

Focus Scripture:

I am the resurrection and the life (text: John 11:25; context: John 11:1-44).

Theme: Christians believe when Jesus is present, the power is present to overcome our most hopeless situations, death included.

“Raised from the Dead”

Not only were Mary, Martha, and Lazarus a close knit family, but they were also extremely close to Jesus. Knowing this helps us to understand the anxiety that the sisters felt when Lazarus became ill, and the struggle it was for Jesus to delay His response to their urgent call. Knowing that the illness of Lazarus served a higher purpose did not make Jesus' decision easier. People He loved were going to experience great disappointment and sorrow as a result of His delay. When He finally set out toward Bethany, the cluelessness of the disciples only added to the burden that Jesus carried on the journey. Lazarus died two days after Jesus received word of his illness. When Jesus arrived near Bethany, Lazarus had already been entombed for four days. From the perspective of anyone there, it was way too late to be of any help to Lazarus and his heartbroken sisters. It would be a familiar feeling to all who has seen their situation go from bad to worse despite their most earnest prayer. One wonders how many times during Lazarus illness did the sisters and their friends ask, “Where is Jesus?” Why does He take so long? Martha's words to Jesus when she came to meet Him expressed her confidence in Him, but they also showed her disappointment and belief that Jesus was too late. When Jesus said that her brother would rise again, Martha took it as the usual word of consolation looking ahead to the general resurrection on the last day. We hear it at every funeral. We accept it because a little bit of comfort is better than none at all. But Jesus said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (11:25-26). Martha did believe this, but she thought that Jesus was only speaking metaphorically of His Messiahship. Although Jesus claimed power over death in the here and now, Martha heard His words as a further attempt at consolation.

Martha returned to summon her sister Mary to Jesus. Like Martha, she also observed that if Jesus had been there her brother would not have died. Unlike Martha, Mary was bowed at Jesus' feet when she said this. Her palpable sorrow overwhelmed both Jesus and those who had followed her from the house. Jesus requested that Mary show him where Lazarus was buried. Jesus wept. Here appears another one of the ironies so characteristic of John's telling. Even though Jesus has the power and intent to reverse a grievous situation, that does not stop him from fully sharing in our grief and sorrow. When Jesus delays His response to our grief and pain, it is not because He does not feel what we feel.

Still, after four days, the tomb of Lazarus was filled with the stench of death and hopelessness. However, it was more important that the heart of Jesus was filled with purpose and mission. In His prayer, he thanked God for hearing Him; and he thanked God out loud for the sake of the crowd, so that they may believe. Jesus then called out to Lazarus by name, and the “dead man” revived and came out of the tomb. The words of Jesus were not a mere attempt at consolation after all; they were the promise of the power that Jesus provides to overcome even our greatest enemy, death.

The hardest part of having faith is waiting. The passage of time tends to stress our faith and may even undermine it. Many times, we get the feeling that God is not there or just does not care. We feel that if He was there and cared, His response to our crisis would be immediate. Even worse, we have a sense that if the Lord delays His response any longer it will be too late even for Him. Anxiety crowds out our assurance. Fear corrodes our faith. How can we keep believing under these circumstances? The key is to change our attitude toward waiting. We first need to realize that for God there is no such thing as “too late.” What seems to us as delay in the Lord's response is actually the unfolding of His purpose and plan. The extra time is meant to avail us of more of God's presence and power. It is meant to prepare us for what God will do. We must learn to welcome the wait and accept it as time to spend with God until He speaks the word and causes Lazarus to come forth.

FOCUS QUESTIONS - John 11:25

1. What occurs to you as you read this? What questions arise for you?
2. Jesus wept with Mary. Are we accepting of our own grief and others' grief, knowing that God mourns with us all?
3. How do you keep faith as you are waiting for God's answer to your prayer?
4. Does God ever say "No" to your prayer requests?
5. Jesus' identity as the resurrection and the life offers hope even in the most impossible of circumstances. Are there any situations in or perspectives about your life that call for transformation in light of the resurrection hope that Jesus brings?
6. What do you try to control in your life? How dependent are you on Him to "resurrect" things that are lost or dead in your life?
7. When is it most challenging to remove yourself from the center—and put Him as the source of light and redemption?
8. Waiting can be painful, but it can also be during those times that we become most aware of our false sense of security, a false sense of hope. Waiting can be a time to reassess the direction and foundation of our lives. These times can also draw us closer to God. If you are waiting for God right now, how can you use this time to draw closer to Him? What parts of Scripture speak to you? Are there Christian friends or witnesses you can learn from as you wait?

Life/Discipline Application:

What does this passage mean in your school or department - consider the implications of the passage to your day-to-day lives.

Personal Reflection:

What does this mean to you - examine the implications of the passage to your own day to day life.

Additional Print Resources:

- Fuquay, Rob. *The God We Can Know: Exploring the "I AM" Sayings of Jesus*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2014.
- Harris, W. Hall III. *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. <https://bible.org>. 2009.
- Marrow, Tim. *Before Abraham "I AM!" The Claims of Christ from the Gospel of John*. Bloomington, IN., CrossBooks/Lifeway, 2010.
- Okorie, A.M. "The Self-Revelation of Jesus in the "I AM" Sayings of John's Gospels." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 28/5 (2001): 486-490.
- Simmons, Billy. "A Christology of the "I Am" Sayings in the Gospel of John." *The Theological Educator* 38/1 (1988): 94-103.
- Whitacre, Rodney A. *Commentaries for the Book of John (IVP New Testament Commentaries)*. www.biblegateway.com. 2010.