jesus waits **3** days until God's Holy Spirit releases Him to go. So, now, after an additional day of travel, Jesus arrives to serve God and aid His puzzled, grieving friends.*

(TRN) In (17-29), Jesus shocks Martha w/ some **amazing news**.

John 11:17–29 (NASB95) ¹⁷ *So when Jesus came, He found that [Lazarus] had already been in the tomb four days.*

¹⁸ *Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning [their] brother. ²⁰ Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house.*

²¹ *Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."*

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 on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

²⁷ *She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, [even] He who comes into the world."*

²⁸ *When she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and was coming to Him.*

(17-19) Now, John says that Lazarus had been in tomb for **4** days by the time Jesus arrives, b/c John wants to address a commonly held superstition.

A. People commonly believe that soul floats around for **3** days trying to get back into body. But, on the **4th** day, when decay sets in, **poof!** It's gone.

B. So, by this time, everybody thinks that Lazarus is as dead as a door nail. And, all that's left now for family and friends is ashes and grief. IOW, there's no hope—**it is what it is.**

(20-22) Now, Martha meets Jesus outside of **Bethany**. And, you can hear the **pain** in her voice— **"Lord, if You'd have only been here, he would've been healed."**

A. And, please notice this: Martha could've angrily asked Jesus a question like, **"Aren't You going to give me some lame excuse for why you're late?"** But, Martha doesn't. Instead, she shows **Trust** in Jesus.

B. In fact, she says to Jesus, **"I know that God always says, 'Yes,' to Your prayers."** IOW, Martha still Trusts that God gives amazing answers to Jesus' prayers, but this time—**for Lazarus**—it just didn't work out that way. That's all.

(23-24) Then, Jesus shocks this grieving woman w/ some amazing news. He says, **"Martha, your brother will rise again."**

A. Now, you can imagine how shocked Martha is when Jesus says this. She isn't expecting Jesus to say, "**Martha, Lazarus will rise again,**" as if He means **right now!** Instead, she's expecting some comforting words, not **Resurrection** talk!

B. IOW, Martha doesn't accept Jesus' statement at face value. Instead, she leans on what the **Law** and the **Prophets** teach. Namely, that the dead will rise again (Is 26:19).

1. IOW, she believes that One Day, God will physically Resurrect all His dead saints. One day, but **not** today! Lazarus is rotting in his tomb, and—**it is what it is!**

C. So, Martha looks at Jesus and says, "**I know that he'll rise again on the Last Day.**" But, then, Jesus makes another amazing statement that blows her mind!

(25-27) Jesus says, John 11:25–26 (NASB95) ²⁵ "***I Am the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,*** ²⁶ ***and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?***"

A. IOW, Jesus is God's answer to death—**untimely or expected**. And, as such, any man who Trusts in Him never has to worry about the curse that **stalks** all men.

B. So, at this point, we must ask ourselves the same question: Do we Trust in Jesus' claim? Is Jesus Christ **the** Resurrection and **the** Life for us, **personally**?

1. **If** He's not, **then**, we grieve like the hopeless and helpless **Pagans**. But, **if** He is, then, our Trust balances the loss of those who die in Christ and even our own death.

C. Now, poor discombobulated Martha answers Jesus. And, she says, "**Yes, Lord, I believe that you are Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into world.**"

1. IOW, Martha strongly Trusts that Jesus is **the** Heir to David's Throne, God's **1-of-a-kind** Divine Son, and **the** Savior of World.

2. But, she doesn't get what He's saying about raising Lazarus from dead does she? That's b/c what He's saying is **way too big** for her grieving heart.

3. **Think about this:** Lazarus Trusted in Jesus. But, Lazarus now lies **stinking** in his grave. So, what can Jesus mean? Jesus means **2 key** Truths:

D. **First**, to be Truly **alive** means you sense that God is your **Father**. IOW, you know God as your **Parent** Who always gives you right advice about everything.

1. You know God as your Parent Who always sees you safely through your toughest times. And, you know God as your Parent Who's always on your side.

2. And, this sense of God as your Father never dies—even if your body dies—b/c He warmly greets you on other side. Trusting in His **character** is critical, isn't it?

E. **Second**, Jesus also means that on the **Last Day**, He'll raise our corpses from our graves and join our **radiant** superhuman bodies to our **radiant Born-Again** souls.

1. IOW, on the Last Day, God will equip us w/ bodies fit to live in His eternally young, healthy, and strong Kingdom. Trusting in Jesus' **omnipotence** is also critical, isn't it?

(28-29) Now, Martha's loyal but puzzled remarks end her conversation w/ Jesus, b/c in her view, there's nothing left to say.

A. So, she goes back to get Mary for private meeting w/ Jesus outside of town, b/c the sisters want some time alone w/ Jesus in middle of all the funeral hubbub.

B. QTT: [Paul] 1 Corinthians 15:53–55 (NASB95) ⁵³ *For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.* ⁵⁴ *But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory.* ⁵⁵ *"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?"*

C. APPL: Resurrection means knowing God as our Father and enjoying **Spiritual Bodies** fit to live in His Eternal Kingdom.

We can put on **immortality**, b/c Jesus solves the mystery of death.

(TRN) In (30-37), what Jesus sees **outrages** Him.

John 11:30–37 (NASB95) ³⁰ *Now Jesus had not yet come into the village but was still in the place where Martha met Him.* ³¹ *Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.*

³² *Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died!"*

³³ *When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her [also] weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled,* ³⁴ *and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see."*

³⁵ *Jesus wept . . .*

³⁶ *So the Jews were saying, "See how He loved him!"*³⁷ *But some of them said, "Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?"*

(30-32) Martha and Mary's plan to see Jesus alone doesn't work. Mourners see them leaving, and supposing that they're going to grave, they tag along for moral support.

