



I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

Part 20 of The Gospel of John

Pastor Mark Driscoll | John 11 | April 22, 2001

And tonight we're in, actually, my daughter's favorite story in the whole Bible, John 11, Lazarus's resurrection from the dead. My daughter Ashley loves this one. I asked her to think about it this week and help me with my sermon. She wanted me to tell you a few things, and so I will, as instructed. She wanted me to tell you that Mary and Martha, the sisters, really love their brother Lazarus, and we should love our brothers and sisters. And she told me that one day we will see Lazarus in heaven, and so she wants to meet him someday. And so she wanted me to pass that on to you, and so I have done so.

And I would just encourage you to continue, if you have children, studying the Scriptures with your kids. It's amazing what they can actually remember. My daughter's got all the details of the story nailed. I was really surprised. And it's amazing because she ponders it, and God gives her insight by spirit, and she's able to learn. It's a beautiful thing. And it's funny because certain Bible stories then take on all new kinds of significance as you've studied them with your kids, and your kids are then reciting them back to you, and so I would just encourage you guys to do that with your kids as well.

This is my daughter's favorite Bible story, so we'll dedicate this one tonight to her. And John 11, we'll just jump right in. "Now a man named Lazarus was sick, and he was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair." That comes up in the next chapter. We'll get to that.

~~The setting is very simple. Just give us the setting for the story. The setting is very simple. Jesus has these friends: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, two sisters and a brother. Jesus loves them very dearly. We have studied that Jesus traveled through Judea, Samaria, into Jerusalem. He is a traveling itinerant teacher, and so Scripture says he has nowhere to lay his head. He's basically without a home or a base of operations, and what we find in the 10th chapter of Luke's Gospel, beginning around verse 38, is that he would often to go to Mary and Martha's house, and they practiced hospitality, an art form that is long forgotten in our own day. And they would welcome Jesus in, and Martha would feed him, and Mary would sit at his feet, and Lazarus was his friend, and this became sort of a surrogate home for him.~~

And so Jesus loved these people very dearly, and he was very close with them. He had left that particular area because there was such hostility, animosity, and opposition toward him. And so Mary and Martha and Lazarus were carrying on their life, and then all of a sudden Lazarus gets sick and is in a terrible condition, and so the sisters send word to the Lord Jesus, "Hey, your buddy Lazarus is ill. He's sick." Obviously they're anticipating Jesus' concern and care and participation in trying to remedy the situation.

And so in verse 4, when he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. Know it is for God's glory, so that God's Son may be glorified through it." This is very, very important because what we'll see in a moment is that Lazarus is not just sick but that Lazarus is going to die. And in light of that, Jesus says that the final word in Lazarus's death is that it is for the purpose of God's glory being given to God's Son, Jesus. And it should be a comforting word to all of you, that when sickness comes or chaos or trouble or strife or grief or possibly even death comes, that need not be the final word. God still has the potential of working that out for something good. As Romans 8 states, God will work that out for his glory. God always has a way of taking tragedy and then working that for something that is beautiful and is glorious, and that's exactly what Jesus states.

One of my favorite theologians, Jonathan Edwards, has stated, I believe rightly, that the object of all things is God's glory, and when God gets his glory, God's people get their joy, and that's what you'll see happens. God gets glorified, and people get happy because when God is in control and God is in charge and God sits on his throne and God works things out, that gives us as the children of God rest and peace and hope and comfort. And that's exactly what is entitled in this concept of God getting his glory. God gets his honor, dignity, and praise, and the people get a right understanding of God which gives them comfort and joy.

And so Jesus designates: "He is sick. He will die. But this will not ultimately be for the cause of death. God has something far, far greater in store." And then we find, in verse 5 and 6, something that is very paradoxical, something that's sort of peculiar, something that may strike you at first glance as contradictory. We're told in verse 5, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." Jesus loves them very much. Yet, verse 6, when he heard that Lazarus was sick he stayed where he was for two more days.

Do you see the rub? "Your buddy is sick; he's gonna die." "I love him very much. I'll get to it when I can." Jesus is in no hurry. Jesus doesn't rush off to see his friend Lazarus. Jesus waits two days. And if you have been a Christian for any duration of time, you know how this works. God is always late. Always. Always late. Peter says that he is not slow but that he is patient. For us it just appears as though he's always late.

