

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: Jesus' best friend had died, resulting in chaos and confusion as to how and why this had happened. If Jesus healed and raised others, why did He allow Lazarus to die? This did not make sense and it set up major spiritual confusion and crisis of faith! Martha desperately ran out to meet Jesus as He came, while Mary stayed at home, grieved. Martha asked in anguish, *Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died; but I trust you and know God will give whatever you ask.* Jesus replied, *do not worry; your brother will rise again. I know,* Martha said, *at the resurrection day.* Jesus then spoke to her the emphatic, all-powerful statement; *I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in Me will always live, even when they are dead; these people will have everlasting life! Do you believe this Martha?* Yes, replied Martha, *absolutely I do; I know you are the Messiah from God.* Then she rushed off to tell Mary. Mary was having a tough time with this. People were trying to console her; when Jesus came, she fell on her knees and said, *why, Lord if you had been here...* then Jesus wept too and asked where Lazarus' body was. All of them saw how much Jesus loved this family, but they could not understand why Lazarus had died; if He could heal others, why not heal His best friend and keep these sisters from such grief?

Contexts and Background

This passage showcases who Jesus is and foretells to His followers what He would selflessly do for us all! These events took place during one of Jesus' extraordinary miracles that proved not only His divinity but also His humanity and compassion and who He allowed in His inner circle. In most civilized cultures, especially in the Middle East, it is expected that family and friends console, usually for one week, those who have had a loss, especially a great one like the loss of a close family member. Here, we see the "community," but the excitement and the Kingdom He said would be set up were now in doubt; everyone was perplexed. Why did Jesus come so late and seem to do nothing?

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings

- *Martha.* She was a woman of faith, perhaps the eldest and head of the household and a very responsible person. In Luke, the sisters Mary and Martha are contrasted. Martha, being industrious, was busy and flustered by Mary who was studious, and who refused to help, choosing instead to sit at Jesus feet and learn. Here, we see another contrast of Martha's active faith and Mary seemingly passive and grief stricken and yet diligent and faithful (Matt. 26:6; Mark 14:3; Luke 10:38-42; John 11:38; 12:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:35).
- *Mary.* Mary and Martha are used throughout church history as representatives of two types of extreme character. Martha was wrapped up in the tyranny of the urgent, preoccupied and overly busy—the quintessential workaholic, type "A" personality, sometimes missing out on the things of God. The other sister, Mary, was type "B;" determined, single-minded, and curious. Both character-types are good when they are in balance.
- *If you had been here.* A statement of faith and confidence and also a question of "why;" *if you do heal, and we know you do, and if we are your friends, why did this happen?* Martha was gentle, faithful, and reverent when she approached Jesus. She was not displaying anger or great misgiving, even though she doubted and questioned. She remained gracious, trusting, and faithful. There was less fretting and fussing present than were hope, faith, and prayer.
- *But I know/even now.* The sisters expected a miracle, but were confused; and yet, they still trusted in Jesus. The sisters hoped for an immediate miracle even though Lazarus had already died and been buried. They realized that nothing was too difficult for God to do!
- *God will give you whatever you ask.* This is not a "demand" statement or an "expect to get" one, but an

honest plea, and a trust in His Sovereignty whatever the outcome.

- *Rise again.* Meaning, when people who have passed on are still in existence. The Patriarchs, in Jewish belief, were in eternal relationship with God, so they are living—not dead, and pave the way for the believer (O.T. apocryphal books, 4 Maccabees 7:18-19; 16:25; 18:19 and Tobit; very popular then).
- *Resurrection.* From Martha's perspective, this was a life after death statement, because Lazarus was beyond help. She referred to a belief shared by both Judaism and Christianity that our lives here on earth are just the beginning of what is to come in eternity. Our corporeal physicality is temporary; our soul is primarily more important. The theme of “resurrection” is our hope for today, because we are with and in Christ; our “being” is made for eternity. The Sadducees were the liberals of the day and did not believe in an after-life, while the Pharisees did (Isa. 65:20; Dan. 7:14-18; Amos 5:18; Matt. 19:28-30; 25:14-30; John 5:24-29; 11:25; 1 Cor. 15:51-57; 2 Cor. 4:14; 5:8; Phil. 1:23; 3; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-3; Rev. 6:9-10).
- *Last day.* Meaning the after-life (Matt. 22:23).
- *I am the resurrection.* Jesus' resurrection meant He overcame His dead body and was transformed back to life. This event that we celebrate as Easter is the proof and power of the Gospel. Lazarus would also be raised, but Jesus, in this context, was proving His divinity. The resurrection was the proof that God accepted Christ's redemption in our place (John 10:17-18; 14:6; Acts 13: 5, 30-35; Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:17, 50-54; Phil. 3:21; Heb. 7:16-24).
- *The life.* Meaning that Jesus is the source of life, and is not only the Messiah, but the very One True God. The sisters started to recognize His deity, and then they had to trust so to live, and obey Him. Being a Christian must raise our character and Fruit of the Spirit so we are joyful and productive (John 1:7-14; 14:6; 20:8-9; Acts 3:15; Heb. 7:16; Rev. 8:8).
- *Believes in me.* Meaning Christ is Sovereign, the highest in all creation, and the greatest of all who are raised from the dead. Jesus gives us His life and blood and then a new life in Him that we can enjoy now and for eternity. Christ's resurrection marked the inauguration of the covenant of grace (Acts 2:29-36; 13:32-35; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:20-28; 2 Cor. 5:17 Col. 3:10; Phil. 2:8-11; Heb. 1:6; 12:23; Rev. 1:17-18). This also shows that this is the greatest miracle. Other people who were raised from the dead (2 Kings 4:35; Luke 7:15; John 11:44; Acts 9:36-41; 20:7-11) would one day just die again.
- *Will live.* Christ is our living Hope that will never fade away! This gives us the confidence and conviction that our loving and living God keeps His promises and secures us in Him. It is the assurance—and fact—that God has redeemed us, will bless us, and will care for us. This also means that death will not triumph over those in Christ (1 Cor. 15:54-57; 1 Peter 1:13, 21; 3:15).
- *Believes.* What matters most to God is not just our belief, as in our ideas of God or that He exists, but that our belief is the basis for our conviction, trust, and faithfulness in Him that leads to our obedience, for which we are rewarded.
- *Never die.* Jesus takes our sins, bears them and covers them from God's wrath by His work on the cross! This is called *atonement*. We are justified and saved by Him and Him alone; no work on our part contributes to it. This is what gives us our salvation. We only respond, out of our gratitude, to do good (Lev. 17:11; Job 15:14-16; Psalm 5:4-6; Isa. 53:4-12; 64:6; Jer. 44:4; Hab. 1:13; Matt. 27:37; Luke 22:37; John 2:2; 4:10; Rom.10: 2-3; Gal. 3:13; 4:4; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14-22; 2:14; Heb. 2:17; 9:11-15, 28; Rev. 1:5).
- *Do you believe this?* Having a real confession of faith is not just a statement; rather, it is a decision—to take hold of Jesus' leading and election and make it real in our lives so we spill over and glow to others about Him. The Spirit's illumination is the only way we can know who Christ is (John 6:46-49).
- *The Christ.* Meaning the anointed One, Messiah, who comes to save the lost; thus, this is a confession

