

Who Do You Say That I AM?
John 11:1-48
"I AM The Resurrection and The Life"

Introduction

After His confrontation with the Pharisees in **John 10:22-42** during the winter feast of Hanukkah, Jesus withdrew Himself from the public spotlight and went to a town across the Jordan river known as Bethabara (**10:40**). Bethabara was a little more than twenty miles from Jerusalem and was a perfect place for Jesus to stay just out of reach of the Pharisees. He knew that His time of crucifixion was drawing nigh, so He avoided Jerusalem during the winter months, knowing that He would return to Jerusalem to lay down His life the following spring during the Feast of Passover (Pesach). He was running perfectly according His Father's timetable and was fully aware that He had very little time left before he would carry His cross up Calvary's mountain to die for the sins of the world.

When spring arrived, Jesus received an urgent message from His dear friends Mary and Martha that was delivered to Him by messenger. Lazarus, their brother and also a close friend of Jesus, lay dying. The exact wording of the message was, **"Lord, the one you love is sick"** (**vs. 3**). Think about that for a moment. The one YOU LOVE is sick. That statement speaks volumes. The televangelists of today are always saying that if you are right with God then you will never have any problems. But, that is a false teaching. Godly people have tough times! Can I get a witness? Jesus never promises us that life will be easy, He just promises that He will be WITH US. Emmanuel means, "God WITH us". Do not be discouraged when sadness and trials come your way. Life is hard, but God is good. One of my favorite "Easter" sayings is, "It's dark on Friday, but Sunday's coming!" Having Jesus, means that we will never face our trials alone. He is an ever present help in time of trouble (**Psalms 46:1**).

By doing some simple calculations, we are able to ascertain that Lazarus was most likely already dead by the time the messenger arrived in Bethabara with the news. It was twenty miles from Lazarus' home in Bethany to Bethabara. Jesus waits for two more days before departure (**vs. 6**), and when He arrived in Bethany, a one day journey, Lazarus had already been dead for four days (**vs. 17**). Mary and Martha had desperately wanted Jesus to heal their brother. They knew that Jesus could merely speak the word and Lazarus would be healed, but Lazarus was dead. By the time the messenger returned they had given up all hope. But Jesus had sent the messenger back with a word from The LORD, **"This sickness will not end in death."** You see, Jesus knew that Lazarus would die, but He also knew that He had the power to bring Him back from the grave! Though death was inevitable, it was NOT the end.

This morning we celebrate Easter Sunday. This day is an awesome reminder for us that death is absolutely not the end! It may be dark on Friday, but Sunday is coming! Jesus IS the resurrection and the life. He who believes on Him will live, even though He dies (**vs. 25**). The fifth I AM statement of Jesus is a perfect one for us to study this Easter Sunday: I AM The Resurrection and The Life. I just LOVE the message that Christ sent back to His friends. **"This sickness will not END in death."** Thanks to Christ we also have the assurance as His friends, that the "sickness" of our sin will not end in death. He has brought us from death to life. Knowing Him means that we have a great hope of resurrection. A hope that assures us that this life is not all there is for us. A hope that these trials we face are only temporary. A hope that is based upon the assurance of Christ that for the child of God; this will not end in DEATH; it will not end in Disappointment; and it will not end in Decay! Jesus IS the resurrection and the life.

This Will Not End in Death

When the disciples heard Christ say **"This sickness will not end in death"**, they must've thought that Lazarus would soon be well. After all, they had spent enough time with Jesus to know that He didn't have to go all the way to Bethany to heal Lazarus. He simply needed to speak the word and Lazarus would fully recover. They had seen Him do this before (**Matthew 8:5-13**). He had performed such a miracle, for a Gentile nonetheless! Surely He would do the same for one of His dear friends. It may even be safe to assume that Mary and Martha had wanted him just to "speak healing" for Lazarus, rather than come to Bethany. For their home was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and surely they knew of the danger that awaited The Lord there. How sad they must have been, when their brother died. How confused they must have been that The Lord had not spared his life. Had they sent the messenger

too late? Should they have sent him a day earlier? What had they done wrong? These questions and doubts must have been tormenting them from the moment they watched Lazarus draw his last breath. How helpless they must have felt, knowing that if Jesus had been there then Lazarus would not have died. They just didn't understand. Jesus had a much bigger plan. He wanted Lazarus suffering and death to bring glory to God (**vs. 4**). This was for Jesus a great opportunity to show them just who He truly was. He was the Great I AM, and for Him, death was but a small thing to be conquered. Mary and Martha may have felt hopeless, but for God, nothing is impossible (**Matthew 19:26**). Death is not the end for the child of God, it is only the beginning.

