**Easter: Jesus’ Resurrection and Ours**

**John 11:1-44**

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Dr. Ritch Boerckel

Recently, *Time Magazine* published an article by a very famous Christian scholar. The article was entitled: “Christianity Offers No Answers About the Coronavirus. It’s Not Supposed To.” Wow! One of the ideas presented in this article is that God doesn’t know everything nor is He in charge of everything. The writer gives the impression that in the face of human suffering, God laments with us but He is as helpless as we are. Well today we open up our Bibles to John 11 to discover that Jesus teaches us that He does offer answers to every trouble. He offers answers to coronavirus. He offers answers to human suffering, even death itself. To be sure, Jesus is a Savior acquainted with grief. He is not above our grief. He took on human flesh so that He would come alongside of us and enter into suffering with us. He is that kind of Savior. Here in this very story, we’re going to read these two famous words, “Jesus wept.”

Jesus enters into the grief of Mary and Martha, who had just lost their brother through this illness. His illness may have been a virus. It may have been some flu that took him down quickly. We’re not sure what sickness it is. Jesus weeps with His friends as an indication and a demonstration of His tremendous love for them. So it is right to affirm that God enters our distress. He enters into our sorrows with us. He is not beyond our suffering. He’s not outside of it. He is with us in the midst of it. However, that is not where Jesus’ ministry to us ends. If Jesus only wept with Mary and Martha, He would have comforted them, that is comforting, but He would not have given them hope. Jesus’ ministry to us is both comforting and it is also hope-filled. Hope is what the story of Easter is all about. Christianity offers answers about the terrible problems of things like coronavirus and cancer and heart disease and poverty and war. Christianity must offer answers to these things. If it doesn’t, it should be rejected and replaced perhaps with a stiff drink or with some other diversion. The gospel teaches us that Jesus died and rose again because He is the answer for every problem that we face.

The main idea that we’re going to trace here through John 11 is that Jesus’ resurrection guarantees the resurrection of every person who is in Christ Jesus. Well let’s talk through this story and its context. Jesus is coming to the end of His earthly ministry. He has told His disciples on a number of occasions that He is going to die and rise again. They’ve had trouble understanding this. They’ve had trouble receiving this. This is where we begin in verse 1.

***1*** *Now a certain man was ill,*

Again, we’re not sure of his sickness. It seems that something had come upon him suddenly.

*Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.*

And then John reminds us of who these two dear women are.

***2*** *It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.* ***3*** *So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”*

Now these two sisters had loved Jesus for a long time. They worshiped Him, and now they’re at the point of their greatest need. And in the time of their greatest suffering and sorrow and concern and anxiousness, they call upon Jesus. Undoubtedly, they had called upon physicians in their location in Bethany. But now Lazarus is beyond the help of doctors, and they know that. Someone more powerful is needed. So they call upon Jesus.

Oftentimes, we expect tomorrow to be exactly as it is today for us. We live most of our lives believing this. Here’s how today is, and what today is like, tomorrow will be similar. And then one day, through some trial, we discover that tomorrow is very different from today. Who do you go to when life spins you a curve ball? Jesus is ready to be invited to come and help us. He’s the only One who can help us. Jesus says

**Matthew 11:28-29** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

What a sweet invitation! Come to Me when we’re weary. Come to Me when we’re suffering. We have a Savior who loves us. He loves you and me as much as He loves Lazarus and Mary and Martha. Let’s not hesitate to call upon Him in our need.

***4*** *But when Jesus heard it he 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.”* ***5*** *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*

Isn’t it sweet to have a Savior who loves us so?

***6*** *So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*

You know, big problems in life take us to the very foundation of what we really believe about God. In the midst of problems that are bigger than ourselves, we find what we are really trusting in. Do we really trust in the things that we say we believe? Let me give an illustration. I have a piece of twine here. Let me ask you, do you trust this rope? It feels pretty strong. It feels pretty sturdy. And indeed, if when I ask that question, if all you’re going to do with this rope is to bind up packages and do simple things with it, you’d say, “Yes, I absolutely trust this rope.” We use it and we use it effectively in those every day circumstances and occasions. But imagine you’re on the fifth floor of a building that is burning. It’s burning from the first and second floors. There is no way down. And you have this rope. Let me ask you, do you trust the rope? You may say, “Well, I have no other recourse.” But do you trust the rope? Now it’s a whole different question than do I trust the rope to bind up packages. Do I trust the rope to hold me so that I will be safe all the way to the ground?

