

The Life Giver John 11:1-53

Introduction

Throughout his gospel, John presents Jesus as the giver of life. In Chapter 1 verse 4, he writes, "In him (in Jesus) was life; His life was the light of men." The life John is talking about is Eternal Life. Eternal Life is the life that God created every person to contain. Eternal Life is what connects us to God in relationship. How do you get this Eternal Life? It only comes through Jesus Christ.

Jesus prayed to the Father for His followers, "that they might know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (John 17:3) Jesus offers this Eternal Life to Nicodemus, the religious leader who seemed to have it all. In John 3:16, Jesus tells Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

To the woman at the well in northern West Bank city of Sychar, Jesus said, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (Joh 4:13-14 NKJV) For a Samaritan woman whose life was so empty, this came as some very good news.

Jesus offered this same life to the multitude after he fed them in John 6:35, "Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." (Joh 6:35 NKJV)

It is the life he offered worshippers at the Feast of Booths in Chapter 7:37,38, on the last day of the feast when He cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." (John 7:37-38 NKJV)

It is the life He offered to the man born blind in Chapter 8 verse 12, when He said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (John 8:12 NKJV)

And it is the life he offered those who wanted to be a part of God's flock in John 10:10 when He said, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly." (John 10:10 NKJV)

But the most exceptional offer of all comes to a dead man in John Chapter 11. Jesus offers resurrection life to a man named Lazarus, who is in the ultimate state of death. Jesus presents himself as the ultimate expression of Eternal Life when He calls Lazarus out of the finality of death to resurrection life. Jesus gives his

followers this final picture of his mission and purpose just before going to face the Cross.

I. The Reality of Death

Most people don't like to think or talk about death, especially right now. Since the outbreak of the coronavirus, the thought of death has gripped many people with paralyzing fear. Our hearts and prayers go out to the many victims and their families. The truth is, however, you're more likely to die of heart disease, cancer, or diabetes than COVID-19. Death is not limited to a single virus.

One reason we don't like to think about death is that we all know someday we are going to die! And you don't know when it will be! Trying to hide from the fact or ignoring it doesn't change a thing. The best thing we can do is think through this issue in light of Jesus' claim and offer.

The controversy over Jesus' claims at the Feast of Booths came to a head in John 10:39, so Jesus went into hiding in Judean wilderness. (Or as we would say today, He observed a self-imposed "stay in place.")

But then we read in Chapter 11 verses 1-6, "Now a certain *man* was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was *that* Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." When Jesus heard *that*, He said, "**This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.**" Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was." (John 11:1-6 NKJV)

Jesus stayed where he was for two more days after he learned that Lazarus was dying (vs. 6). He wasn't waiting for Lazarus to die. Lazarus died soon after the messengers left to find Jesus. Jesus waited so that when He raised Lazarus from the dead, it would be an indisputable miracle.

Have you ever experienced a time when you felt like God isn't listening or doesn't care? Even though we know that isn't true; sometimes it feels that way, doesn't it. Could it be possible that Jesus delays, to provide an opportunity for an even greater revelation of his glory?

Look at verse 7, "Then after this, He said to *the* disciples, "**Let us go to Judea again.**" The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?" Jesus answered, "**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 one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.**" These things He said, and after that, He said to them, "**Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.**" Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get well." However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly,

"Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him." Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." (Joh 11: 7-16 NKJV)

It seems the disciples' "concern" for Jesus in verse 8 is related to their concern for their own safety. They are probably relieved when Jesus tells them that Lazarus is already dead because that would make the trip unnecessary. But Jesus is determined to go, and the disciples finally resign themselves to go with him. So off they go to Lazarus' funeral, and to Jesus' funeral, and ultimately to their own funerals.

II. The Promise of New Life

Let's pick up the narrative in verse 17, "So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Now 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 of 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 at the last day." (John 11:17-24 NKJV)

Martha isn't rebuking Jesus. She is expressing her faith in his authority to heal sickness and her regret at his absence. She interprets Jesus' statement in verse 23 as a proper orthodox Jewish condolence. Martha is overwhelmed by the untimely death of her brother, but she expresses her faith in the resurrection (vs. 24).

