

Probably the greatest trial most of us will face is death. We don't even like to think much about it. My daughter says, "Dad, you're not really afraid of death. You just don't want to be there when it happens." When we take our last breath in this life, we will pass from this world into our eternal home. That is the Biblical truth upon which we place our hope. Most Christians truly believe that they will live forever, but there is just so much uncertainty about it all that it just seems "scary." I can't think of a better word to describe it. It is indeed frightful. It's just scary. One of the incredible comforts of putting our faith in Christ is that we are promised that we will live forever with Jesus. But, what will that look like? What will we be doing for all of that time? I think anticipating the event of our death is scarier than the thought of death itself. Most of us wistfully say, "I just want to die in my sleep." Well, of course we do! But the reality is that very few people are afforded the privilege of deciding when, where, and how they will die. We really don't have a choice of how it will happen.

When we hear the story of the resurrection as we did on Wednesday night, we are filled with wonder and delight. We are so sad when we see the misery that Jesus went through. Here He was on earth, God in the flesh, and He was tortured to death by his own creation. We are saddened when we read or hear about the scourging, the torture, the pain, the sorrow. We are absolutely delighted when we read those first words John penned in chapter 20. *"Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb."* (John 20:1, NKJV). We love to read that Jesus conquered death. But this morning, I want to talk about our own experience of dying AND about our own resurrection to come. Please open your Bibles with me to John chapter 11. There are 21 chapters in John. All of the remaining chapters of John's gospel will be focused on the last week of Jesus' life. John is focused on the gospel. And what is the gospel? Jesus died, was buried, and He rose again.

¹*Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.* ²*It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.* ³*Therefore, the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love [Phileo-brotherly love. Like saying, "Jesus your buddy is sick"] is sick."* **[The basis for their prayer is that Jesus loved Lazarus – wow, what a way to pray. So even though Jesus loves us, we too will go through physical sickness and death. There is false teaching that we as believers will never be sick. You and I will both die of our last illness. Tragedy happens.]** (John 11:1-3, NKJV with authors notes in brackets).

We are immediately reminded of the story that went on after this in chapter 12. That was when Jesus was with them in their home, and Mary anointed Jesus' feet. Martha was busy with her business while Mary was seeing Jesus for Who He was, and she was worshipping Him.

⁴*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."* ⁵*Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and*

Lazarus. [The verb agapao is used here in the imperfect. It is ongoing. This is in contrast to the love that Martha said that Jesus had back in verse 3. His love is tied to the delay.] ⁶ So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. (John 11:4-6, NKJV with authors notes in brackets).

Let's pray.

Lazarus, Mary, and Martha were intimate friends of Jesus. As the youth might say, "They hung out together." Their home village called Bethany is just across the Kidron Valley from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. If you stand on the Temple Mount facing south, as you look off to your left to the east, you can see across a little valley (the Kidron Valley) to the Mount of Olives, and right over and past the Mount of Olives continuing on to the east is the little village of Bethany. That's where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived.

Lesson One – Sometimes We're Called Upon to Wait-God's Delays are not Denials

Verse six gives us our first clue that a lesson is going to be taught. The text says, ⁵ "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." ⁶ So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was." (John 11:5-6, NKJV). When we're sick or in pain, we cry out to the Lord, and it is so hard to accept that relief is not immediate. When I was suffering from pain during my surgery recovery, my body would go into spasms, and I would cry out to the Lord for deliverance. Let me tell you, I just told God how much I hurt, and I learned that I had to wait for relief to come. We might wonder why it is that we must wait. I'm not too sure, but I think Jesus waited to let the dying process take place so that all who witnessed what was to come would know beyond a shadow of doubt that Lazarus truly was dead and had indeed come back to life. **God's delays are not denials.** There was a purpose to His delay. **We should never interpret the love of God through our circumstances. Rather, we should interpret our circumstances through the lens of the love of God.**

⁷ Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸ The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?" ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." [The Jewish day was divided into 12 hours and 12 hours. At the time of Passover it was just about 12 hours of day and night. Jesus was saying that you do work while you can do work. He's referring to his own ministry. He has limited time.] ¹¹ These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." (John 11:7-11, NKJV with authors notes in brackets).