And so when you need God, he's not there, but he's there later. When you cry out to God, he doesn't come, but he comes later. God comes at his appointed time, not according to our time, and it always appears to us that God is very late. "Lord God, I need you now." And he says, "In a couple days, we'll think about that." "No, I need you right now." "Well, in that case, in a couple weeks, we'll think about it." "No, you don't understand. This is a crisis." "Well, then in a couple years, we'll think about that."

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them? After all, they have a need. They've requested that Jesus come. Jesus is taking his time. Does Jesus not love them? Says right here, Jesus loves them very much. So just because you find yourself in a position of need and just because you've requested that God would intervene does not mean that he necessarily will move at your appointed time. It also does not necessarily mean that his absence is any indication of the absence of his affection. He still loves you. He still cares for you. He's just taking his time, which is a little frustrating to those of us who live in time, but to God, who is eternal, not that big of a deal apparently. He will get to his things when he feels it is his time.

"He then said to his disciples, 'Let us go back to Judea.' 'But rabbi,' they said, 'a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you for blasphemy, and yet you are going back there? We can't go back there. They tried to kill you.' Jesus answered, 'Are there not 12 hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light.'" Roman and Jewish calendar essentially broke the day into two 12-hour segments. Jesus is saying, "When it's light out, you're supposed to work; when it's dark, then you rest. As long as I'm in the world, it's light. There's work to get done. Kill me, don't kill me. The bottom line is I have some things to accomplish. I have some things that the Father has given me to finish, and so I'm getting to work whether or not people want me dead."

"After he had said this, he went on to tell them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going to wake him up.' And his disciples replied, 'Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.'" See, the disciple is saying, "Well, if he's napping, he'll get up. He'll be fine. No need to go there and die."

And what Jesus is using here is he using a metaphor. When the people of God in the New Testament die, the metaphor is used on at least 14 occasions that I was able to locate, that they have fallen asleep. It's a metaphor for death, because Scripture says that when we die, our bodies lay in the dust of the earth, and our soul goes to be with God. That is what Ecclesiastes 12, I think it's verse 7, tells us. We die, our body goes in a grave, and our spirit goes to God. Solomon says that our body was taken from the dust, so that's where it goes. Our spirit was given from God, so that's where it goes. Paul says the same thing in 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, where he says, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

And so this is just a metaphor, but some – Jehovah's Witnesses, Bible instructors, people from some other aberrant Christian theologies and doctrines – take this metaphor to mean that – they teach a thing called soul sleep, which is that both the body and the soul rest in the grave, that the person is not really dead but they are just sort of in a catatonic state, laying in the grave, awaiting their resurrection. And I'm here to tell you that that is not what the Bible is saying. The Bible is very clear that that is a metaphor. Sleeping is a metaphor for death, and I'll show you why, in this context in particular.

"Jesus had been speaking" – verse 13 – "of his death." So it's clear that Lazarus is not in a catatonic state of soul sleep, but he is metaphysically challenged. He is very, very, very dead. "But his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So he told them plainly: 'Lazarus is dead.'" That was, I believe, potentially given him by revelation, because all he has been told at this point is that Lazarus is sick, and now he says Lazarus is dead. And the issue is, well, why did the Lord Jesus wait two days to get to his buddy if he knew he was dying? Jesus waits until he is dead to move.

"Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Jesus says that the purpose of this action is going to be Lazarus is dead, but we're not done. We still have work to do, and I'm glad I wasn't there, because now what we get to do is go visit him in his state of death, and I will work, and that will build your faith.

It's the same thing that John tells us in the 20th chapter of this Gospel: that Jesus performed a large number of miracles. He did a great number of signs and wonders, but John records specific events and instances of the miraculous for the purpose of belief. Jesus did a great number of things. John says, "I wrote down some specifics so that you may believe that he is the Son of God, and you may have life in his name." The purpose of the miracles and the healings and the feedings is never just the blessing of those whom are present; it is also for the building of the faith of those who will later hear the witness and the testimony of what Christ has done.

And so he says, "This is going to be a wonderful opportunity to build your faith." And you need to look at all situations like that: crisis, death, sickness, confusion. Those are opportunities for God's glory and for your faith to be built, and that is exactly what Jesus has articulated. And so he says, "Now we must go. We must go visit Lazarus."

