

**The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.**

## **Resurrection and Life John 11:17-27**

**Intro:** Although **ch11** records the premier miracle of Jesus Christ, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, we can't help but notice that John is in no hurry to get to the central miracle. He moves this story through different stages and each stage (or act) serves as a vehicle for important doctrinal teaching. In **vs1-3**, we saw how this miracle would have a dramatic effect on the key characters in the story. In the next 3 verses, we saw how even the difficult circumstances of our lives can serve to reveal the glory of God to ourselves and others. Last time, we looked at the ramifications of time in the believer's life; what Jesus thought about death and Thomas' declaration to follow Jesus in the face of certain death. The news of Lazarus' death and Jesus' desire to return to Judea shook the disciples up but Jesus was going to use this entire episode as a means to increase and strengthen the faith of His disciples.

Jesus wasn't only concerned about the faith of His own disciples; He was also concerned about the faith of Martha and Mary. Every experience of trial or suffering in the life of the believer ought to increase their faith, but this kind of spiritual growth is not automatic. It's been said that suffering in a believer's life will either make them better or it will make them bitter. I have found this saying to be very true. I've met or heard of people who have gone through some terrible things in their life who still have a sweet spirit about them and an ever-increasing positive outlook of the future. I've also met a few people who have suffered some difficulties in life which have made them extremely bitter to the point that it touches everything they do and say. What makes the difference? We, as God's people, must always respond positively to the ministry of the God's Word and God's Holy Spirit regardless of the circumstances.

Things might not always turn out like we think they should but that only matters if we are in control of our lives. If you are a Christian and you still think you are in control of your own life or destiny – you are set for disappointment! On the other hand, if you have come to grips with the iron-clad truth that God is in complete control of your life then you should know that whatever circumstances come into your life have been pre-approved by God for His glory and for your betterment. At least, that's what the Bible

teaches – if we'll only believe and walk in it. Jesus had sent a promise on ahead to these two sisters in vs4.; now He's returning to Bethany to see how they have received this promise.

**17-18-** The 4 days may be significant. There was an old Jewish superstition that believed that the soul of the recently deceased stayed near the grave for 3 days, hoping to be able to return to the body. On the 4<sup>th</sup> day, when it sees decomposition setting in, it finally leaves. We know this is not the case but it was a commonly accepted truth in that day. Thus, in the Jewish mind, waiting for the 4<sup>th</sup> day meant that a time had been reached when the only hope for Lazarus was a divine act of power. Good thing Lazarus knew a guy who fit that bill.

**19-24-** Before we look at the Lord's upcoming statement about the nature of resurrection, we need to look at the one He will speak it to – Martha. Martha is an excellent example of a certain type of believer that is far too common in Christian circles today. Like Martha, these Christians do not distrust Jesus, but neither do they trust Him with that full confidence that allows them to lay aside their concerns and simply rest in His good provision. They believe, sure; but they're always worrying themselves with "How?", "Why?" and "What if?" to the point that they miss out on blessings that could be theirs if they would simply believe and walk in the belief.

This kind of faith always attempts to limit God or scale down His promises, which is the same thing. Don't get me wrong; Martha's greeting here is an expression of faith: if Jesus had been present her brother would not have died. Nobody ever died in the presence of Jesus! Her greeting expresses more regret than rebuke but we should also notice that within her statement, Martha is limiting the Lord's work both to time and location. Her comment, If you had been here limits Jesus power to time for it clearly implies that she believed Jesus could've done something 4 days earlier but that He couldn't do what was obviously necessary now. It also limits Jesus' power to a location as it assumes that He could not have healed Lazarus from a distance.

We know Jesus delayed His return to Bethany so that there would be no doubt Lazarus was dead and no reason to doubt the miracle. We also know that Jesus always intended to raise Lazarus from the dead (11). We know all this but Martha didn't know any of it and her greeting expresses her own

limited faith in the power of Jesus Christ. Sadly, many Christians seek to limit Jesus in the same way today. They believe He's able to do all that He says He will do – but not now and not here. They don't expect Jesus to work in their lives and are always surprised when He does.

Another characteristic of Martha's uninformed faith is that she treated the words of Jesus impersonally. The first thing Jesus said after returning to Bethany was a tremendous promise (v23). But instead of taking this in the best and most personal sense—a promise that Jesus was about to restore her brother to life—Martha pushed the words off into the future as though the words had no bearing on herself or her situation.