After two full days, Jesus announced to His disciples that He was going back to Judea (**vs. 7**). This must have scared His poor followers to death. They thought that they had narrowly escaped death the last time that they were there! They were by no means in any hurry to return. What they did not know was that they had never truly been in any danger. Oh sure, the Pharisees had wanted to kill Jesus the last time He was there, but it is impossible to kill God unless He is willing to be killed (**John 10:17-18**). No one could take the life of The Son of God, but the time was fast approaching that He would lay it down. He had just one thing to do before that happened however. He needed to go to Bethany and wake up Lazarus! The disciples tried to argue that there was no need to put themselves in harms way. If Lazarus was sleeping, then surely he was on the mend. Perhaps all he needed was some rest. No need to risk our lives for that. Jesus told them plainly that Lazarus wasn't resting, he was in fact dead. The bluntness of it must have caught them by surprise, for even Thomas the doubter said, then let us all just go and die (**vs. 16**). I am not certain if Thomas is speaking here of dying along with Lazarus, or with Jesus, but you gotta give him points for loyalty. His attitude may be defeatist, but his loyalty to Christ is without question. He was resigned to die, if that's what it meant to follow Christ. Believe it or not, Jesus expects this same loyalty from us. Thomas, in spite of his negativity and weak faith, was fully committed to Jesus, even unto death. What He didn't understand was that Jesus was The Resurrection and The Life. Lazarus may have been in the darkness of tomb, but the light of the world was about to call him back to the light.

We too, like Lazarus, were once dead in our sin. There was no earthly hope for us to recover, for the wages of sin is death (**Romans 6:23**). The person who is lost and separated from God is dead, even while he lives, but Jesus is The Resurrection and The Life. The one who believes in Jesus will live, even though they die (**vs. 25**). Death is not the end for those who will believe. Jesus came to deliver us from death. Has there been a time when you put your faith in Christ and asked Him to save you from the certain death of your sin. The Bible says that **ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God** (**Romans 3:23**). The Greek word for "all" in that verse means "ALL". That includes you, and that includes me. You may try and convince yourself that you're not that bad, but God says that we are ALL "that bad" and our sins will lead us to death, but Jesus has come to free us from death. He IS The Resurrection and The Life. Do you believe? Then death my friend is not the end for you! Just like Lazarus, the sickness of sin will not end in death for those who believe on Jesus! So who do YOU say that He is? He is The Great I AM.

This Will Not End in Disappointment

I find it interesting that when Jesus FINALLY arrived in Bethany, that Martha ran to meet Him but Mary did not. Perhaps they were both disappointed that Jesus had not answered their prayer, but maybe more so with Mary. She was the one who would leave everything to sit a Jesus feet as He taught (**Luke 10:39**). She must have thought that after all that devotion and faith, that he had let her down. It is quite possible that these women had depended upon Lazarus to provide for them, for why else would they be living in their brother's house. Why had Jesus not simply spoken the word and healed their brother when they had sent Him word? Why did it take Him four days to make a one days journey? Didn't He care that they were suffering? I wonder what was going through Mary's mind as Martha went out to see Jesus, but she stayed in the house. Perhaps she was a little angry that He had taken His sweet time. Maybe she wasn't really in the mood to talk to Him now. Maybe this all hurt just a little too much. Maybe.

Martha ran to meet Jesus and the very first words out of her mouth were, **"If You would have been here..."**. Jesus could feel her disappointment. **He is a man of sorrows acquainted with grief** (**Isaiah 53:3**). He knows how it feels to be disappointed. He too was disappointed in their lack of faith in

Him. After all this time did they not understand yet just who he was? He responded to Mary, ***"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?" (vs. 25-26)***. Martha doesn't waiver for a second, she responds that she does in fact believe and is assured that Jesus is indeed The Christ, The Son of God (***vs. 27***). The Greek word that is used there for "*believe*" means "to believe" and "will continue to believe". Martha may have been disappointed in Jesus not answering her prayer, but she has settled her mind that she does and forever will believe in Him, come what may. That my friends is called FAITH. Unshakable, unwavering faith! Martha didn't fully comprehend what was about to happen there that day, but she had put her faith and trust in Jesus no matter what happened. She believed that she would see Lazarus again one day (***vs. 24***), but what she didn't know was that day was TODAY. Jesus had no intention of making her wait until the final resurrection of the dead, he was going to give her a sneak preview. Lazarus would be home that night for supper!

Martha went back to get Mary. She let her know that Jesus was asking for her (***vs. 28***). Isn't that a great verse! Jesus knew that Mary was disappointed. He knew that she still didn't fully grasp what He was able to do. He knew that her faith was weak, but He sent for her anyway! You see my friends, sometimes we let Jesus down with our lack of faith and bad attitudes, but HE never lets us down! He sends for us when we are struggling! I am reminded that when Christ died, Peter had all but given up on hope. He had even denied knowing Him (***Luke 22:54-62***), but when Christ arose, the angels at His tomb instructed the women to ***"Go and tell His disciples. AND Peter!" (Mark 16:7)***. Why did Peter get a special invitation? Because even though his faith had failed him, Jesus loved him STILL. He loves us unconditionally. What Mary did not know was that although this day had begun with tremendous disappointment, it certainly would not end that way! Believing in Jesus will NEVER end in disappointment. It will end in joyous celebration, and praise. The Bible says, ***"...we can rejoice too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And this hope will not lead to disappointment" (Romans 5:3-5 NLT)***. Trusting Jesus will never END in disappointment, for He will prove to us that He loves us with an everlasting love. Are you going through a trial right now? Don't give up trusting in Jesus. This will not end in disappointment! It may be dark on Friday, but Sunday is coming!