"And then Thomas, called Didymus," which means twin, "said to the rest of the disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'" I love Thomas. Thomas has got his issues, as do the rest of us, but what I love about Thomas, he says, "Well, Jesus is – he's gonna go die, so pack a suitcase. We'll all go die too. What the heck. If Jesus is gonna go get killed, we'll go get killed." He's committed to go wherever Christ goes, whatever that may cost him.

The story transitions then: "On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. And Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Mary and Martha to comfort them in the loss of their brother." It was customary in a Jewish funeral for all the friends and family to pack into the house and to have upwards of a week of mourning, weeping, fasting, sorrow, grief, remorse. It was a very sad and grievous time. If you've ever lost a loved one, you know how this goes. It's just like the air gets sucked out of your home, and there is deep remorse and loss and a period of deep introspection and grieving among those whom are friends and family. That is exactly what is happening with the two sisters, Mary and Martha. Their home is filled with all of these loved ones who have come to mourn with them.

~~The Bible is a story of how Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home."~~

Probably the best-known story of Mary and Martha is when Jesus comes to their house and Martha is basically Martha Stewart. She's in the kitchen

cooking, cutting up vegetables, getting ready to cut up Mary. She's very frustrated with the whole situation because Martha's trying to feed everybody and get things done, and Mary's just sitting in there at Jesus' feet just sort of "Oh, Lord, give me wisdom." She's just trying to learn, and Martha's like, "Well, tell her to get up and help me." My guess is, is that Martha is the older sister. She kind of at least has that sort of attitude about her.

And you'll find in people's spirituality, they tend to go one of two directions. There's the activists who, when crisis comes, they do something. And there's the contemplative: When something happens, they pray; they ponder; they cry; they consider; they study; they journal. Martha is the classic activist: "Jesus is coming? Great. I'll get on the road and I'll run as fast as I can. I'll meet him halfway. Mary: "I'm just gonna sit here and cry. I'm just gonna feel this for a while and walk through it."

And I love the fact that as Jesus comes, he deals with each of them individually, and he recognizes that in their different personalities they grieve and mourn differently. And so Jesus deals with Martha, and Jesus deals with Mary, and he deals with each of them very specifically, respecting them as people and seeking to love them in their moment of need and crisis.

And so Martha makes a run for it, and she goes out to meet Jesus. In verse 21, "'Lord,' Martha said to Jesus" – she just launches right in – 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'

"I sent you a letter. Didn't you get it? I told you to come quickly. What's this – he's been in the grave four days. That's not quickly." Martha has got her agenda. She knows what she wants. She looks at Jesus and says, "You coulda prevented this. You coulda helped this."

But you gotta love Martha. She looks at Jesus and she says, "But" – she catches herself – "I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." She doesn't boss Jesus around. She doesn't tell him what to do. She says, "Well, okay, the Father will answer anything you ask. It's up to you. I'll just leave it in your hands." ~~She doesn't boss Christ around.~~ If any of you have tried that, you know that he doesn't respond well.

Fighting with Jesus is always a losing battle, and Martha recognizes this. She's standing before Christ. "Well, whatever he wants, that's okay," and so she just gives it to Jesus, and then she sort of comes to her senses, and Jesus says something wonderful to her. In verse 23, he gives her a promise: "Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'" He'll get out of his grave. He'll resurrect from the dead.

"Martha answered, 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'" Give you a little bit of historical context: The resurrection was a particularly debated issue in that day. There was two primary schools of theological instructors: Pharisees, Sadducees. They disagreed vehemently about this issue of the resurrection. One school believed that there would be a resurrection; the other did not believe in resurrection. They do come together upon occasion to fight with Jesus, and what I love about Jesus is, when they come to tag with him and to fight him on a theological matter, sometimes he'll throw out the issue of the resurrection. They'll start to fight, and then he'll just sorta walk away, just let 'em go at it. And that is a good trick, by the way. Like if you want, you can always use tongues or predestination, and just throw it in as – just sorta walk away, and people will just – they'll just duke it out for the rest of their lives.

Jesus does that with the issue of the resurrection. Some believed that there would be a resurrection where all would resurrect from the nation of Israel at once, as a nation. Others believed there would be no resurrection. The Old Testament is clear. I'll give you a few. In Isaiah 52 and 53, we're told that Jesus would come and that he would rise from the dead. It was the Lord's will to crush him, to cause him to suffer, and that the Father will raise him, prolong his days. He will see the light of life and be satisfied, that he will die and raise and go on in his living.