This is also what many of us do with Christ's promises. We believe them as they apply to others or to a far distant time. But we don't receive them personally; we don't "own" them, so to speak. For us, the glorious promises of God are too often thought of as antiques in the attic. They have value, we suppose; but practically we get nothing out of them. It's like the person who has a small fortune in rare collectible coins but can barely afford to make their monthly budget. Too often, we treat God's promises like stocks or bonds, something we possess but really can't use on a regular basis. A healthy 401k is nice to have but you can't run down to the bank and make a with-draw on it anytime you want. That's how we tend to treat God's promises but we shouldn't. They are great riches that can be turned into everyday currency to be used for our spiritual benefit (II Peter 1:3-4).

God's promises are based on His glory and virtue. This reveals their value and reliability because God could never compromise His glory or virtue. The practical benefit of these promises is that through them we become partakers of the divine nature. Now, God could rescue sinners from hell without ever inviting us to be partakers of His nature but He does. This shows how deeply God loves and wants to share His life with His people. Since God is above and beyond the corruption of this world, then those who partake of His nature are made capable of being that as well. God's promises aren't just pie in the sky; they're powerful, beneficial and even critical to our daily walk of faith.

**25-26-** Notice how Jesus deals with Martha's limited faith, a faith that was half faith and half doubt. He doesn't get angry at her for rebuke her for her weak faith. He could have but rebuke in a time of great sorrow is unhelpful

and uncalled for. Besides, it would have been misunderstood because Martha thought she was expressing great faith. No, Jesus doesn't do any of that. Instead, He uses this opportunity to teach Martha (and us) more about Himself.

Jesus did not deny what Martha said about the future resurrection but in this, His 5<sup>th</sup> "I Am" statement, Jesus completely transformed the doctrine of the resurrection and by doing so, brought great comfort to Martha's heart.

1) He brought it out of the shadows into the light. The concept of death and resurrection in the OT is neither clear nor complete – it's in the shadows. But by His teaching, His miracles and His own resurrection, Jesus emphatically declares that there is life after death and that the body will one day be raised by the power of God.

2) He personified it. Jesus took the doctrine of the resurrection out of a book and put it into Himself. While we thank God for all that the Bible teaches us, we also realize that we are saved by the Redeemer, Jesus, and not by a doctrine written in a book. When you're sick, you want a doctor not a medical book. If you have to go to court, you want a lawyer not a law book. When you face your last enemy, death, you want the Savior and not a doctrine written in a book. Resurrection's not an event, it's a Person! Since Jesus is resurrection Himself; wherever He is, there's life.

Here, Jesus was present physically so there was going to be physical life. Lazarus would live again. When Jesus returns physically again, there will be a physical resurrection then too. When Jesus is merely present spiritually, like today, there is a spiritual resurrection rather than a physical one. If you've accepted Jesus as your Savior, you have experienced this resurrection. You were dead in trespasses and sins, but you have been brought to life by Jesus.

3) He moved it out of the future into the present. Martha was looking to the past, "If You had been here..." and the future "he will rise again..." but Jesus wanted her to focus her attention on the present. Wherever He is, God's power of resurrection is available now ([Rom 6:4](#)).

Simply put, all those who know Jesus Christ as Savior will experience a physical resurrection. That's what the rest of His statement is saying. This promise is all-inclusive. This is a promise of both spiritual life and physical

life. It's a promise of life now and of life to come. But, it also clearly states that this promise of life only applies to those who believe on Jesus and are thus, members of His covenant people.

This brings us to the conclusion Jesus pressed upon Martha: "Do you believe this?" He'd just made a statement and had elaborated on it; now He leaves her with this simple question. Notice that He is speaking of faith, not feelings. He doesn't ask if she feels better now or if she found His comments comforting. As far as Jesus is concerned, how she felt wasn't important, but rather, what she believed. Feelings are deceptive; they come and go. But, faith is an anchor fixed in bedrock. To believe Jesus' words is to believe in One whose promises are absolutely trustworthy.

Note also that Jesus was specific. He didn't say, "Do you believe generally?" He said, "Do you believe this? That is, do you believe the specific truths I've just taught you?" What about you? Do you believe all that is in this Book? Sure, there's a lot in it and plenty of it's difficult to grasp but the question still stands – do you believe this? That God is the Creator and Sustainer of life; that we're sinners; that God's redeemed us in Christ Jesus; that Jesus rose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is coming again; that there will be a final judgment? Maybe you can't say for certain that you believe all that the Bible says. What should you do? Let Martha's answer illuminate yours.

27- Martha didn't directly reply to what Jesus had asked because her answer didn't include any assent to what Jesus had been teaching. Still in all, it was a good answer. Martha didn't acknowledge more than she knew but she acknowledged what she did know! From here, she went on to even greater understanding of Jesus and His Word.

