

***A Matter of Life and Death. The Importance of Faith  
Do You Believe This?***

*John 11:38-46*

The message of Easter is that a man named Jesus who lived in Israel 2000 years ago died on the cross for our sin and was bodily resurrected on the third day. Many people throughout history have been pronounced dead and then been resuscitated. But that's not what we're saying. Christianity claims that Jesus Christ died on a Friday, was put in a stone tomb, and then on the following Sunday morning He was bodily raised from the dead never to die again. The resurrection confirmed that Jesus is who he claimed to be.

If Christianity is new to you, I readily acknowledge that this may seem too fantastic to be true; after all, you don't know anybody else who has been raised from the dead never to die again. This whole idea of resurrection is outside of our realm of experience.

This Easter season, we have been studying an incident that has been called "the resurrection before the resurrection." We have been studying John 11, a chapter that describes how a man named Lazarus was raised from the dead. As we'll see, the raising of Lazarus from the dead is a reason to believe that Jesus was who he said he was. So who did Jesus claim to be?

Listen to what Jesus said about himself in John 11:25-26. To set the context, after Lazarus had been dead four days, Jesus arrived in his hometown of Bethany and talked with Lazarus' two sisters, Mary and Martha. Here's what Jesus said about himself in the middle of his conversation with Martha:

25 Jesus said to [Martha], "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

*John 11:25–26 (ESV)*

Jesus is saying something staggering here. He is saying that if you want to live after you have died, you need to place all your hopes on him (i.e., believe in him). Why? Because ***he is the resurrection***; nobody else has the power and authority to raise you bodily from the dead (see John 5:25-29). He is also saying that if you want to have a type of life here and now that cannot be destroyed by physical death, you need to place all your hopes on him (i.e., believe in him). Why? Because ***he is the life***; nobody else can give you an eternal, indestructible type of life. So when Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life," he is saying that "apart from me there is no resurrection from the dead and there is no eternal life." That is a staggering claim.

Jesus looks Martha in the eye and asks, "Do you believe this?" Her reply:

27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

John makes clear that Martha believed that her brother would be resurrected in the future on the last day; but she wasn't expecting Jesus to raise her brother from the dead in a few minutes. But by setting up the raising of Lazarus from the dead this way, he is signaling that the one who can raise a dead man really is the resurrection and the life. In other words, the raising of Lazarus was **a reason to believe**.

Since the mortality rate still hovers right at 100%, whether or not Jesus is the resurrection and the life is relevant to every one of us. Today we'll consider John's two primary reasons to believe this: The raising of Lazarus from the dead and the resurrection of Jesus himself.

**Reason #1: The raising of Lazarus from the dead. (John 11:38-46)**

Verse 38 reiterates the theme we saw last week in the previous paragraph.

38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.

As I mentioned last week, the most common meaning of the Greek term translated "deeply moved" was outraged or indignant. Jesus was outraged over sin and death and the devastation they caused in his good creation. Specifically, Jesus was outraged over the fact that his close friend Lazarus had been swallowed up by death. When he came to the tomb where Lazarus had been laid, once again he had this fierce reaction.

Moreover, Jesus understood that death was **an enemy that he alone could conquer by dying** and being resurrected on the third day. He agonized over his impending crucifixion.

John mentions that the tomb was a cave whose entrance had been covered by a stone. As we'll see, this is one of several similarities to Jesus' burial; he too was put into a tomb with a stone rolled against its entrance (Mark 15:46).

39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days."

Martha was not wrong about this; there would be an odor if they took away the stone. But Jesus wasn't afraid of the stench of death. He had actually **delayed** coming to Bethany so that the decomposition of Lazarus' body would have begun when he arrived. That way when he raised him from the dead, the fact that he had performed a one-of-a-kind miracle would be **undeniable**.

In verse 40 Jesus refocuses Martha's attention.

40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

Jesus was referring to his earlier conversation with Martha (see John 11:17ff). Jesus had told her, “Your brother will rise again.” She thought he meant “on the last day” in the distant future; but he meant that very day she would see him raised from the dead. When **she saw him walk out** of that tomb, she would **see just how glorious God really is**. . . and just how glorious Jesus his Son really is.

41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

Jesus paused, looked up toward the heavens, and prayed. He expressed to his Father in the hearing of those present that what was about to happen was an answer to his prayers. Here Jesus gives us a window into his relationship with his heavenly Father (which we can also have with him!). Jesus had prayed for Lazarus to be brought back to life, so he simply gave thanks that God had favorably heard his petition: “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.” Then he adds:

42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”

Jesus expresses that he was praying in the hearing of those present so that when Lazarus came out of the tomb so that “they may believe that you sent me.” The theme of “the Father sending the Son” is prominent throughout the gospel of John. On the one hand, Jesus **willingly left** the heavenly realms to come into the world as one of us (Philippians 2:5-7); but on the other hand, he was **sent** by his Father. Jesus wanted the people around him to understand that he was able to raise Lazarus from the dead because God had granted him to do so. Jesus never did his own thing; he was always “totally dependent on and obedient to his Father’s will” (Carson, p. 418).

Having prayed, we read what Jesus did next:

43 When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”

No hocus pocus; no fanfare. Jesus simply spoke. Jesus was the Good Shepherd who called his sheep by name: “Lazarus, come out!”

Notice how Lazarus is described in verse 44 (“the man who had died”):

44 The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Lazarus emerged from the tomb bound with his burial clothes: “linen strips” on his hands and feet; and his face wrapped with a cloth. These cloths were loose enough for him to stumble out of the tomb. But Jesus kindly enlisted others to unbind him and let him go.