So it's promised in Scripture that Jesus would rise from the dead, and I'll give you one that's my favorite in Daniel 12:2. That in Daniel 12:2, we're told that in that day, that last day, the multitude that sleeps in the dust of the earth will arise, some to blessing and happiness, some to the eternal woodshed, and that's the way it goes.

And so resurrection is clear for God's people and God's Son throughout the duration of the Old Testament. And so she thinks, "Well, he'll rise at the last day with everyone else." The Jews struggled with some of Jesus' miracles, because on three occasions he resurrected people from death. Their resurrections were different than his, that they did not get a fully glorified body, and so they again died, unlike Jesus, who lives forever without end.

~~But she's had a hard time believing that Jesus would resurrect, and by~~

himself. And so Martha says, "I know that Lazarus my brother is gonna raise." But she gets into this theological issue: "It'll be at the last day, at the end of the age, with the whole nation."

"And Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life.'" On seven occasions in John's Gospel, Jesus declares himself to be "I Am." It's taken out of Exodus 3:14, where Moses is out, as the classic underachiever, shepherding his father-in-law Jethro's flock. A bush is on fire, is not consumed, begins to speak to him, says, "Hey, I'm God. I have work for you to do." Moses says, "Well, if I'm gonna go declare war on Pharaoh, I need more than 'Well, the burning bush says...' and so I need some sort of weightiness to come with me." God says, "Here's my name: I Am. I Am. Tell them I Am has sent you."

And so Jesus says on seven occasions in John's Gospel "I Am": "I am divine. I am the good shepherd. I am the light of the world." He says here, "I am the resurrection and the life." What he is stating is not that he just has authority over life and eternal life and resurrection from the dead but that it is in him. There is no life apart from him, and there is no resurrection and conquering of death apart from him, and so you must be in him, and he must be in you for you to receive the gifts of resurrection and life.

And so Jesus looks at Martha and he makes this declaration, and he then goes on to say, "He who believes in me will live even though he dies." If you believe in me, you'll die but you'll go on living. You will resurrect from death. You will conquer your enemies of sin and death. "And whoever lives and believes in me will never die." And he looks right at Martha, and he re-anchors her soul, and he asks her the one question that she needs to just

settle in that moment, and he requests of her, "Do you believe?"

Martha is undoubtedly frantic, tired, mourning, grieved, and he refocuses her attention not on her circumstances and not on her loss and not on her grief and not on her pain. He refocuses her attention upon himself. "Do you believe in me? If you do, I'm the resurrection and the life. There is no need for concern. I will take care of everything."

And I love Martha's answer. Very simple. She says, "Yes, Lord." She understands what is going on. "I believe that you are the Christ, the Messiah promised in the Old Testament, the Son of God, who was to come into the world. You are God come down to be with us." You are the resurrection and the life. I don't know everything, but I know one thing: You're God, and I believe that. And so she clings to that fact.

And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. This proclamation of her faith seems to resettle her soul. She calms down and goes back to get her sister Mary. She tells her, "'The teacher is here and is asking for you.' And when Mary heard this, she got up quickly and she went to him." Oh, Jesus wants to see me? I'd love to see Jesus.

"Now Jesus had not yet entered the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him." Jesus doesn't come to their home. Jesus comes nearby, and Mary has to run to greet him. "And when the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there." They didn't know what she was doing. Martha pulls her aside, says, "Mary, Jesus is coming. He wants to see you. Go meet him." Mary gets up, runs out to meet Jesus. Everybody thinks she must be going to the tomb to mourn the loss of her brother, so they all follow in her stead.

"When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet." And that's classic Mary. Mary is the one who deeply loves Jesus, and you see her on a few occasions here and also in their home. She just sits at the feet of Christ. She just puts herself in this place of humility and service, yieldedness, submission, learning, and listening. Mary is a great portrait for us all. She sees Jesus. She doesn't have much to say. She throws herself at his feet.

She says, however, the same thing that Martha did: "'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' And when Jesus saw her weeping" – she's just crying – "and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled." If you put these words together in the Greek text, what you get is the concept that Jesus was agitated. He was frustrated. He was a little bit angry. He was perturbed. Use whatever language you like. He was agitated. I don't believe he was agitated with Mary and Martha. I don't believe he was agitated with the mourners. I believe he is agitated by death.