Oftentimes, again, we say we trust God because really, each day all we’re doing is binding up packages. Life seems fairly easy. We seem to know where our food is going to come from today, tomorrow, the next week, the next month. We have a paycheck. We have physical health. We have relationships that seem sound and intact. It’s in times of trials when we are caused to ask, “Do I really believe? Do I really trust in Jesus?” And that’s where Mary and Martha are now in the midst of a trial such as they had never experienced before.

The rope God gives us is Jesus. It’s His Gospel, His good news. It’s a Person that we can rely upon in every circumstance. Trials such as we’re going through right now as a country ask, “Do I really trust Him?” The message of the story is that Jesus is a sufficient Savior. It’s also a message that He’s a reliable teacher. We can trust what He tells us, that what He tells us is absolutely true. Here in this story, Jesus gives us some truths to lean into in the midst of the trial with corona or in the midst of whatever other difficulty, whatever other distress we may be experiencing.

Here again, Lazarus is sick. Indeed, he is dead. Did you catch that Jesus waits two more days before He goes to Mary and Martha? Why does He do that? Jesus always acts out of the kind intention of His will. He acts sovereignly out of His infinite wisdom. He waits for two more days because He loves Mary and Martha and Lazarus. He doesn’t wait because He doesn’t love them, because He doesn’t care, because He doesn’t see their distress. He waits because He loves them. Jesus, in this passage, teaches us two categories of truths about Himself and about His workings. The first category is truths that are alongside of us. And the second category is truths that are way above us.

Alongside of us truths are truths that God gives to us and shares with us that impact us here and now. We receive these truths rather quickly, rather easily. There’s almost no faith needed to be ministered to by the alongside of us truths. And then Jesus teaches us above us truths. These are truths that show us a peek into the invisible world which God inhabits. These are truths that impact us not only now but forever and ever. And these truths we receive rather slowly and with much difficulty because faith is necessary to be ministered to by these above truths. The alongside of us truths are precious and they’re important and they’re vital. But these above truths are so important. They’re the ones that are so helpful in a circumstance like this.

Throughout this story, we see these alongside of us truths and above us truths that are taught by Jesus. So for instance, Jesus loves Lazarus, so He comes even though it’s dangerous to Him. Thomas is going to say, “We’re just going to die when we go,” because there were some enemies that wanted to kill Jesus. This alongside of us truth is that Jesus cares enough even at great risk to Himself, to come to us and draw near to us. But then there is this above us truth. And that’s that Jesus waits two days. Why would you wait? Mary and Martha are undoubtedly asking that question. “Why would you wait?” Jesus says, “There is a realm that is invisible to you and that you don’t know. If you could see it, you’d understand. But I’m asking you to trust Me.” The alongside of us truth is that Jesus visits Mary and Martha personally. He connects to them personally when they’re distressed. The above us truth is Jesus saying, “I need you to believe that I am the resurrection and the life. Press into that.” The alongside of us truth is that Jesus is going to weep with Mary and Martha over the sadness and the sorrow of this brother who had died. The above us truth is that Jesus says, “Open the grave.” What? Wait a minute! He’s been dead for four days. Open the grave?! That sounds crazy. And then Jesus speaks and says, “Lazarus, come out.” That’s a truth that requires faith.

An alongside of us truth is that Jesus suffers on the cross. We can read of His physical and emotional agonies upon the cross. We hear Him say, “I thirst,” and we’re moved by that. But then there is the above us truth that on the cross, Jesus did something that we couldn’t see with our eyes. He bore our sins. He took the punishment our sins deserved and required. And He cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” The alongside of us truth is that Jesus is buried. He is confirmed as dead on that first Good Friday. And this is a terrible, sad, real story. The above us truth is that Jesus rises from the dead. He promises resurrection to all who believe in Him. This miracle of Jesus’ resurrection guarantees every other miracle that God offers us in Christ.

I say this and I make this distinction because many who go to church on Easter relate to God only in the alongside of us truths. They see God as a God who sympathizes with them, who cares for them, who loves them, who ministers comfort in sickness and sadness. And those things are so precious. They’re such a precious ministry of God. But if we believe only in the God who ministers alongside of us and not above us, we’ll miss Him. We’ll miss that which connects us to eternity. Here in this story,

***7*** *Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.”* ***8*** *The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?”*

Jesus responds and ultimately Thomas says

***16*** *So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”*

So he thinks that’s going to be the end of it. In verse 11 Jesus explains

***11*** *After saying these things, he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.”* ***12*** *The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.”*

That must mean he’s doing well.

