

JOHN 11:17-26
JESUS, THE GREAT I AM:
“I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE”

“When Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”¹

At first the sisters thought their brother had caught a cold, or maybe it was the beginning of a flu—the symptoms were rather nondescript. None of them knew the reason for the sudden illness; they only knew that he did not feel well. His forehead burned when one of his sisters checked; he was feverish. He said he was feeling nauseous and doubted that he could eat anything. Finally, he could no longer continue working; he was forced to lie down. Every effort seemed only to drain him of energy. And the brief rest until he felt a little better had turned into an evening of lying abed, and the evening of lying in bed had extended into the following day.

Since he grew progressively worse during the next several days, it was evident that this was something more serious than a simple cold or flu. He was not improving, and that knowledge worried the two sisters. Where could they turn for help? They had consulted an area physician who was willing to come to the little village, but he had been unable to do anything to turn the ravages of whatever strange invader was even then raging through his body. With a sigh of resignation and with hands turned palm upward in a gesture understood throughout the entire world the physician had uttered what has become timeless wisdom for man confronted with the inevitable, “We can only pray.” But though the words are offered as a source of hope, they are universally recognised as a statement of hopelessness.

However, when the sisters heard those words, and when they realised the serious nature of his illness, they thought of Him who was their friend. Motivated by a confusing array of emotions they felt compelled to act. There was no question that they loved their brother, and it grieved them to see him suffering as he did. There was also the gnawing fear of their own futures. They were single women living in a culture that frowned upon women working. And having been dependent upon their brother's income for such a long time, how would they now provide for their own needs? They were also angry—angry at the spectre of death hovering over one who was only recently strong and vigorous.

How could they simply surrender without a struggle? So they hurriedly sought out a young man, instructing him to go find their Friend to deliver a message, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” “It will be enough,” they thought. “When He learns of our distress He will come, and He will know what to do.”

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He would be easy to find, for He was so well known throughout the whole of the land. His Name was known to everyone and His presence created a stir wherever He went. So the messenger did not have any difficulty discovering that He was then in the region of Perea, east of the Jordan and south of the Decapolis region. There, near where He had begun His ministry after He had been baptised by John, He was informed of the need in the little home in Bethany.

The message was delivered, but His reaction seemed strange and unnatural. He had said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” [JOHN 11:4]. And then, as though He was utterly unconcerned, He had continued doing what He had previously done for two more days. The disciples did not think this strange since they were well aware of the threats to His safety from religious leaders in Judea. It was not that many days earlier that they had attempted to stone Him.

I am always startled by John’s account of Jesus’ response to the concern of the sisters. “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that Lazarus was ill, He stayed two days longer in the place where He was” [JOHN 11:5, 6]. The words sound so contradictory, so incongruous. The Master was not in a hurry, though He surely knew that Mary and Martha were anxious because of Lazarus’ condition. There is no question but that they reacted as any of us would have reacted—love and concern cloud our confidence. Oh, that on every occasion I could say with the Psalmist:

“I say, ‘You are my God.’
My times are in Your hand.”

[PSALM 31:14b, 15a]

The disciples were silent when they saw the seeming lack of concern, assuming that He was worried about His safety. However, they failed to take into account that He is the Master of all. According to John’s testimony about Him, “All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” [JOHN 1:3, 4]. Jesus had spoken of the fact that the illness Lazarus suffered provided occasion for the Son of God to be glorified; obviously, the disciples failed to understand the significance of what He said.

Abruptly, to the amazement of His disciples, the Master said, “Let us go to Judea again.” They were convinced that Jesus was avoiding Judea out of fear of the Jewish leaders. When He at last said He was going to Judea, they remonstrated with Him: “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again” [JOHN 11:8]? He was demolishing their assumptions by His actions. They concluded that He was acting out of fear, when in fact He was boldly seeking what would glorify the Father.

Listen to the Master’s reply to their expression of concern for His safety. “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him” [JOHN 11:9, 10]. The Master was focused on the light of God’s glory, and thus His actions appeared illogical and divergent. They were walking in the light of this world, which is darkness; He was walking in the light of God’s glory, and thus had no fear of the Jews.