When that happened, they saw just how glorious God the Father and God the Son really are. It turns out that Jesus not only had power over the wind and the waves. . . over Satan and his minions. . . and over sickness; **Jesus had the power over death.**

Notice the varied responses in verses 45 and 46:

45 **Many** of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, 46 but **some** of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

Some did NOT believe; rather, they went and told Jesus' antagonists/enemies what he had done. Next week Logan will be teaching the following paragraph in John 11, which describes how the Pharisees responded to Jesus' miracle.

But this morning let's notice that **many "believed in him"** - that Jesus is the resurrection and the life - because he raised Lazarus from the dead! It was an undeniable miracle. Nobody (not even his enemies) denied that Jesus had brought a dead man back to life. Whereas there were conspiracy theories about the resurrection of Jesus (see Matthew 28:11-15 - that the disciples stole his body), the raising of Lazarus from the dead was irrefutable.

They saw how glorious God the Father and God the Son really are. . . and they believed. They believed that he had been sent from the Father (how else could he do something only God could do?!?!). They believed that he was "the resurrection and the life" (otherwise he couldn't give life to a dead man). Therefore they experienced the life that Jesus promised all who believe:

25 Jesus said to [Martha], "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

On the spot, they believed in Jesus and received eternal life. My question to each of you is, "Do you believe this - that Jesus is the resurrection and the life?" The raising of Lazarus from the dead is a good reason to believe in Jesus.

But if we keep reading the gospel of John, we will see that there is an even better, more compelling **reason to "believe this"**:

**Reason #2: The resurrection of Jesus from the dead.** (John 19:38-20:31)

There are both similarities and differences between Jesus and Lazarus. First the **similarities**: Both of them were wrapped in linens and a head cloth. Both of them were buried in a tomb with a stone placed in front of the entrance. In both cases, when their loved ones came to the tomb nobody was expecting a resurrection. When Jesus told them to "take away the stone," Martha could only think about the smell. When the women came to Jesus' tomb early on the first Easter morning, they were bringing spices to apply to his dead body.

Second, there are notable differences between the raising of Lazarus and the resurrection of Jesus. As numerous people (like David Camara) have pointed out, in the case of Lazarus the stone was rolled away so that he could come out. But in Jesus' case, the stone was rolled away so that disciples could look in. John made clear that Jesus didn't need an opening to walk out of the tomb. Rather, he had a glorious resurrected body that wasn't subject to the limitations of our flesh and blood bodies.

John stresses that Jesus was eager to give his disciples tangible reasons to believe that he was the resurrection and the life. We're told in John 20 that on that first Easter evening his disciples were together in a room with the doors locked. Suddenly, "Jesus came and stood among them." He showed them his crucifixion scars in his hands and side, proving that he had indeed been raised bodily from the dead. But Thomas wasn't present at that time. You may remember that Thomas was the only apostle mentioned in John 11; he was the disciple who expressed his willingness to go to Judea and die with Jesus (John 11:16).

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Thomas was a "good skeptic." He wasn't the type of person who said, "No matter what evidence you provide, I will never believe that Jesus is risen from the dead." No, he said, "Show me credible evidence and I will believe."

26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

When Thomas was convinced that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead, the implications were astounding. Jesus was not only his Lord/Master; Jesus was also his God. The resurrection was proof of the divinity of Jesus Christ. The resurrection was God the Father's stamp of approval upon Jesus' life and teachings and death. As Romans 1 says, Jesus was "declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead."

In essence, a Christian is a person who says to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" A Christian is a person who understands the identity of Jesus as the One who has been pierced for our transgressions, the One who has died as our substitute and been raised from the dead.

29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus acknowledges that Thomas' faith was the result of seeing his crucifixion scars. In that sense, Thomas' faith was just like the other disciples. But Jesus then pronounces a blessing upon those who would believe even though they had not seen His wounds. Soon Jesus would return to the Father; He would no longer personally appear when people were skeptical about the resurrection. People would have to believe without seeing. And Jesus says that the favor of God rests upon such people.

Of course we are in the exact situation that Jesus described. I have never seen the crucifixion scars of Jesus and yet I, along with many of you, believe with every fibre of my being that Jesus died on the cross to pay for my sins and was raised bodily from the dead on the third day. Do you know why I believe that?

Significantly, immediately after recording Jesus' words about believing without seeing, John addresses this very issue.

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

My faith (and our faith) is based upon the written, eyewitness accounts of people like John. I became convinced that Jesus is the resurrection and the life by reading and discussing the Scriptures with a few other guys about 45 years ago. That is the common way that people come to believe.

About twenty years ago an engaged couple in college started coming to this church. She was Jewish and he was a follower of Christ. When they asked me to do their premarital counseling and their wedding, we talked about the importance of being on the same page spiritually before they got married. They both agreed. She not only continued coming to worship on Sundays; she began reading and discussing what the New Testament says about Jesus. Several months later, she told me that she was sitting here in the worship center before services when she realized, "I believe Jesus is the Messiah." That's how she came to believe.

It may be that you have come to believe here this morning. As you've heard the Scriptures, your heart was moved and you realized, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who has come into the world." If so, express your faith to God in prayer. And tell a Christian friend that you now believe.

If you don't yet believe, but you're open to believing, be a good skeptic. Continue coming to worship and hearing the Scriptures taught. Read the Bible for yourself (if you need a copy, we have free Bibles available in our library just off the foyer outside the worship center). As well, there are people here at Faith who would love to read and talk about the Scriptures with you (w/o any pressure whatsoever). Let us know through the Connection Card, email, however. . . and we'll be in touch.

Unless Christ returns first, one day every one of us will die physically. Jesus makes this offer: "If you believe in me, you will live even if you die." Do you believe this?