Lesson Two – You Have Specific Amount of Time to Live – So Live While You're Alive

Do what it is that God wants you doing. As the old saying goes, "Make hay while the sun shines." God has given you 24 hours in a day and He has things for you to accomplish. Don't be focused on how little time you might have left. Just do what it is that He has for you to do

today. He's given you "12 hours of day and 12 hours of night." Use it for His glory. NOTHING can happen to you until your time on earth is done. Be about doing what He has you doing. Stonewall Jackson said he was invincible until God was ready to call him home, and it's exactly the same for you and me.¹ There is another lesson in here for each of us.

Lesson Three – Don't Let Fear of What Might Happen Stop You from Being Obedient to God

Verses 8 and 9 seem to be a reminder by Jesus that when we're going through things that are painful and/or dangerous, when we're doing what God wants us to do, we need to just keep moving forward. When there is light to the day, we need to just keep on living. If we live in fear of what is to come, we are robbed of the joy that we're to have in today. Jesus was telling His disciples that notwithstanding danger that might lay ahead of Him, there was work to be done, and He wasn't going to focus on the list of horrors that might come about by taking a trip back near to Jerusalem. When we're sick and possibly nearing death, we should move forward and not live in fear. There is still work to be done until we take our last breath. I also think it is interesting that Jesus told them that Lazarus was merely sleeping. This was a euphemism, of course, for death itself, but it reminds us that our physical death will not be permanent. As a matter of fact, it will be a much shorter event than falling asleep. It is transitory. It is quick.

¹² Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." ¹³ However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless, let us go to him." ¹⁶ Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

[Jesus says he's glad because this is going to be an event that would cause them to truly believe and understand that Jesus is the resurrection. Thomas, the one who always sees the glass as half empty, was probably being sarcastic here because he knew how dangerous it was to go back to Jerusalem.]

*¹⁷ So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. ¹⁹ And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. ²⁰ Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. ²¹ Now 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 of God, God will give You." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again" **[Jesus didn't rebuke her in her grief. Remember that everyone handles grief differently.]** ²⁴ Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." (John 11:12-24, NKJV with authors notes in brackets).*

¹ My religious beliefs teach me to feel as safe in battle as in the bed. God has fixed the time of my death. I do not concern myself with that, but to be always ready whenever it may overtake me. That is the way all men should live, and all men would be equally brave."

Lesson Four – God Often Doesn’t Work Until Things are Humanly Hopeless

Pastor Michael likes to say that God can truly start working in us when we come to the end of ourselves. That is so true. Jesus purposely waited four days because there was a belief at the time that a person had to be dead four days before they were truly dead with no chance of recovery or coming back. He let the whole death process run its course. This waiting meant that Lazarus’ situation was humanly hopeless without any chance of reversal. Yet, in spite of her despair, Martha believed that Jesus could have healed Lazarus, so there is a statement of her belief in what Jesus is able to do.

Lesson Five – You and I are Not God – Don’t Try to Figure Out What He is Doing

Martha is trying to figure it all out. On one hand, she knows that Jesus can ask anything of God, and it will be answered. But on the other hand, she rationalizes that if He had just gotten there earlier, Lazarus would have lived. She’s busy trying to figure it all out. When Jesus told her that Lazarus would indeed rise again, she automatically said that she, too, believes in life after death. She just wasn’t hearing what Jesus was saying because she was too busy trying to figure it all out. When I was diagnosed with cancer, I had a nice long talk with Aaron one morning. I told Aaron that I had submitted myself to the sovereignty of God a long time ago, but I was just frustrated with all of the delays in my surgery etc. Aaron wisely told me, “Well, Pastor, that’s when we have to trust God with the process.” Martha needed to trust Jesus not only with the final outcome but also with the process.