In fairness to the disciples, we should recall the account given that relates how the Jewish leaders had surrounded Jesus, probing in an effort to get Him openly to assert that He was the Messiah. Jesus’ answer exposed their perfidy—they had no intention of believing Him, regardless of what He might say; they were looking for an occasion to accuse Him.

"I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one" [JOHN 10:25-30].

Earlier in that day, they had attempted to stone Him, and He slipped away from their presence [JOHN 8:59]. Now, as result of His answer, these religious leaders again picked up stones to stone Him. Jesus calmly questioned them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me" [JOHN 10:32]? His interlocutors made it clear that He was welcome to perform all the miracles He desired; it was the fact that He declared Himself to be God that generated such animosity. His response, though truthful, served only to generate even greater hatred. Jesus said, "If I am not doing the works of My Father, then do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me and I am in the Father" [JOHN 10:37, 38].

Did you catch the nuance words Jesus spoke? The Jewish leaders imagined that if they saw miracles they would believe; Jesus said that if they believed they would see miracles. They imagined that if He convinced them of His relationship to the Father, they would believe; Jesus said that if they believed they would know the reality of His relationship to the Father. The issue is vital for solid evangelism and discipleship. People are not convinced because they see miracles or because they are convinced by overwhelming proof of Jesus' divinity; people witness God's power and see the evidence of His divinity when they believe.

Jesus opened yet another avenue of discussion with His disciples when He told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." The disciples again misunderstood what Jesus was saying, and in what is essentially a verbal shrug, they said, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." They thought that perhaps he had the flu, or some other transient illness, and that rest would cure the illness. So it was necessary for Jesus to speak plainly, "Lazarus has died."

Jesus said a strange thing after He asserted that Lazarus was dead. The Master said, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there." The reason for this strange assertion is that Jesus knew what He was about to do. The disciples had witnessed Him healing the deaf, the blind and the lame, but they had not often seen the dead being raised to life. There had been the time the Master had raised to life the daughter of a synagogue ruler named Jairus. The professional mourners had already arrived and were keening, according to the custom of the day. However, none of the disciples, except for Peter, James and John, had been in the room when the dead girl responded to the Master's words and came to life [MARK 5:22-43].

There had also been the instance when Jesus, His disciples and a great crowd that followed encountered a funeral procession. A man, the only son of a woman, had died. Moved with compassion, the Master moved to the bier, touched it, and said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." Immediately, the dead man sat up and began to speak [LUKE 7:11-17]. Raising the dead was not a common event, but it did happen and the disciples had witnessed His power over life.

Knowing what He was about to do, Jesus said, "Let us go to [Lazarus]." Thomas, the Twin, expressed admirable resolution, though lacking perspicuity. He glumly resolved, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" [JOHN 11:11-16]. He reasoned, "The Master is threatened by those who hate Him; since He doesn't fear for His life, someone must. Nevertheless, He appears resolute in His determination to return. We might as well go back with Him. Let's go die."

The journey from the Perea region required several days of travel and when the small band arrived in Bethany it was only to discover that not only was Lazarus dead, but He had been entombed for four days. Burial had been immediate, as was the custom of the people. And a large number of friends and associates from nearby Jerusalem were in the village sharing in the grief the sisters felt. Hearing that Jesus had arrived, one of the sisters, Martha, went out to meet Him. Feelings raw and grief palpable, she immediately vented her frustration, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Yet she was not destitute of hope, for she quickly affirmed, "But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." "Perhaps," she thought, "He will restore my brother to us."

A SISTER GRIEVING — This brings us to the text for the day. Martha hurried out to meet the Master when she heard that He had at last arrived. However, Mary, perhaps overwhelmed with sorrow, remained in the house with those who had come to commiserate. When she came into the presence of the Master, Martha sobbed out her heart, "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Then, expressing her great faith in Jesus she affirmed, "But even now I know that whatever You ask from God, God will give You" [JOHN 11:21, 22].

Martha and Mary were individuals. They each grieved the death of their brother, and undoubtedly, they were deeply concerned about the future. They appear to have been unmarried, perhaps even widowed. In any case, it seems as if their brother, Lazarus, had been the provider for the family. Now that he was dead, the sisters would undoubtedly experience financial hardship. The uncertainty of their new situation must surely have caused them grave concern. At the moment, this concern would be exacerbated by their sorrow at the death of their brother.