What is Jesus' response? In verse 25, "Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26 NKJV)

Jesus makes an incredible claim! Martha believed Jesus had the authority to heal sickness, but could He really have power over death! That seems to be a ridiculous claim to make to someone dealing with grief and struggling with a death in the family. How inappropriate for Jesus to claim to be the source of life that overcomes death. Yet, to believe in Jesus is to receive eternal life that ultimately overcomes death.

Jesus doesn't promise that believing in him will prevent physical death. Unfortunately, physical death will remain the norm until Christ returns. But, Jesus does promise that physical death will not interrupt our conscious communion with God. Christians who die, transition into the direct presence of God. The Apostle Paul tells the believers at Corinth, "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." (2 Cor. 5:8) In

Luke 23:43, Jesus told the man on the cross next to him, "Verily I say unto you, Today you will be with me in paradise."

Jesus is the source of eternal life. In John 5:24, Jesus says, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." (John 5:24 NKJV) Jesus offers the promise of Eternal Life a gift and makes it available to everyone who repents of their sins.

III. Receiving Eternal Life

But there is a condition! Jesus asks Martha, "Do you believe this?"

In verse 27, Martha gives the correct response. "She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." (John 11:27 NKJV) If Jesus were to ask you this same question, "Do you believe?" How would you answer?

But Jesus not only makes this unbelievable claim. He backs it up with a "sign." He validates his claim to have authority over death by raising Lazarus. Martha goes inside the house and tells Mary that Jesus wants to see her.

Verse 28 says, "And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you." As soon as she heard *that*, she arose quickly and came to Him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there." Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" (John 11:28-37 NKJV)

John is an eye-witness, and he records Jesus' reaction to all of this. John describes two distinct emotions. First, he says that Jesus "wept" with sadness. It wasn't because Jesus was grief-stricken over the death of Lazarus. Jesus knew he would raise Lazarus in just a few moments. Jesus wept because of his empathy for our sad state.

Death is not "the final stage of growth," as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross says in her book *On Death and Dying*. Nor is it nature's beautiful way of recycling people, so they go on as flowers and trees. Jesus knew that death is a terrible abnormality that God never designed for human beings.

God created Adam and Eve as personal, spiritual beings designed to live forever. But Adam and Eve disobeyed God, making them the first sinners. Death is the horrible and unnatural result of our sin against God.

Witnessing the painful separation from loved ones breaks in upon Jesus and causes Him to weep. Because of Jesus, and because he wept, we know that God does care about our pain and suffering. Hebrews 4:15 says, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin." (Heb 4:15 NKJV)

But Jesus also expressed another, very different emotion. In verse 33, it says He was "deeply moved in spirit." This word means to be "outraged." The Greek author Aeschylus uses this word to describe "Greek stallions before battle, rearing up on their hind legs, pawing the air and snorting before they charged." This is the word John uses in verse 38 to describe Jesus as he "charged" Lazarus' tomb. Jesus not only empathizes with our condition. He is also outraged by it, and has the power to do something about it!

Verse 38 says, " Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been *dead* four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up *His* eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this*, that they may believe that You sent Me." Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go." (John 11:38-44 NKJV)

Before Jesus performs the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, He prays to the Father. He wants the crowd to believe in Him and recognize that God the Father has sent Him. In John 5:24, Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." (John 5:24 NKJV)

Conclusion

Verse 45 says, "Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him." (John 11:45 NKJV) Thank God for those who come to believe in Jesus! But verse 46 says, " But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. (John 11:46 NKJV) Others who saw the same miracle ran off to tell his enemies!

It is not true that enough evidence will make you believe. Saving faith is not caused by miracles. In John 12:37, Jesus says, "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." When He had spoken these things,

He departed and was hidden from them. But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him." (John 12:36-37 NKJV)

Miracles can provide a basis for saving faith, and make unbelief more inexcusable. But saving faith is a choice we make. It is your choice to humble yourself before God and admit that you are lost. It is up to you to acknowledge that you have rebelled against God and need his forgiveness. When we choose to humble ourselves before God, it causes us to admit that we are sinners and have lost our way when it comes to faith in God! You must believe that Jesus is the Son of God sent to deliver you from your sins if you wish to receive the Eternal Life. It is a choice only you can make!