***13*** *Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.* ***14*** *Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died,* ***15*** *and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”*

Now, Jesus could have healed Lazarus before he died, but He didn’t. Jesus tells us that there are eternal joyful purposes which He holds for us that we may not understand. We ask the question, “Why didn’t you come?” Undoubtedly, that’s Mary and Martha’s heart. And Jesus says, “Trust Me. There are joyful purposes that these painful trials are going to bring to you. Your natural minds can’t grasp these purposes right now, but I’m going to ask that you trust Me. I’m going to give you promises.” Through this sad trial, these sisters are going to see more of God. They’re going to be satisfied with eternal joy in Him. Nothing prompts us to look upward in faith to see God more than personal troubles, especially the kind of troubles that bring us to the end of ourselves. God loves us too much to let us fix our lives upon these small, transient, present world lives here. He gives us these lives, but He says, “I want you to look up and consider eternity.” He wants to awaken us to His glory.

**Isaiah 55:8–9** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Christian friend, I don’t know what pains you are enduring. I know some of you endure the kind of suffering that is almost unfathomable to me. And in every sorrow, in every trial God whispers, “Trust Me. I know that you don’t always understand Me. You don’t see My workings. But I’m going to ask you to trust Me. You’ll find that I’m good. You’ll find that I’m wise. You’ll find that I’m loving. You’ll find that I’m all-powerful. Trust Me. You will see how this trial is working for your joy in Me and you’ll see that at a future day. But for now, trust Me.”

***17*** *Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.*

Through this passage, we’re going to learn three specific Gospel truths that give us hope in every circumstance. The first Gospel truth that we’re going to discover is

**Gospel Truth #1: Jesus enters our sorrows and walks with us through them.**

To be a follower of Jesus does not mean that we are immune from troubles, we are immune from pain, we’re immune from physical death. Jesus doesn’t guarantee that this virus won’t touch us or someone that we love; our families, our friends, our church. But to be a follower of Jesus first means that we will never walk alone in any circumstance, in any trouble, in any bit of our suffering.

***18*** *Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off,* ***19*** *and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.* ***20*** *So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.*

So Jesus comes to console. He comes to comfort. He comes to be with these two precious sisters so that He might minister to their lives. Each of these sisters responds differently in their grief. Martha goes out to meet Him; Mary waits in the home.

***21*** *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 from 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 on the last day.”*

So Martha has this mixture of sort of weakness and feebleness. She is likely frustrated at this point that Jesus hadn’t come earlier. And yet she has this testimony of great faith. “I know, Jesus, that if you had come, then you could have rescued him. And I know of this resurrection. And I know that whatever you ask of God even now, God will give you.” So there is this precious faith, and yet there’s this feebleness. Isn’t that often where we are? Jesus meets Martha in her weakness not with a harsh reprimand, but ever so gently, ever so encouragingly. I want you to know that in the midst of our sorrows and suffering, this story and Jesus teaches us that He is a friend who we can rely upon and who will bear all our griefs, all our sorrows, all our difficulties. We need not be discouraged. We can always take our trials and our hardships to Jesus Christ. As the song says:

Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Let’s also learn to be like Jesus as we minister to one another. As others suffer, they suffer maybe anxiety, they suffer grief, they suffer hardship. Gospel ministry begins with us coming alongside, entering into, and sharing in the sufferings of others. Now we read this great statement where this above truth is set before us in verses 25 and 26.

***25*** *Jesus said to her, “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?”*

When we read this story, we discover that Jesus changes everything for us in life or in death. Jesus’ presence radically transforms our experiences here in this world. His presence removes the fear of death, the threat of death, so that we can live boldly, so that we can live courageously. What a statement Jesus makes here in verses 25 and 26! Did you notice there seems to be a contradiction, though, in this statement? On the one hand He says

*Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,*

And on the other hand, He says

***26*** *and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.*

So at first He says believers will die. Yet right in the same breath, He asserts that believers never really die. How do we explain this contradiction? Well I believe that Jesus is teaching two different truths. These are above truths, but they are truths to help us in our times of suffering, especially in our dealing with death. They are corresponding to each other. They’re not contradictory, but they are distinct from one another. So for instance, when we read the first sentence, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he physically die, yet shall he physically live.” So He’s talking about a bodily resurrection. He’s acknowledging that many believers will suffer bodily death. But He says, “There’s no need to be concerned. Because of Me being the resurrection, I’m going to provide a bodily resurrection.” And then secondly, He speaks spiritually. “Everyone who spiritually lives and believes in me shall never spiritually die. I am the life.” He says, “I am the bodily resurrection and I am the life; spiritual life for today.” What a tremendous truth! The second truth that God would have us consider is that

**Gospel Truth #2: Jesus promises indestructible spiritual life to all who believe in Him.**

This is that second phrase in verse 26.