We are told, in Genesis 2:16-17, God declares very clearly to Adam and Eve, "When you sin, you will die." That is because God is life, and when we walk away from God, we walk away from life. Paul tells us in the Book of Romans, the wage for sin is death. I love the analogy that Paul uses there. He says we have earned death, but he says the gift of God is eternal life. Death is earned; life is given. That we have all earned death because of sin. Had there not been sin, there would not be death.

And I believe as Jesus is there in that moment, he sees Mary broken. He sees Martha broken. He sees their friends and family distraught. He sees tears flowing down the cheeks of loved ones. He considers the fact that his friend is as good as dead and in the grave, and Jesus is agitated by death because it is the consequence of sin. It was not needed. God created us to live. We sinned, and so we die, and death is further reminder of sin.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that death is our enemy, and it is. It wars against us all. We buckle up. We take vitamins. We jog. But it's gonna be one person, one box; that's the way it goes for all of us. We will all die. It is our enemy. We fight it. We fight it as hard and as long as we can, but it always wins. We always die at some point in time, and Jesus is agitated by death, and I'm glad that he is. I'm glad the Lord Jesus doesn't look upon death and shrug his shoulders.

I may have told you this story on one occasion. When it comes to death, it's my most vivid memory. I have done a multitude of weddings. I have never done a funeral. If you look around this church, people are pretty young. I have not had a number of people close to me die.

I still remember, though, the first time that I had someone die was my grandfather George, and if I haven't told you about George, George was awesome. George was a very big man, working on his own ZIP code. George was a big guy, and George always wore overalls and boots, and so as a little boy I always wore overalls and boots because I idolized my construction-worker dad and my diesel-mechanic grandpa George, and George was the best grandfather. I adored him. I enjoyed him fully. He kept a big bag of lollipops in his glove box, just like the Bible says. He was wonderful.

And I loved staying at his house because what he would do is he would tuck me in, and then he would wink at me, when I would stay there on Saturday nights. And when he would wink at me, what that meant was: "Don't go to sleep; your grandmother's going to fall asleep. When she does, I'll get you up. We'll eat ice cream and watch wrestling." And so that's what we did, and so I loved George. George was the very best. Taught me how to use power tools, the whole thing. If you were a guy and your grandfather gives you sugar, wrestling, and power tools, you adore him with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. I loved my grandfather.

And I could still remember, he would take me sometimes on Wednesday nights, I think it was, down to the old Coliseum to go to wrestling, on school nights, and I'd get to be out late. And on one occasion I got to touch Andre the Giant. I got to see Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka. I got to see "Rowdy" Roddy Piper. I got to see Jesse "The Body" Ventura from the great dysfunctional state of Minnesota. I can't believe they elected a wrestler, but had I a vote at age ten, I would've voted for him myself. Now I would not.

But I loved my grandpa. Ice cream, wrestling, power tools, staying at his house. He taught me how to ride a bike. I adored my grandpa. And I

remember at age ten, my parents came to me, and my mom was crying, and I had never seen my mother in that state, and they told me that my grandpa George had died. I was just devastated. I had never even considered the fact that I wouldn't be with my grandfather. It wasn't even a fleeting thought that had ever passed my mind. As a child, I had never considered death. Never encountered death. I loved him. I figured he would live forever. It wasn't really a concept for me.

And I remember going to his funeral, and the preacher was speaking, and as we were sitting in the pews, he said, "Now I want you all to just accept this as a natural part of life. This is part of life's cycle." And I think he went into this whole stupid nature cycles thing, which didn't make any sense to me at all as a kid. He said, "Well, you know, nature goes through fall and then winter and then spring and blah, blah, blah, blah." I was just like, "What in the world? This is not natural. This is not normal. This is not the way it's supposed to be. My grandpa died, you freak. It is not supposed to be that way."

I was sitting there, ten, and I remember being completely annoyed, like "Why is he not agitated? Why is he not a little frustrated?" I was frustrated. I hated death. I'm looking around. My grandmother's weeping. My mother's weeping. My grandpa's gone. I don't have anyone to eat ice cream and go to wrestling with. This isn't the way it's supposed to be. This is wrong. Something has gone tragically wrong.

Solomon says as much in Ecclesiastes, where he says that God has set eternity in the hearts of men. We were built to live. Death is our enemy. We're not supposed to die, and as a kid, I knew that.

And so I love the fact that Jesus comes to Lazarus's tomb, and he's agitated: "My buddy is dead. Everybody is crying. This is frustrating. If it weren't for sin coming into the world, this would not happen."