The sisters obviously were individuals. It is impossible to draw a conclusion about their spiritual condition from their reaction at the death of their brother. They appear to have been in agreement in sending for the Master. When they heard that He had at last arrived in their village, Martha hurried out to Him while Mary remained in the home. Perhaps you are tempted to conclude that Martha was the more spiritual of the two sisters, but you need to weigh this incident with another incident that occurred earlier in the ministry of the Master.

In Luke's Gospel we find the record of an earlier incident. "As they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her'" [LUKE 10:38-42].

The spiritual insight of these two women appears reversed from the first meeting to the present meeting. Early on, it is Mary that wants to spend time in the presence of the Master. Now, it is Martha that hurries to pour out her sorrow to the Master. I'm not really convinced that we can draw an accurate conclusion concerning the spiritual state of the two women. What we can say is that they were individuals, each handling their sorrow in their own way, just as each worked out the way in which they lived their lives. What is obvious from reading the divine account is that these women were suffering severe grief at the death of their brother. We who know the Lord grieve at the death of loved ones, but as revealed through the Word, we do "not grieve as others do who have no hope" [1 THESSALONIANS 4:13]. It will shortly be evident that thought she was grieving, Martha had hope—hope centred on the Master.

Among thanatologists, those social scientists who make the study of death and our response to that eventuality their life work, there has been great advance during the past several decades. Among the great contributions to our understanding of the reaction of surviving friends and family when death has removed a loved one is the knowledge that grief is a process instead of being a transient state. And the grieving process is to some extent dependent upon factors preceding death. The death of a child has a different impact upon family and friends than does the death of an elderly individual; the latter being easier to accept through surrender to the natural course of things. Whether the death was sudden, unexpected, or unanticipated, or whether it was preceded by an extended illness influences our reaction.

We now know that the process of grief may be defined to an amazing degree; and though the process may vary in terms of time visited in each stage and in terms of intensity with which each stage affects us, we, being made of the same clay, respond to the death of a loved one with a fair degree of similarity. ***The first stage of grief appears to be shock.*** There is a sense of numbness and an inability to comprehend what has occurred. When our minds are unable to absorb the magnitude of our loss, emotions seem to run on autopilot. We feel intense pain, and because we were created with emotions, we weep, sometimes uncontrollably. When our tears seem exhausted, there is a sense of growing numbness which seemingly freezes our ability to sorrow. We move through daily routines uncomprehending, our minds seeming to refuse to function. We can't think clearly, and we react instead of taking charge of our situations.

A succeeding stage of grief appears to be anger. Depression at the loss of companionship, fear at the loss of security, and a sense of guilt arising from the knowledge of lost opportunities, all seem to conspire to drive us to anger. We frequently question God, wondering why He permitted this to happen. Or we may focus our anger on our loved one, wondering why he or she would die at this time, leaving us to cope with life alone. Accusations may be made which in our lucid moments we know have no foundation in fact. But we are angry, and we must vent our anger or we will explode with holding it in.

When anger has run its course, as it ought to do, there is frequently ***a struggle between fantasy and reality.*** We may find ourselves fantasizing about our loved one. "I heard someone pull into the driveway, and for a moment I expected him to walk in." "When I get up and go to the kitchen for breakfast, I almost expect her to have coffee ready." "I have caught myself looking into the street expecting to see my boy playing hockey there." These are statements people may make at this stage of the grieving process. During this time people often bargain with God, attempting to reverse reality.

When bargaining fails and fantasies are finally put behind us, ***we move toward despair, and depression settles in.*** Realizing the futility of anger and bargaining, we often exhibit a sense of apathy. Our attitude fairly screams, "Nobody understands how I feel. And since they do not understand my feelings, I might as well be quiet and do nothing." People at this stage of grief often express the feeling that life is not worth living.

The final stage of grief is that of acceptance and affirmation. At this time, those grieving are finally able to bring to mind memories of the dead without stabbing pain, even being grateful and pleased at the reflections of their loved ones. They can again speak of the departed, appreciating the relationship they enjoyed without wishing unrealistically that it could be restored. At this point they will probably again begin to affirm their own life, involving themselves in the activities of others. They again find meaning in what they do. They can celebrate the memories of the deceased without being obsessed by those memories. They are able again to affirm that life is good.