***26*** *and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.*

Never, no never, no never!

Earlier in John’s gospel, he told us about a story where a religious leader named Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night and he gives Jesus a compliment. “You’re a great teacher.” And Jesus says, “Nicodemus, you must be born again. Unless a person is born again, they cannot enter the kingdom of God. You must be born again.” What Jesus is teaching Nicodemus is “Nicodemus, you have to have spiritual life. Everyone born into this world is born in spiritual death. So if anyone is to have spiritual life, they must be born again, born of the Spirit.” This was a truth that Nicodemus had a hard time understanding. It was out of this story that comes the most famous Bible verse.

**John 3:16** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

You see, what Jesus offers is the offer of spiritual life; not just bodily life, but spiritual life. And when Jesus gives a person spiritual life as they come to believe in Him, that life is indestructible. That person from that moment on will never ever die. Well what is this life? Jesus teaches us about it in John 17. He says

**John 17:3** And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Spiritual life is a connection to God, a union with God through Jesus Christ that connects us to His life. And once a person has that knowledge of God, that personal relationship with God is never destroyed. The promise there is that for the person who receives this eternal life, this spiritual life, this life of God in their soul, that when their body dies, there is no spiritual death, no separation from them and God. To breathe our last is instant heaven.

How do we know that Jesus’ claim to be life and to give this kind of life, spiritual life to everyone who believes in Him, how do we know that’s true? This story provides the first witness and Jesus’ story of His own resurrection provides the second. The first witness is Jesus in verses 38 and following saying, “Take away the stone.” And they said, “Wait a minute. He’s been dead four days.” But Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” And then when the stone is taken away, Jesus lifts up His eyes and He prays to His Father. He says “I’m praying not because of your account but on account of the people who are here. That’s why I’m praying out loud.” But He says then that “I’m praying so that when you do this miracle through me, the people here will believe that I am the person who can offer life.” And then He shouts out, “Lazarus, come out.” One pastor remarked that if He hadn’t have said, “Lazarus, come out,” the whole graveyard would have been raised. Such is the power of Jesus!

Well here is a witness to us. Do I know that Jesus can give me life? Do I know He can follow through on that promise? And the answer is look at Lazarus. This was so troubling to Jesus’ enemies that in John chapter 12, the enemies of Jesus were saying, “Lazarus is such a testimony to the life-giving power of Jesus. We don’t like this. We hate Jesus.”

**John 12:10** So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well,

This is after he is raised from the grave. Isn’t that remarkable?! We don’t believe not because there’s not enough information. We don’t believe because our hearts are resistant to committing to God.

The second witness of course is not just Lazarus’ being raised from the dead, but it is Jesus’ own death, burial and resurrection. Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection is the ultimate evidence that God gives us that Jesus is life. He can offer spiritual life.

My father-in-law was talking with a friend of his throughout this corona crises. He lives in an area where there are a lot of people who are in that at-risk age. And many of them are anxious. Many people in our country and in our own community are concerned about this. They were talking about this terrible disease and the friend was remarking at how it scared him a little bit. My father-in-law, Kimberly’s dad said, “I know that if I die, I have a home in heaven.” What a great confidence to have! And the person looked at him and he was rather quizzical. He said, “Well, how can you be so confident?” Well, that’s the million dollar question, isn’t it? How can we be so confident that if we die we have a home in heaven? We can be so confident because Jesus is the one who made the promise. Jesus is the one who made the promise and He is the one who raised Lazarus from the dead. He is the one who resurrected Himself through the power of the Spirit, from the dead. What a tremendous gospel truth that Jesus promises a spiritual life that is indestructible. It never dies.

**Gospel Truth #3: Jesus promises a future resurrection for all who are in Him.**

He promises a bodily resurrection, and that’s a precious gift. He pointed this truth to Martha originally and Martha wasn’t receiving it at first.

***23*** *Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”*

There is going to be a bodily resurrection.

