

43. I am the Resurrection and the Life

July 31, 2011

Many of you gentlemen, even ladies, hunt around Arizona – deer, javelinas, coyotes, alligators, elephants, etc. As you know, after you hunt your animal, you have to field dress it right away, otherwise you are going to lose that animal because of the fast decomposition due to high temperatures around the year. When a person or an animal dies, the first of the five different stages of decomposition starts immediately because there are bacteria within the dead body. I can go on with more gory details about decomposition, but I will stop here. Very appetizing, don't you think? By the way, what's for lunch, honey? A fruitcake?

There is no person or medical procedure that can reverse this decomposition, especially like the dead body of Lazarus who had been inside of the tomb for four days. Yes, it would take God's miraculous intervention that overrides the law of nature. Not just any so-called gods, but one true living God of the universe – Jesus Christ.

This morning we are going to learn about Jesus' fifth 'I AM' statement: "I am the Resurrection and the Life," in our study. It is an extremely bold statement. Can He back up His power over death with any proof or evidence? Yes, He can, not like a certain politician, but our God truly can.

A. THE SETTING

John 11:17-19 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. 19 And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

Some of you may remember what I said about the distance between Jerusalem and Bethany last Sunday. Yes, I said that it is 1.3 miles. But the Bible in here says about two miles. Does it mean that I lied? No, the straight distance is 1.3 miles according to the satellite map I used, but the actual road distance is about 2 miles. So don't sue me.

In their ancient custom, the Jews didn't practice embalming dead bodies. Again in our last Sunday study I said, "The Jews embalmed." John Sienicki who did the bulletin announcements gently corrected me that I was wrong. Thank you, my friend.

The Jewish people didn't embalm their dead like Egyptians, rather they wrapped up their corpse with strips of linen and spices by each limb to reduce the decomposing odor until they bury the bodies in the tombs. They had to do it almost immediately.

Another part of their ancient custom regarding a funeral is that they had a period of mourning up to 30 days. I don't know how they could get any work done there. The first seven days were the most intense. During that period of time, a person would not anoint oneself with the oil, would not bathe, would not wear shoes, would sort of hang around in a disheveled state. It is a symbol of deep and intense mourning.

At the same time, the family would hire a group of professional mourners. These people would come in and wail loud because it was believed that the louder the noise that was made, the more the dead person was loved and missed. In our country, when we go to a funeral home for viewing or a grave site for burial, we are all quite and whisper with one another. Obviously different cultures and different cus-

toms. I think I'd rather hang around our country than theirs, no offense to any Jewish people.

B. A TALE OF TWO SISTERS – MARTHA AND MARY

John 11:20-24 Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. 21 Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But 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 at the last day."

John 11:27-32 She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." 28 And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you." 29 As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. 31 Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there." 32 Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

The event recorded in Luke chapter 10 gives us a clear picture of Martha and Mary's temperament. Martha was the worker, the active one, the one who got the things done. You would see her in the kitchen, in the yard, wheeling and dealing. She would be everywhere.

In the meanwhile, Mary was the contemplative one who sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to His Word.

Here, in this portion of the Book of John, we again see a clear display of their characteristics. Notice that they both made the exact same comment when they saw Jesus. I am sure that while they were waiting for Jesus to come, they said this phrase to one another many times. With much disappointment in their hearts, they blurted out. In a way we cannot blame them for it. We probably would have done the same.

Although their words were the same, their posture was not. Martha ran to Him, active and erect; Mary fell at His feet, passive and prostrate. They both were hurting and confused, but still believing in Jesus.

What Martha said here is far more insightful than any of the comments by Jesus' disciples, the Pharisees, or any religious leaders at that time.

Martha needed intellectual and theological assurance and Mary needs emotional support. Martha needed to know that Jesus was in control; Mary needed to know that Jesus cared. Without rebukes and reservations, Jesus met each sister where she was – whether standing or prostrate; and whether needing intellectual and theological assurance or emotional support.

Some Bible commentators give more worthiness to Mary because she prostrated before Jesus unlike Martha, I don't think that it matters one way or another. They

both didn't understand our all-knowing and all-powerful God's real reason for the delay.

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Before we move on to the next verses too quickly, we must hang here a little longer. I want all of you to pay attention to the one word both sisters used in their identical question: "if".