"This information is most interesting, and perhaps it could even prove helpful," you may be thinking, "but what has this to do with the account given us in our text?" Did you notice the transition in language between the time the worried sisters first summoned the Master and when they confronted Him upon His arrival in Bethany? When they called for Him to come to their assistance, it was a polite request for His presence [JOHN 11:3]. But whether Martha or Mary, coming into His presence either sister blurts out in accusatory tones, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" [JOHN 11:21, 32]. The intercession which had first characterized their request in the early stages of illness has now turned to accusation, revealing the depth of their pain and the grip grief now has on their life.

You see, even the Faithful are not immune to grief. When death invades the home stripping our loved ones of dignity and vitality, we reveal that we are but dust. We hurt like others, and the same grieving process which afflicts others is necessary to our own eventual spiritual health. We also will know the shock and numbness of grief. We also will experience the gamut of emotions, feeling the anger we would not otherwise feel. And we will know what it is to fantasize, to bargain, and finally to feel the apathetic sense of resignation which others know before we are able to progress to acceptance and affirmation. Knowing these things gives us an advantage we might not otherwise enjoy in our ministries to one another.

A SISTER BELIEVING — "When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.'"

What distinguished these grieving sisters from others about them? What distinguishes you and me from the world about us? We have already noted that believers need not "grieve as others do who have no hope" [1 THESSALONIANS 4:13]. There is, then, this one singular distinctive available to the child of God alone—they may seize upon a hope which the rest of the world cannot know but may only wish to possess. Even though her tone may have betrayed her grief, Martha could nevertheless state with confidence, "Even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." And when challenged by the Lord to redirect her gaze from the grave to glory, she could state with equanimity, "I know that [Lazarus] will rise again in the resurrection on the last day" [JOHN 11:24]. The basis for her confidence was her trust in the Person of Jesus, as seen in her affirmation of faith in her confession, "I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world" [JOHN 11:27].

Mark this observation carefully in your Bible and in your mind. Martha said, "I know" that You have power with the Father, and "I know" that my brother will rise again, because "I believe that You are the Christ." Her certainty grew out of her affirmation, "I believe." There is a perception among the pagans that the Christian Faith is a leap in the dark, a grasping after the wind by poor, beggared minds incapable of facing reality. Nothing could be further from the truth—the Faith of the Christian is firmly based upon knowledge, and leads to greater certainty.

While living in Coquitlam, I read a fascinating series of views printed in the religion section of a local newspaper. The religion editor had proposed to change his column to an ethics column since atheists were excluded from a column which dealt with strictly religious matters. As a not entirely dispassionate observer of the religious scene, may I state that I am uncertain what the religion editor was proposing since I see little to distinguish open atheism from much of what he paraded under the guise of religion. Nevertheless, several of those openly espousing atheism wrote some revealing points concerning their view of faith in God, the ultimate reality.

"Why is it so difficult for us to accept that it is all a fluke—that there is no grand purpose or design?" wrote one Surrey woman. "I believe," she opined, resorting to the language of faith, "we suffer from a collective fear of death, which prevents us from seeing the truth. If we have to worship something, why not worship the process of nature?"

In what must surely be a flight of serendipity, a Burnaby woman wrote, "I know," finding herself confined to the language of faith, "I am solely in control of my destiny, and that I only have one chance at life. There is no repentance or afterlife for an atheist." Brave, little woman!

Because the Christian Faith is predicated upon knowledge, personal knowledge of the Living and True God, there is a sense of confidence in the face of that which the world considers absolute disaster. Hope instead of despair characterises those who know the Lord Christ. And though they grieve, theirs is not a grief which finds no consolation for they look beyond the moment to something far better.

I do not say hope defines the situation we confront when loved ones depart this life having rejected grace. There can be no prospect of hope when grace and mercy have been spurned. But when we know that our dear ones have turned in faith to the Creator of Heaven and earth, when we know that our loved ones have received the grace which the Saviour extends to all, we anticipate that we shall see them again. Though the pain of parting is intense, it is not exacerbated by the fear that we shall never see our beloved again, rather our pain is mitigated by the confidence that they are safe in Him who loved them and gave Himself for them.