A. And, Mary expresses same kind of Trust in Jesus that Martha does. Only Mary does so more emotionally and more publicly.

B. Jesus is her LORD, and she knows He could've healed Lazarus if He'd been there. But, she still Trusts Him completely. IOW, **grief** isn't her God. Jesus is!

(33-35) When Jesus sees Lazarus' family, friends, and professional mourners hired for funerals loudly wailing together, He groans in **anger**.

A. IOW, He's outraged, b/c of all the pain, sickness, and grief that death causes in this fallen world. But, He's also outraged b/c **forgetting** God's Truth causes such **despair**.

1. Many of these mourners are wailing like Pagans—They're hopeless and helpless. So, they're acting as if God had never vowed to keep His people safe even in death.

B. The **General Resurrection** has **no** practical value for them; it's pie in the sky by and by. So, Jesus, our source of Resurrection Life, is just a **famous** teacher to them.

C. Now, John goes on to say that Jesus and Lazarus' family go to grave. And when Jesus sees the stark reality of Lazarus' tomb—He cries **quietly** unlike others.

1. But, why is He crying? Isn't Lazarus going to live again? Jesus cries, b/c He sees the earthshattering pain that death causes those whom He loves.

D. Do you know what that means for us? Our suffering **always** moves God! God is never far from us, pulling strings for some sick pleasure, like some bitter people say.

1. Instead, He's in the mud, the blood, and the tears w/ us, s/t He can bring **hope, life, and peace** to us—**who Trust Him**.

(36-37) The Crowd sees Jesus crying, and they get Him all wrong: Some see His love for Lazarus, but they think He's just as hopeless and helpless as—**they are**.

A. But, others recall that Jesus healed a blind man, so they're unsure if Jesus is all that He's cracked up to be. IOW, they need steady stream of miracles to keep on trusting.

B. QTT: [Isaiah] **Isaiah 42:3-4 (NASB95)**³ ***"A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth***

justice. ⁴ "He will not be disheartened or crushed Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law."

C. APPL: Our suffering always moves God! So, He enters into the mud, the blood, and the tears w/ us to bring **hope, life, and peace**.

God brings us **Resurrection Power** in grief, b/c Jesus solves the mystery of death.

(TRN) In (38-46), Jesus proves that He is **our** Resurrection and **our** Life.

(38-42) Now, the Jews bury their dead in caves and seal them w/ heavy stones. So, Jesus orders Martha's family servants to remove stone from Lazarus' grave. But, Martha, true to her practical nature, objects.

A. Clearly, she hasn't understood what Jesus meant earlier about raising Lazarus from dead. All she knows is this: Her beloved brother is turning into ashes. And, he stinks!

B. But then, Jesus sums up what He'd said to Martha earlier in day: **"Martha, didn't I tell you, if you Trust Me, you'll see God's glory?"**

1. IOW, Jesus reminds Martha that her brother's **untimely** death is a part of God's plan, so at the end of the day, it will serve God's **good purpose**.

2. So, dead Lazarus will help prove that Jesus is our Resurrection and our Life as He faces down the death that binds us to our graves. **Do you believe this?**

C. Now, Martha finally gives her consent, and her servants remove stone seal. Then, Jesus prays out loud for **3** prophetic reasons:

1) Jesus wants His listeners see that **only He** can do His Father's miraculous will. **2)** He wants His listeners to Trust that His Father sent **Him** as **the** Christ. **3)** He wants His listeners to give all honor and praise **to God**.

(43-44) Then, Jesus shouts, **"Lazarus, come out!"** And, **this** dead man hears Jesus' voice and comes back to life. And, it's stirring to think that if Jesus hadn't named Lazarus **specifically**, all the dead would've risen as well.

A. Now, Lazarus has been laying on shroud that goes from his feet, over his head, and back down to his feet again. And, it's tied at his ankles. What's more, linen strips tie his arms to his body. And, finally, his face is wrapped in a linen cloth.

1. So, Jesus quickly orders Lazarus' servants to free him, b/c Lazarus can't walk. He can only blindly hop and shuffle little.

B. But, it's crucial to see another prophetic Truth here: Lazarus will die again unlike Jesus Who will rise in an immortal body clothed in Glory—**the** Sign of our Resurrection to come. **Do you believe this?**

(45-46) Jesus divides Crowd again. Mary has large circle of friends. And, when they see Jesus' **Messianic** miracle, some of them Trust in Him but others don't

A. Jesus' miracle scandalizes that group, and they tell their hostile Jewish leaders all about it. So, these men begin to plan Jesus' **assassination**.

B. QTT: [Jesus] John 5:25–29 (NASB95) ²⁵ *"Truly, truly, I say to you, an 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 just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; ²⁷ and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.*

²⁸ *"Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹ and will come forth; those who did the good [deeds] to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil [deeds] to a resurrection of judgment.*

C. APPL: One Day, Jesus will call all Sinners and all Saints from their graves to condemn the former and celebrate the latter—**according to God's will**.

For us, the **best** is yet to come, b/c Jesus solves the mystery of death.

Do you believe this?

Bibliography

Beasley-Murray, George R. *Word Biblical Commentary: John*. vol 36. 2nd ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999.

Carson, D. A., *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

_____, ed., Douglas J. Moo, Leon Morris. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.