First, she reveals the basis of her understanding – the word of Jesus: "Yes, Lord, I believe." This doesn't mean she understands everything He's been saying (she didn't); it just means she accepts it, whatever it is, because she knows His words are trustworthy. This is a perfect starting point for anyone.

Plus, it's not just that Jesus' words are absolutely trustworthy. It's also true that only His words are fully trustworthy. With anyone else the question of truth is relative. A person may speak what is true at one time but what is false at another. Or they may speak partial truth (truth mixed with error). Or they may not even know what's true. Jesus is different. Jesus not only

spoke the truth, He claimed to be the truth (14:6). According to Jesus, the only valid starting point in any religious matter is what He Himself has said and done and not the words or deeds of some other person.

“Yes, Lord; I believe...” should be our starting point. The Bible is our only infallible rule in matters of faith and practice.

Next, Martha reveals the content of what she believes. This is critical because faith without content is meaningless. If someone says, “I believe,” we need to ask, “What do you believe?” If they have no answer, we must conclude that they don’t know what belief is in the biblical sense and that they’re deluding themselves in spiritual matters.

Martha didn’t do this. She said, Lord, I believe, and immediately went on to say what she believed: Her confession has 3 points and all 3 have to do with Jesus; meaning: He is the content of her confession. There are other subjects in the Christian faith,, but they all focus in Christ, so He’s really the content of Christianity. So, in her confession, Martha becomes a valuable guide for all of us. What was her confession? That Jesus was...

**1)** the Christ – the Messiah or Anointed One! Martha was affirming that Jesus was the One prophesied to appear in the end time as God’s specially appointed servant. True, there were different expectations of the Messiah in Judaism then, but they all held the belief that God would one day send a specially anointed individual who’d be the herald of salvation. Martha believed Jesus was this anointed one, and so should we; it’s through Him alone we have salvation.

**2)** the Son of God. Here, she’s acknowledging the divinity of Jesus. How much did she understand of His divinity? Did she recognize Him as Jehovah, the covenant God of Israel? Did she know He was the God-man, a totally unique person with all the attributes of God and all the attributes of man (except a sin nature) present and combined? Not too likely. But, she recognized His divinity and wanted to confess it in some way.

It’s important that Jesus be divine. Only a divine Jesus was able to do what He was sent to do, what we needed Him to do!. If Jesus is not God, then His words are not to be trusted any more than any other man’s. They might be partially right but we can’t build upon them. We can’t trust our eternal destiny to His teaching. If Jesus is not God, then His death on the cross has

no more meaning than the death of any other individual. It may've been courageous but it wasn't an atonement for sins and those who trust in it are deluded. If Jesus is not God, then He didn't rise from the dead; and those who preach the resurrection are of all men most miserable and are deceivers of others. If Jesus is not God, then He's not gone to prepare a place for His own, He will not return again for them, and is not now present to guide and assist those who trust Him. All this depends upon Jesus being fully divine.

**3)** who is to come into the world. Martha believed Jesus was the One who'd been promised in the OT and had come to fulfill those promises. He's the One promised to the fallen and dejected Adam and Eve in the Garden, the One who would crush Satan's head though Satan will wound His heel ([Gen 3:15](#)). He's the seed of Abraham through whom all families of the earth should be blessed ([Gen 22:18](#)). He's the coming Prophet God told Moses about ([Deut 18:15,18](#)). He's the suffering Servant of Isaiah's prophecy ([Isa 53](#)), the crucified but resurrected One of the Psalms ([Ps 16:10; 22:1-18](#)). He's the One who will rule forever upon the throne of His father David ([2 Sam 7:16](#)).

Do you believe that Jesus is all these things? If you do, a great consequence will flow from it: you'll stop looking elsewhere for the answers to life, history and salvation. Some people claim to be Christians, but they act like pagans in their daily lives. They say they believe in Jesus, but they never expect Him to help them. Instead, they put trust in science, politics, education or whatever else seems to have caught the fancy of the society around them. That's not to say that those things are wrong, they're just not the answer to society's problems. Men can work toward solutions; but they can never provide final solutions. Only Jesus can do that. He's already provided the final solution to the problem of sin. He's the only answer to peace and victory for the individual in this life. Eventually, He'll return to solve all problems as He reigns on earth in righteousness for 1000 years. Do you want solutions? Then look to Jesus, who is "the Christ, the Son of God," the One who was "to come into the world."

Is your faith like Martha's? Is it based on a knowledge of God's Word and centered on Christ? Or is your faith without substance, without content – no more than a state of mind? True, saving faith is anchored squarely in God and the truth that is revealed of Him in the Bible. 😊