And so there Jesus stands, right before he goes to Lazarus's tomb, and he is agitated. "'Come and see, Lord,' they replied." And then verse 35, the shortest verse in your Bible: "Jesus wept." I believe Jesus cries for sin; Jesus cries for death; Jesus cries for Lazarus. He weeps.

"And then the Jews said, 'See how he loved him.'" They look at Jesus and they say, "Golly, he loved Lazarus, didn't he?" And isn't it an amazing thing that the God of the universe would come to this earth, that he would have a friendship with very average people? Very average people. We're never told that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus are geniuses, that they hold any political office, that they're particularly important. They're just his friends. He hangs out at their house. And that God himself would cry over the death of his friend. It just tells you something about the heart of God. So Jesus weeps, and they all recognize that he loved him.

"But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'" Sometimes in the midst of suffering, evil, chaos, tragedy, people love to point the finger at God: "Well, if God's loving, wouldn't he have done something? If God was powerful, wouldn't he have done something? If God was present, wouldn't he have prevented that?" And they love to ask foolish questions and accuse God of foolish things.

These people do. Jesus is there weeping at the tomb of his friend, and all they can murmur is, "Oh, yeah, he's really powerful. If he was powerful, Lazarus wouldn't be in this state." And it's very frustrating to me because when we hit this problem of suffering and evil and death, everyone has a take on it, and most of them are nonsense. One of the most popular theologies in our own day has, very convincingly for some, not for myself, argued that God is not sovereign and, over human history, that God is involved in human history with us. And so when bad things happen, it's not God's fault, because God is just working out as best he can, just like the rest of us, stuck in the middle of this mess.

That is not the way that it works. God works out all things for good. What these people are doing, what many people in our own day do – tragedy comes, and the first thing they wanna do is judge God in that moment, not the problem is, it's too early to render a verdict. It's like walking into a movie and, ten minutes into the movie, saying, "Well, this is a dumb movie," and walking out. You have no idea what is going to happen at the end, but in your arrogance you believe that you can foretell the future and you know exactly where it is going.

Some people do that with human history. Some people do that with their own history. Something happens. They curse God and walk away and say, "Well, that's it. I don't like where this is going." Well, you have no idea where this is going. You and I have no idea where God is taking us and how he will be good on his promise to work out all things for good. We have no idea. We just need to trust him and keep moving and know that at the end we'll get some surprise plot twist, and everything will be glorious, and we'll be shocked and happy. We have to wait for that, because right now we're only ten minutes into the film.

And so they asked these ridiculous questions of Jesus: "Oh, does he not love him?" Well, it already says that he loves him. "Does he not have power?" He's already proven his power.

And the story continues. Verse 38: "Jesus, once more, deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance." John, the eyewitness, gives the specific details of this encounter. This indicates that potentially Lazarus or Mary and Martha were fairly affluent people, because this is a fairly expensive burial chamber. It'd be a cave that was hollowed out, with a large stone rolled across the front to protect it from robbers and from animals and such. It's the same type that was used in the burying of the Lord Jesus. Jesus, though, was not a wealthy man; he borrowed it from a guy named Joseph of Arimathea. The reason I say "borrowed" is because, three days later, he returned it like a prom tux: "There you go. Give it back to you. I'm all done with it now."

And so he comes to this tomb, and it was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance, and he says, "Take away the stone."

"'But Lord,' said Martha, the sister of the dead man, 'by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.' Four days, okay? If you have ever met a man, you know that a man stinks. In fact, if you have the King James Bible, it'll say right here. Martha says, 'He stinketh.'" And if you've

ever met a man, you know that just a regular man stinketh. And if you've ever been around a man who hasn't showered for four days, that man really stinketh. And if you were around a man who has not breathed for four days, that man really, really stinketh, okay?

Martha is saying about her brother, "He has got the bad four-day funk. Do not roll away the stone. When he takes his shoes off in the house, we almost pass out. Please do not roll away the stone covering the tomb. For four days he's been in a nice, warm, moist room, decomposing. We'll just mourn at a distance, thank you very much."

Jesus has done this to ensure that all know Lazarus is very, very dead, and I love what Jesus says. Jesus says, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" We are not done with the movie yet. The story is still moving.