If this is true, and if the child of God shall regain their balance shortly, then how shall we minister to them in their time of greatest sorrow? If we understand the path they are traveling, we can walk it with them. Immediately after a loved one has died, let us be careful not to expect the bereaved to be capable of making decisions. They will be experiencing a sense of shock, and the numbness of the moment will rule. Events will pass in a haze at best, and even some of their actions will be unconscious. This is the time they need a friend to assist in making some of the minor decisions until they are able to again assume control of their situation. As time passes they will no doubt express anger, or reveal a variety of intense emotions. During this period they may say things which appear shocking if we fail to remember that they are in pain, pain which drives them to anger. Be a good listener, forgetting much of what you will hear during this time. When they fantasize, don't be overly concerned, reacting strongly to their statements. Rather give thanks that they trust you enough to speak freely with you. Be supportive, redirecting their gaze to Christ. Later, if they should express apathy, be an encouragement, sharing in their pain, always knowing that they will regain their feet in due time. And when they have come to acceptance, as they shall in time, continue to be available as a friend who cares for them and who shares in their life.

A SISTER RECEIVING — "Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?' She said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.'"

Martha lived in the hope of resurrection, and she was able to assert her confidence that Lazarus would rise again. Though it could not remove her sorrow, it did assuage her grief. However, Jesus made a greatly significant assertion upon her statement of confidence. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die."

Jesus' words force us to think of how we define "life." We are physical creatures; and we think of living in physical terms. We speak of growth, of utilisation of the five senses, of emotional stimulus; but what does it mean to live? Or to die?

This body is dying. If we live only for the physical, we shall lose all when this existence that we speak of as life is concluded. However, what the Word of God speaks of as "eternal life" is a new quality of life in which the saved individual enjoys immediate and intimate access to the Living God. This is the consistent evidence presented throughout the Word, and it is especially evident in the words Jesus spoke that John has recorded. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" [JOHN 3:16]. The testimony John penned concerning this saying of Jesus attests to this singular truth. "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" [JOHN 3:36].

Again, Jesus is recorded as saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" [JOHN 5:24]. Later, at the time of His final entry into Jerusalem, Jesus would say to some Greeks who sought Him, "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" [JOHN 12:25].

The Master did not enjoy the success we anticipate in our world of instant gratification. In fact, He would caution those about Him, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me" [JOHN 12:42-50].

Consistent with the testimony of our text, Jesus would later tell His disciples, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" [JOHN 14:6]. Praying as the Great High Priest of the redeemed, "Jesus ... lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent'" [JOHN 17:1-3].

Man is a tripartite being. He possesses a body; but he is a living soul and he has a spirit that was created to know God. God warned our first parents not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for, said God, "In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" [GENESIS 3:17]. As the Word declares, Mother Eve was tempted and she ate some of the fruit. Her husband, Adam, chose to disobey God and also ate some of the fruit. Immediately, the eyes of both were opened; and just as quickly as their disobedience was carried out, they were estranged from God. In that moment, man's spirit was no longer capable of intimacy with God. His soul was dead in trespass and sin, and the body began the inexorable process that culminates in death.

All mankind is dead to God in the natural course of things. Paul writes, "You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world ... among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" [EPHESIANS 2:1-3].

The spirit is dead. The soul is under sentence of eternal separation. And the body is subject to death. Death, as we commonly speak of it, is nothing more than the separation of the soul and spirit from the body.

When we are saved through faith in the Risen Son of God, we receive a new Spirit from God, our soul is redeemed, and the Spirit dwelling within us becomes the earnest of a new body. Just as body, soul and spirit are contaminated by the Fall, so salvation is full and complete, saving the soul and giving a new Spirit and promising a new body at the resurrection. This is what Jesus was speaking of. To know Him is to know life. To be in Him is to have life. And all who possess the life God promises have the confidence of the resurrection.