Did they know and believe that Jesus is the Son of God and has the power to heal their brother Lazarus? Without a doubt. Did they know and believe that Jesus could heal Lazarus from the distance without being there? No. Did they know and believe that Jesus could raise now-very-dead Lazarus? Say what? They had no idea. What am I saying? Let's ask ourselves how often do we limit God's will for us by asking for our will over His?

Ephesians 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,

God's power is not limited by His proximity or our imagination.

C. I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

This is the fifth "I AM" statement of Jesus in the Book of John. It is important to note that Jesus did not deny what Martha said about the future resurrection. The resurrection of the human body is a cardinal doctrine in the orthodox Jewish faith at that time and Christian faith now. But in His great I AM statement, our Lord completely transformed the doctrine of the resurrection and, in so doing, brought great comfort to Martha's heart.

To begin with, He brought the doctrine of the resurrection into the light through this incident. The OT revelation about death and resurrection is not clear or complete. In fact, there are some passages in Psalms and Ecclesiastes that almost make one believe that death is the end and there is no hope beyond the grave.

As apostle Paul wrote in his first letter to the church of Corinth, without the resurrection of Jesus Christ and our future resurrection, we are most pitiable.

1 Corinthians 15:13-19 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. 15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up-- if in fact the dead do not rise. 16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

Some of you may wonder when this resurrection is going to happen? Would it be a long process? Actually, no one knows the exact date, nor time. It will happen at the time of the Rapture. This is the second resurrection for the born-again believers of Jesus who died in the past.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 *But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*

The first resurrection was done by Jesus Himself as the four Gospels and many other Books in the Bible recorded. But the third resurrection which is for all the unbelievers in human history will happen in the future right before the Great White Throne Judgment.

Revelation 20:11-13 *Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.*

D. LAZARUS, COME FORTH

John 11:33-44 *Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. 34 And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" 37 And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" 38 Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" 41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." 43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" 44 And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."*

We have the shortest verse in the Bible here in v35. Why did He cry? To see the real reason, we must notice what was happening to the heart of Jesus in v33. Our Lord's response was to groan within and was troubled.

The original Greek word for 'troubled' is "tarasso" which means "be moved with indignation." At what was He indignant? At the ravages of sin in the world that He had created. Death is an enemy, and satan uses the fear of death as a terrible weapon. No wonder Jesus was indignant!

Though it is the shortest verse, yet it is one of the deepest verses in Scriptures. It reveals the humanity of our Savior. He has entered into all of our experiences and knows how we feel. His tears assure us of His sympathy and as a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

When Jesus told them to remove the stone, Martha and others thought that He wanted to see His friend Lazarus one more time. To them, there was no hope for Lazarus, nor for themselves.

If I can translate what Martha said in v39 in Chinese, here it is: Stin-Kee-Poo.

Can you just imagine being there when Lazarus was walking out of the tomb? Just about everyone was having a heart attack by witnessing a dead-man walking, literally.

Jesus spoke to a dead body of Lazarus as if he was alive, because He is God who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.

Lazarus was not resurrected, but resuscitated. He arose bound in grave-clothes, but when Jesus resurrected, He left His grave-clothes behind in the tomb.

Please note v39 and v44. Jesus commanded the people around Him to remove the stone and loose Lazarus' grave-clothes and let him go. God does what only He can do, and look for men who are willing to be used by Him to bring glory to Him. Why? Is it because He cannot do without us? No way. He can do everything perfectly without us, but He chooses to include us in His master plan.

Let's make it clear: Not everybody goes to heaven after he or she dies. The vast majority will end up in hell even though they might be sincerely good people, even religious people. Why? Because they were not born-again through Jesus Christ.

If you are not a born-again Christian, God is trying to resuscitate your spiritually dead heart now. What is it going to take for you to wake up from your spiritual death? If you don't respond to His care, you will go from your current spiritual death to eternal death in hell. Is it worth it for you to keep your pride over your eternal life?

E. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Whatever your spiritual need is, God can meet you where you are if you sincerely seek Him.
- 2) God's power is not limited by His proximity or our imagination.
- 3) You cannot separate Jesus' death and resurrection from Christianity. It is one of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity.
- 4) We can expect God to do His part; He expects us to do our part – trusting and obeying Him.