"So they took away the stone." And then Jesus looked up, and he prays. He takes a moment to pray: "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." It is not that Jesus is ever out of communication with the Father. He prays without ceasing. But on certain occasions he pauses to pray out loud for the benefit of those who are around him. He does that in this instance. He wants these people to know that the work that he does was commissioned him by the Father, that the power that he has was given him by the Father, and that he and the Father are working together.

"When he had said this, Jesus called out in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!'" Love that. Augustine, one of the early church fathers, says he had to say Lazarus's name; otherwise he would've emptied the entire graveyard. Everyone would've been, "What, you're looking for me?" "No, everyone back. We're looking for Lazarus." "D'oh!"

Every time I read this verse, it cracks me up because when Ashley was about two, she had me read this story to her every night for weeks at her bedtime. We read her Scripture in the evening and pray with her and talk and sing songs, and she really loved this part of the story, and she would yell it every single time, and then she started using it on me. Like if I was in the bathroom and she needed to use it, she'd be like, "Daddy, come out!" and she would mock me with it all the time. So she still likes this little verse. She takes it out of context, but not as bad as some people take verses out of context. So every time I read this verse, I think of my daughter, and she cracks me up.

"And the dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face." They did not embalm the bodies, as sometimes the Egyptians and such did. They would just wrap it in a burial cloth and then put another cloth around the face.

"So Jesus said to them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.'" Sure Lazarus is like, "Thank you, Jesus. It's been a very traumatic day. I seem to be very funky right now. I can't see where I'm going. I'm wrapped in a burial cloth, and I'm walking out of my tomb." Jesus says, "Clean the guy up." I'm sure that Martha went and cooked him a bite to eat, and Mary probably sang and danced and had a great party thrown in his honor. And so Lazarus gets to come back from death.

And what I've told you on many occasions is that God initiates with people. It is not that we look for God; it is that God looks for us. It is not that we find God, but that God finds us. It is not that we love God, but that he first loves and we just love him back. It is not that we hold on to God, but that God holds on to us, and then we respond. We love him back. We embrace him back. We seek him back. We believe him back, but it's all in response to him initiating with us.

The same thing will happen here. Jesus has done this wondrous thing, and now people must respond, and there are two ways to always respond to God. One is in an appropriate way. We call that worship. You love him. You believe him. You follow him. You thank him. You obey him. That's worship. The other is sin, where you disbelieve him. You become hostile. You oppose him. You fight him. You disrespect him. You dishonor him.

And you'll see that every time Jesus does something, there is this very extreme set of two contrary responses, and it's the same in our own day. Some have said, wrongly and naively, "Well, if I just saw a miracle – for example, if I saw Jesus take a guy out of his grave or walk on water – then I would be a Christian and I would believe," and no, you would not, because the Bible is filled with people who saw tremendous things and didn't believe. They didn't love him. They did not respond in faith, and you'll see that in this next scenario. The reactions are tremendous.

~~Some people have said that in God's name~~ Some people have said that in God's name, "We're gonna follow him." We're gonna follow him.

"But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done." The classic tattletale going to the teacher. "When the chief priests and the Pharisees then called a meeting at the Sanhedrin." These are the religious leaders. The Sanhedrin is a body of 70 men, with a high priest who governs them. It is the ruling body over all religious affairs. It's sort of their version of the Supreme Court.

"What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone would believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place" – their temple – "and our nation."

~~We have what they call a saying~~ We have what they call a saying good religion, and this guy is ruining it. He's just destroying our religion. He's going to shipwreck our whole denomination if we just let him go. The reason is we have this little agreement. The Romans rule over us, and we don't get involved in their political affairs; they don't get involved in our spiritual affairs. So they let us have the temple and do our worship. That gives us a nice pension, nice paycheck. We have job security. We're very important, and we get to go about our business. But now Jesus claims to be the King of kings and the Lord of lords. That's in direct opposition to Caesar. The Romans are gonna get really bent outta shape. What they're going to do then is they're going to take away our religious freedom. They're going to start to persecute our people. They're gonna kick us out of our temple. We're gonna be unemployed and out of a job."

And so they have to decide between affluence, prominence, political power, and compromise backroom dealings that they have set up to maintain their

and life. If you do, I wanna read something to you from John's Gospel in the 5th chapter.

Jesus has previously to this section spoken about these matters. In John 5, beginning in verse 25, listen to the words of Jesus. As always, he prefaces his comments with a statement: "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man" – God become a man to judge men on behalf of God. "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."

