
The Life and The Life (John 11:17-27, 38-45)
4/1/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



I haven't been a parent for that long, but I have certainly learned a lot from the experience so far. One lesson that struck me right away was just how quickly my son could go from uncontrollable crying to calm, cool, and content. My son would be weeping and wailing one moment and, one diaper-change later, he would be ok again. My son would be beside himself with grief one moment and, after simply picking him up, he would smile at me. Overtime I learned that many of my child's troubles, real and serious as they were to him, could be solved pretty simply by someone who just knew more than him, someone who could do more than him.

The lesson applies to you and me too. We have struggles in our lives. I have spoken with fellow believers who should be emotionally crippled by the struggles they have faced. Life is hard! Sometimes, what more is there to do than simply grieve?

But no matter how hard our struggles are, there is someone who knows more than we do, someone who can do more than we can, someone who can take those struggles away instantly. To God, our hardest griefs are nothing more than a dirty diaper. To God, our deepest pain can be turned to joy when he simply lifts us up.

Today, we see Jesus at one of the worst places human experience has to offer: a funeral. Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha was dead. But hard as it must have been for Mary and Martha to lose their brother, we see that even death is nothing more than a dirty diaper to God. Today, our God wants to focus us away from death and life, away from our hardships, and instead focus us on The Life.

Now don't get me wrong. I am not downplaying your struggles or anyone else's. I am not trying to say that people just need to get over the harsh things they face. We live in a horrifying world. All of us are suffering the effects of sin, and some people really do seem to have it especially hard. People suffer from abuse and neglect. People are hated and persecuted. People suffer from chronic pain and illness.

We all suffer the effects of being sinful ourselves. We feel guilt and shame over what we've done. We feel we need to hide ourselves from others. We are burdened by how useless our best efforts at good are. Our lives so often prove the Scripture true when it says that we are dead in our sins.

Furthermore, we all know so clearly the wages of our sin: death. People lose their loved ones from all kinds of tragedies, from freak accidents, to addictions, to depression. Most of us here, if not all, have lost at least one person that we loved. That hurts. Even Jesus cried when his friend Lazarus was dead. All of us here have

our own deaths to look forward to. That's scary. Even Jesus was deeply moved when he saw the sorrow and fear that death had brought to people.

Let's take a closer look at John 11. As we watch Jesus here, keep this question in the back of your mind: What victory was won here? What did Jesus accomplish? Keep that question in your mind as we go through this.

If you read before our text, we find that, when Jesus heard Lazarus was seriously sick, he actually waited a couple days instead of heading out immediately. Why would he do that? It seems almost callous. That fits with our main question so keep thinking about it.

When Jesus finally comes, Martha, Lazarus' sister, goes to meet him. In faith, she knows that Jesus could have healed Lazarus and she doesn't really understand why Jesus would have waited so long. But, in faith, she knows that God will even then give Jesus whatever he asks. Jesus confidently asserts that Lazarus will rise again.

Maybe this strikes you as one of those orthodox, pious responses to a funeral that really doesn't help. Yeah, I know this person will rise again, but sometimes that knowledge just doesn't help, you know? I still miss the person *now*. It still hurts *now*. Martha responds in that, again, orthodox, pious response. Yeah, I know my brother will rise on the last day.

That's when Jesus pulls the shocker. Jesus says that *he* is the resurrection and the life. Jesus did not want Martha to merely hold some abstract concept that her brother would rise on the last day, whenever that is. Jesus wanted Martha to move beyond that to personal belief in the One who could provide that resurrection! Jesus is not only the One who will raise us on the last day, he is himself the resurrection and the life!

Jesus continues, "*The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*" Jesus is life and he gives life, real life. This isn't just the kind of life that a potato has. It isn't the life that unbelievers have. This is real life, the life of God. It is saving life, eternal life, the life of the kingdom of heaven. It is the resurrection from being dead in our sins. The life Jesus gives is the answer to our prayer when we say, "thy kingdom come."

Jesus tells us that the person who has this kind of life in Christ in a very real way will never die. In fact, we continue living this life even if we die physically.

Then Jesus made it personal. He asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" Jesus asked Martha if she could do it. Could she go beyond that quiet confidence that her brother would someday be resurrected? Could she go on to personal trust in Jesus as the resurrection and the life, the only person who can grant eternal life, the only

person who can give the transformation of the resurrection?

Jesus asked Martha that day. I ask you today, do you believe this?

God give all of us faith to trust in Jesus Christ who is the resurrection and the life!

And here we see Martha give a beautiful confession of her faith. She believed that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Son of God. He is the very One God promised to send into the world. May God give each of us a faith like Martha's.

Before we continue with the story, remember our question. What victory has Jesus won here? What has Jesus accomplished?

At this point, we skip ahead in the story a bit. Martha, Jesus, and the crowd had come to Lazarus' tomb. Jesus tells the people to remove the stone, but Martha hesitates. "Jesus, it's gonna stink. That body has been decaying for four days already." Jesus tells her, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

It's funny how faith works sometimes. We can believe in Jesus, but we so often fail to understand exactly what that means. There's always more for us to learn, right? Martha just gave that beautiful confession of faith in Jesus, but she didn't realize what exactly that meant.

Now we come to Jesus' prayer. Again, remember our question. Now, why does Jesus make this prayer? First off, Jesus prays thanking God for answering his prayer even before he asks anything. Second, he tells us that his prayer is for our benefit. This prayer of Jesus is for the benefit of those who see what Jesus is about to do.

Then, with a simple command, "Lazarus, come out," the dead man, the body that had been decaying for four days already, obeyed Jesus and came out. Mary and Martha were so grieved over the loss of their brother, but Jesus, with three words, instantly took away their grief, as though death itself were nothing more than a dirty diaper.

But again, let's go back to our question. What victory has Jesus won here? What did Jesus accomplish? One dead man came back to life? No, that's not it. The real accomplishment comes in our final verse: "Therefore many of the Jews... believed in him."

You see, by raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus did not bring one physically dead man back to physical life. Instead, he brought many spiritually dead people to spiritual life! People who were once dead in their sins, now were raised to the life of being united to Jesus through faith in him! By Jesus raising this one man to physical life, Jesus accomplished something even more fantastic, even more unbelievable:

Jesus brought people to faith in him.

Now, all of those people believed in Jesus, *the* resurrection and *the* life! Now, all those people would live, even though they died. Now, all those people, living and believing in Jesus, would never die.

They would never suffer separation from God. They would never suffer eternal death in hell. Instead, they would have eternal life through their personal faith connection to *the* resurrection, to *the* life, to Jesus Christ himself.

Dear friends, this is the victory that Christ has won in your life too: your faith in Jesus. Do not let your sorrows and your hardships cloud that greatest of all triumphs. Do not let your pains and sufferings take away the life that you have in Christ. Your hardships? They will one day be gone. But the spiritual life that you have in Christ, that is yours forever.

As a father, I've learned a lot. But there is still so much for me to learn. I often have no clue what I'm doing, but whatever struggles my kids have, sometimes, I just pray that they can take comfort in my being there for them.

Dear brothers and sisters, I know you have struggles. I know you are dealing with sins, with shame, with depression, with loss, all kinds of things. But I pray that through all those pains, you might take comfort in the fact that you have a Father in heaven who is there for you. I pray that you might realize that you have a brother, Jesus Christ, and that through faith in him, you have the resurrection and you have The Life. Amen.