***24*** *Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”*

She wasn’t receiving the benefit of the promise. She is so like us, isn’t she? Here are precious promises God gives us. And when we are distressed, when we are suffering, when we are in great grief, we often easily push them away. “Well, that’s not going to help me in this circumstance.” Jesus takes that promise and He presses in deeper, gently, lovingly and says, “No, Martha. It’s important for you to think about this future day of a bodily resurrection because it actually will help you now in your present suffering. Don’t push away the promise of God that quickly. Let it rest upon your soul. Let’s consider all that I’m offering, all that God is promising through Me. There is going to be a future day of a bodily resurrection.”

Earlier in the story, you may remember in verses 11-15, Jesus said Lazarus sleeps. And He used that term not because Lazarus wasn’t physically dead. He even said “Lazarus is dead. I’m going to tell you plainly.” But He uses the word “sleep” to indicate that for the believer, death is as non-threatening to even our body, as sleep is. That’s not to say that there’s not real grief when we have a loved one die. There is. We live in a world that is hurting and it hurts us. But it is to say that that body that is laid in the tomb, if that person believed in Jesus, that body is just sleeping for a time. And there is going to be a future day when there’s awakening, when Jesus returns in the clouds. So we not only have the confidence that that person’s spirit is immediately with the Lord when he or she dies, but we have confidence that that body will also be raised. That body that we’ve grown to love and cherish will be resurrected in newness.

When God saves us, He doesn’t just save us in spirit. He saves us body and soul. He made us body and soul, and for all eternity, He is going to see that we would worship Him and enjoy Him in body and in soul. So God wants us to know that we have no more need to fear death than we do to fear sleep itself. Sleep is comfortable. It’s helpful. It’s restorative. And for the believer, when our body breathes its last, it won’t be breathing its last. It will be renewed as a result of Jesus Christ and His resurrection. What a promise Jesus makes! Because Jesus rose from the grave, our sleeping bodies will one day be awakened when He returns. And then Jesus applies these words very specifically to Martha.

***25*** *Jesus said to her, “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?”*

This is the most important question any of us could possibly ask. If you don’t believe in Jesus, if you’ve not committed by faith to Him as your Savior, as your Lord, there really is no hope in death. There’s no word of encouragement. We could come alongside of you and let you know that we’re grieving with you, but there’s no hope if you don’t have the One who is the resurrection and the life. Death is a terrible enemy and death doesn’t just follow us here. It follows us into eternity. That’s why Jesus’ message of hope is so, so, so valuable. When we have Him, death doesn’t sting us. Death doesn’t hurt us after the physical body breathes its last. In fact, again, death becomes a doorway for our spirit to enter into the very presence of God so that the knowledge of God we have now becomes more complete. And then death doesn’t even touch our body forever. Our body is going to be raised. That’s the guarantee that Jesus made for us when He died and when He rose again on that first Easter morning.

Friend, Jesus is vital! He is absolutely necessary to our peace, to our hope. Do you believe this? That’s what I want to leave you with. Do you believe this? Notice that this question, this call makes it necessary for us to have a response. Do I believe? Do I trust? This is not sort of a general idea about faith, where you kind of generally believe in God. No, this is, do you believe Jesus is the resurrection and the life? Do you believe that when you have Him your spirit will never ever die because the life He gives to you is indestructible? Do you believe that He can make good on that promise? Do you believe that even if your body dies, that your body is going to be resurrected because His body is resurrected? Do you believe this? I call upon you if you’ve never believed. This is the call of God upon your life.

Notice also it is very personal. That word “you” is singular. It’s not “Do y’all believe this?” Every one of us has to ask this question for ourselves. Our parents can’t answer that question for us. Our spouse can’t answer that question for us. Our family can’t. Our church can’t. Every person has to answer this question as an individual standing before God. Jesus is a personal God and He asks, “Do you believe this?” Life and death hang on this very question. Whether we have hope or whether we have despair, whether we have the knowledge of God or whether we’re separated from Him, to believe in Jesus is to receive life from Him, the life that He demonstrated when He died as a sacrifice for our sin and when He rose again. He says, “I’m offering you a resurrected life.” To fail to believe, to refuse to believe is to lose out on a spiritual life and to lose out on that joyful future resurrection.

Believer, if you’ve trusted in Jesus, share this message. It’s the most powerful and important message. And press this question to your family and friends. Tell them the story. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. But also ask them, “Do you believe this? I want to have a conversation with you. I want to hear from you.” That’s the most loving act that we can have in our loved ones’ lives. Bless you! Have a happy Easter. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. How good that news is!