Jesus did not leave us the faux comfort that arises from mere information. We dare not imagine that if we know about Jesus we will know about life and that we will know about the resurrection. It is the intimacy of knowing Christ that is in view. He is the resurrection; and He is the life. This truth is foundational for the child of God. As Paul writes of the resurrection, He points out that, "As by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead" [1 CORINTHIANS 15:21]. The testimony hearkens back to these words of Jesus.

Nor is this the only time the Master spoke of relationship with Him as integral to the resurrection. Earlier, He had said, "As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will" [JOHN 5:21]. This is a truth which is iterated when the Master presents Himself as the Bread of Life. At that time, He testified, "This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day" [JOHN 6:40, 44].

As I read the paper, perhaps because of my appointment as a servant of Christ, I frequently read the obituaries. I am intrigued to learn who will conduct the various funeral rites and whether the deceased professed any faith, whether the service will be conducted in a religious or a commercial facility, and what was important to remember about the deceased. Much of this information is revealed in the printed notices in the various papers which come to our door. And during the years of my pilgrimage I have made a sad observation of social trends of our day, as funerals increasingly become statements of hopelessness and helplessness. Today, the majority of funerals are no longer religious, to say nothing of Christian. The little qualifier, "No service by request of the deceased," becomes ever more common. In conversation with the director of one funeral chapel, I inquired what percentage of the services performed under his purview were nonreligious by request. How many of the families served requested that religious comfort be neither sought nor permitted? His reply surprised me, for though I expected him to say that a sizable proportion of such services excluded any thought of God, he estimated that as many as two thirds of funeral services excluded any mention of Christ, of God, or of an afterlife. Where is the comfort in such exclusion? As an under shepherd, I am grieved for the pain that attends such hopeless, helpless lives.

I am compelled to complete the story. Jesus went to the tomb where Lazarus was buried. He called for Mary, and as she hurried to where Jesus was, those in the house followed her. Before the tomb and in the face of the deep sorrow arising from man's weakness, "Jesus wept." Those gathered before the tomb of Lazarus looked upon the weeping Saviour and speculated on what might have been. At best they saw Jesus as a man with limited power who though He might delay the inevitable could not reverse death. At worst they saw Him as an itinerating thaumaturgist, an entertainer unable to do anything beyond amusing through legerdemain. Their unbelief must assuredly have intensified His sorrow.

The fulfillment of hope is the death of death, and that shall be accomplished at the return of our Lord Christ. Faced with the sorrow of the sisters, Jesus commanded that the stone barring access to the tomb be removed, for He was about to give those then present and all who would afterward read the account of that day, a brief glimpse of the will of God. Lifting His eyes heavenward, He prayed, "Father, I thank You that You have heard me. 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" [JOHN 11:41, 42].

Having said this, Jesus commanded in a voice to wake the dead, "Lazarus, come out" [JOHN 11:43]. How simple is the language of the Bible in contrast to the theatrics of man, and especially of religious man. Permitting the event to speak for itself, the Bible simply states, "The man who had died came out" [JOHN 11:44]. Nothing more need be said, his presence was sufficient to instruct any who wished to learn. The event was witnessed by those then present, becoming sufficiently well known that Lazarus became somewhat of a local celebrity. Later, immediately before the Passover which preceded Jesus' death, such a large crowd was gathered about the house of Lazarus that the religious leaders formulated plans to kill both Jesus and Lazarus. If the event were unsubstantiated, what possible reason could be made for such a statement. But that the statement was not challenged when written, though many intimately and personally familiar with the incident were then alive, lends credence to the accuracy of John's report.

Dear people, one day our Lord is promised to return, and when He does return the hope of Christians shall be fulfilled. That is the consistent testimony presented throughout the Word of God [e.g. 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:42-58; JOHN 14:1-4]. This is the hope of the Christian. And it can be your hope as well. There is encouragement in that hope such as cannot be found anywhere else. In that hope there is solace which removes the sting of death, replacing hopelessness with hope and replacing weakness with strength. When confronted by the spectre of the last enemy, let us point men and women to Him who conquered death, to Him who is "the Living One," to Him who died and who is now "alive forevermore." Let us then resolve to ever point grieving men and women to that One who has "the keys of Death and Hades." For in Him is hope and strength and comfort which is comfort indeed. Amen.