This Will Not End in Decay

As Jesus made his way to the tomb of Lazarus His approach was definitely not lauded with strong expressions of faith, but rather quite the opposite. He was assaulted with repeated statements of doubt and even accusations, such as, ***"If He had only been there." (vs. 23,32)***, and ***"Could He not have kept this man from dying?" (vs. 37)***. These doubts caused Jesus to ***"groan in His Spirit" (vs. 33, 38)*** and even to weep (***vs. 35***). Many have tried to explain away these emotions of Christ as empathy for the suffering of mankind, but that argument has never made sense to me. Jesus intentionally allowed Lazarus to die, and He had ALWAYS intended to resurrect him. While I do believe that Jesus is sympathetic to our pain, I personally do not believe that this ***"groaning of spirit"*** is indicative of that sympathy. The Greek word used for "groaned" is *embrimaomai* which literally means to snort with anger, or indignation. Jesus groaned because they still, after all this time, couldn't see who He truly was. He was God. The death of Lazarus had neither surprised Him, nor limited Him in what He could do. He was The Creator of all life. He made man from the dust of the earth. He also made the dust of the earth! To raise Lazarus from the dead was nothing for The All-Powerful God. Their unbelief was so discouraging to Him that it literally brought Him to tears (***vs.35***). How completely frustrating it must have been to listen to those closest to Him express such unbelief. So frustrating that it made God cry. I am so convicted by that verse. To think that my lack of faith in dark times could break His heart like that, after He has revealed so much of His truth to me.

The family of Lazarus even objected when He commanded them to open the tomb (***vs. 39***). Martha reminded The Savior that Lazarus had been sealed up in there for four days, and the smell of decay would be terrible. Still, they had no faith. Jesus prayed aloud to The Father for the benefit of those who were standing there in disbelief. ***"Thank you for hearing me"***, He prayed (***vs.41***). Obviously, none of those standing there had truly "heard" Him, but he was about to prove once and for all that God did! Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ***"Lazarus, come forth!" (vs. 43)***. It is worth noting that He called

Lazarus by name, otherwise the whole cemetery would have come to life! Lazarus must have literally floated out of the tomb for it would have been impossible for him to walk while bound up in his grave cloths. The man who had been laid in a tomb for four whole days was risen to life once more! Oh, the stories that he must have told his sisters that night at supper. The things he must have seen on the other side. I've always wondered if he was just a little upset with Jesus for bringing him back? The day had started off with Mary and Martha upset with Him, and ended, possibly, with Lazarus not too happy with Him. Just goes to show that you cant please everyone! Even so, the death of Lazarus did not END in decay!

I am reminded of a verse in **Psalm 16** that is about The Messiah. It says, **"For You will not leave my soul among the dead or allow Your Holy One to rot in the grave."** (**Psalm 16:10 NLT**). Who is this "Holy One" that God promised would never see decay? Jesus, that's Who! He died upon the cross on Good Friday, but he didn't stay dead long enough to see decay! He ROSE on Easter Sunday. Again, things may seem dark on Friday, but Sunday is coming. Jesus' story did not end in decay, because he rose from the dead, and so will we. Lazarus' family didn't want to open his tomb for fear of the smell, but all that came out of that dark tomb was LIFE. Jesus IS, The Resurrection and The Life. Because he rose, we will also rise.

Most Christians are blissfully unaware of Jewish customs, but they shouldn't be. For example, most Christians do not understand that during Passive week there are actually three separate feasts that are observed: Passover (The sacrifice of the Lamb); Unleavened Bread (The seven day feast that accompanies Passover); and Firstfruits (The feast that comes three days after Passover). Firstfruits is the recognition of the first sheaves of grain that begin to come up from the ground during the spring that symbolize the great harvest that is to come. The priest would take the first sheaf of grain and wave it before the Lord (wave offering) to give thanks for the many sheaves that were sure to follow, thanks to God's blessings. What does this have to do with Jesus? He AROSE three days after the Passover, on the day of Firstfruits. The Apostle Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 15:20-22**, **"But Christ had indeed been raised from the dead, the FIRSTFRUITS of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man (Adam), the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."**

Did you catch that? Christ is the Firstfruits from among the dead. He, like that sheaf of grain waived before the Lord on Easter, was the first of many more who will rise from the dead. Those who believe in Him are the "harvest" that is yet to come. Because He rose... We will rise! Death and decay is not the end of our story. This same Jesus, who rose from the dead, will one day call us up from the grave just like Lazarus. Our story will not end in DEATH, it will not end in DISAPPOINTMENT, and it will not end in DECAY. Thanks be to Jesus our Lord, we too shall rise. Who do You say that HE is? Friday may seem dark, but Sunday is coming! Happy EASTER!!! And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!!!