Jesus then told her the words that are precious to each of us. ***“²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”²⁷ 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 11:25-27, NKJV).***

Lesson Six – We’re Either Going to Believe the Promises of God or Not – Let us Choose to Believe

Jesus is making an unequivocal personal promise to each and every one of us. He is saying that He is the resurrection and the life. But we must realize that He was saying this to Martha before He Himself had ever died and come back to life. He would prove this a little over a week later when He Himself was put in a tomb and rose on the third day. Jesus tells each of us in clear and certain terms the deal that He offers to each of us. **‘HE WHO BELIEVES IN ME, THOUGH HE DIE, HE SHALL LIVE AND WHOEVER LIVES AND BELIEVES IN ME SHALL NEVER DIE’**. Then He asks Martha, “Do you believe this?” She said, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” It’s kind of funny that she doesn’t answer His question exactly. Is she hedging? He’s asking her if she believes that if she dies that she will never die, and she answers that she believes that He is the Messiah. So, the question is there for each of us as well. What is it that you believe? Do you believe that even though you will die that you

will live and never die? I love what Pastor Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel said when preaching about his own death. He said:

*"Someday you may read in the newspaper that Chuck Smith has died. Don't you believe it! Accurate reporting would say, 'Chuck Smith moved!' Out of an old, worn-out tent into a new, glorious body like Jesus has. No more groaning, no more pain, no more suffering. Just perfect fellowship with the Lord forever."*²

Someday when you get the news that Pastor Faber McMullen has died, DON'T BELIEVE IT. I too will have just changed my address!

²⁸ 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." ²⁹ As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. ³¹ 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." ³² 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." **[There is a little difference in what she says compared to what Martha says. This is because Mary says it down at the foot of Jesus. We see her over and over again down at the foot of Jesus. Whether things were going good or bad, Mary was down at the foot of Jesus. How you and I handle death will be determined by whether or not we are at the foot of Jesus.]** (*John 11:28-32, NKJV with authors notes in brackets*).

Lesson Seven – How we handle death will be determined by whether or not we're at the foot of Jesus

*³³ Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. **[The Greek word is like the snorting of a horse. He is groaning within Himself. It is a groan of anger.]** ³⁴ And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" ³⁷ And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" **[They misinterpreted His actions.]*** (*John 11:33-37, NKJV with authors notes in brackets*).

As I prepared this sermon, I was moved to tears by the compassion that Jesus felt for those whom He loved. Martha and Mary came to Him because they had no where else to go. Mary fell at His feet, and she too was spent. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." On many occasions I have fallen at the feet of Jesus because frankly, I have no where else to go. Then we see Jesus, the Creator of the Universe and yet all man, looking at His precious Mary weeping. He is looking at the Jews that were weeping around her, and we see the heart of God vexed and troubled. How can the heart of God be vexed? I'm really not sure, but here the

² <https://calvarychapelmagazine.org/articles/remembering-chuck-10-years>

God of the Universe is groaning at the human suffering that He sees. It is good to remember that it was not God, but man, who created all of this suffering through rebellion against God and against the desires and ways of God.

³⁸ Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ 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." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ 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. ⁴² 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." ⁴³ Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" ⁴⁴ 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).

The remaining verses are the story of how Jesus is going to make His way to Jerusalem for Palm Sunday. I believe the raising of Lazarus was the front book end of what we call Holy Week. The final bookend is The Resurrection of Jesus. This event made such an impact that it was the match that set off the Triumphal Entry and the crucifixion. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead it was the last straw. But Jesus showed each of us what He will do in our own lives and He proved it by what happened on that first day of the week!

Lesson Eight – He WILL Call YOU and ME out of the Grave – That’s a Promise

If the Lord should tarry in His coming, there is a day not too long off when He will call us by name. If He comes before our physical death, He will call us into the clouds. But if we have been put into the grave, He will say once again to Lazarus, "Lazarus, come forth." He will say to each of us to come forth. Our spirits will already be in His presence, but He will call each and everyone of us up out of our graves. We’ve read in this account today that sorrow will accompany each of us as these old broken bodies find their way to the grave. Tears will be shed. Hearts will be broken, But as Job himself said:

*²⁵ For I know that my Redeemer lives,
And He shall stand at last on the earth;
²⁶ And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,
That in my flesh I shall see God,
²⁷ Whom I shall see for myself,
And my eyes shall behold, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:25-27, NKJV).*

The Resurrection of the Dead – The Resurrection of Jesus Means Everything

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:12-22, NIV).

Now, in the interest of time, let's move down to verse 50.

⁵⁰ I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory"

⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:50-58, NIV).

John's theme is BELIEF. He uses the term "believe" 98 times in the Gospel of John. The question this morning is - do you believe? And the second question is - in Whom do you believe? And a third question is - In what do you believe. John told us the Big Idea:

³⁰ And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31, NKJV).

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.