And over in Chapter 6, verse 40, Jesus also tells us this: "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes" – it's not just enough to hear about Jesus or see Jesus do his work; there must be belief in him – "and believes in him shall have eternal life" – that issue of eternity – "and I will raise him up at the last day." What that means is, if you believe in Jesus, here is what is going to happen to you: You will die. Your body will lay in the dust of the earth. Your soul will go to be present with the Lord. That is what Paul says: absent from the body, present with the Lord. But a day will come when God will, just like Lazarus, speak your name and call you out of your own grave, where you will be decomposed and stinketh, and you will come outta your grave, just as Lazarus did.

And 1 Corinthians 15, Philippians 3:21 tells us that when we rise, we will rise like Christ, in a glorified body, absent of sin, absent of death. That God will make all things new: new heaven, new earth, new Jerusalem, new bodies. No more curse, no more sin, no more sickness, no more lies, no more death. All done.

And then what we are told is that the Lord Jesus, in Revelation 19, will invite us into his home, just as Mary and Martha invited the Lord Jesus into their home. And just as the Lord Jesus sat at their table and had a bite to eat, so the Lord Jesus will take us into his home, his kingdom, and we will sit at his table, according to Revelation 19, and we will have a bite to eat with him.

We are told, in 1 Corinthians 13, that we will see him face to face. As Lazarus came out and had the wrappings taken from his eyes, so we will see the Lord Jesus face to face. And we're told, in Zechariah 12, that he will, in his body, bear the marks of his crucifixion, and he will take his hand that has been scarred in his crucifixion and death and burial and resurrection for us. And Revelation tells us in Chapter 21, verse 4, that he will extend his hand to us, and as we weep bitterly, as he did at the grave of Lazarus, he will wipe every tear from our eyes. And we're then told there will be no more death, just life in Christ, because he has died for our sins, and he is risen from death, and he has conquered our enemies of sin and death. And Paul, according to Hosea, tells us then that death and sin have no more sting. Those enemies have been disarmed in Christ.

And so my invitation to you tonight is Jesus' invitation to those who heard and saw: Believe. Believe and you shall live; though you die, you shall live. And I'm calling you tonight to respond, because some of you will be like these people. You will grow weary and lose heart. You will say, "Does the Lord not love me? Has the Lord not seen my affliction and need? Is the Lord not consciously aware of my present strife? Where is God? I have cried out, and I see him not." The issue is, he is always late. They waited a few days. We have been waiting a few thousand years, but he is coming. He is late, but he will be right on time.

And so we're to wait patiently. We're not supposed to ask foolish questions and get into foolish conjuring and speculation: "Does he not have the power? Does he not care? Does he not know?" He does.

in his own body, in his affection for his children. He does love you. He has come. He is coming again. If you believe, though you die, you will live eternally.

And so I invite you tonight to respond, with belief, with love, with gratitude, with hope, and with joy, because you have been informed about the glory of God in Christ. That should make you happy. I invite you to respond through giving. I invite you to respond through partaking of Communion, and when you do, this is to remind us that it is in Jesus' body and blood, crucified and risen, that all of God's will for us is accomplished. And it is also a foretaste and a memorial telling us that one day we will sit at his table and we will eat with him and we will see him face to face, and those hands that were pierced on our behalf will break bread with us.

And so, Lord Jesus, we come to you tonight with great gratitude. Lord Jesus, I thank you so much that, though the wage for my sin is death, you have given me a tremendous gift of eternal life. Lord Jesus, I thank you that when you died, you died as eternal God in my place for my sins, so that I wouldn't have to pay for them eternally. Lord Jesus, I thank you that you are present, that you are always with me. I ask for the faith to see that. Lord Jesus, I repent of those times when I have sought to tell you what to do or I've questioned your love or I've questioned your power because my circumstances do not correspond with my desires.

Lord Jesus, I thank you so much that one day at your appointed time you will speak my name and you will call me out of the grave as you did Lazarus. And I thank you, Lord Jesus, that I will see you face to face, that I will weep with tears of tremendous joy. And that you will take your nail-scarred hand and you will wipe those tears from my eyes and you will embrace me, that you will walk with me into your kingdom and you will sit me at your table as a friend, as a part of your family, and you will break bread with me.

And Lord Jesus, I pray that same eternity for all of my friends gathered here tonight. I pray that we would all believe and that you would get glory and that we would get joy. Amen.