of faith that Jesus is the True Messiah. When we understand faith, who Christ is, and what He has done for us, we will be able to have more trust in what He is doing, even when we cannot see or feel it. This will also produce our gratefulness and obedience so we will live a more transformed life. Once this happens, the result will be more faith, better relationships, more impact, and we will be of more use to Christ (Matt. 16:16; John 4:27-45).

- *The Teacher.* This is a name of Jesus but moreover, it is the prime character of His Ministry, He is the quintessential Instructor of our faith and lives, who broke cultural taboos to speak to a woman and allow her to call Him “teacher,” something that even a Rabbi or Greek philosopher would never do. Here, Mary and Martha asked Jesus for a favor, which was a practice that a grieved one could do; it was more of a custom than a bold move, but the character of boldness is demonstrated nonetheless (2 Kings 4:16-28; Luke 10:39-42).
- *Comforting.* People were trying to comfort and console a person who could not be consoled; only God can meet these deep needs and here, He came to do so. We are still called to comfort those in distress, to listen and offer any wise biblical council without conceit. Sometimes, we are just to be there—with lips closed.
- *Mourn.* This is called the “Shiva” meaning “seven” for seven days of mourning to comfort a loved one in his/her loss; this was done to release tensions and express grief and is still practiced today. People who mourned for their and another’s loss would not wash or make themselves up, and they would abstain from all pleasures, sometimes for up to a year.
- *Weeping/troubled.* Jesus, being also fully human, was deeply moved; He cared and showed His sympathy and concern. He is the God who is there and cares (John 12:27; 13:21)!
- *Jesus wept.* This Greek rendering indicates a quiet weeping rather than wailing. Jesus was justly emotional and displayed sorrow while also honoring the Jewish custom by the display of grief. Greek philosophers preferred to remain somber and calm and to show they were above such things by being composed and serene. This phrase is famous for the shortest verse in the Bible, so it should be no trouble to memorize it; my two-year-old did (John 1:18; 2 John 7).
- *Loved him!* Jesus personally demonstrated the proper mode of relationship, that of love (1 Cor. 13).
- *Could not he.* Of course he could have. But, their question is that of many of us. If Jesus had the power, and many saw it for themselves and believed, why did He not exercise it at this important time? He healed strangers; here are His loved ones, people who are dear. They could not fathom the deeper implications and reasons of what Jesus was doing. It is hard for us to understand at times, but as we wait and weep, we can be assured that Jesus is at work, He cares, and He will work it out in His perfect timing. Jesus allowed Lazarus to die and his family to grieve for a greater purpose.

Devotional Thoughts and Applications

The question to us and all of humanity is *do you believe this?* What about when you are in trouble, stressed and unable to see a way out of your situation? How is Jesus your source, substance, and Truth in good as well as in dire times? How must He be for you to not just survive, but to thrive? We have to reach out to Him; let Christ grasp you so you do not see just the sea of problems and the ocean of deluge overtaking the ship of your faith and composure in Him. Yes, this is tough; we all deal with this—certainly I do, even now...When times are confusing and we can’t see where we are going or where God wants us, something to consider and pray about is this: God is far more concerned about how we are than what we do or where we go. Our lives are a process and a journey. Our Lord’s mission is to transform our hearts and minds, the very core of who we are, so we can live in the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom with His values and purpose, regardless of any opposition we might have, including the opposition others give us. We especially need Christ in the dire times of life, which are also the times when we have the best opportunities to learn and grow. Usually, it is our own opposition that hinders us the greatest by our fears and neglect or lack of active faith.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Have you ever lost a dear loved one? How did you feel and how did it change your life?
2. Since Jesus did have the power to heal, why do you think He allowed His friend Lazarus to die? Have you ever questioned "why?" When you are confused, do you still trust in Jesus? Can you give an example? What are you facing now?
3. What do you do when you doubt or are perplexed? Do you feel that sometimes Jesus comes late and seems to do nothing? How does this set you up with spiritual confusion or perhaps a crisis of faith? What gets you out of doubt and confusion?
4. What can you learn more about what it means to trust and not worry? What about when *chaos* and confusion come your way? How does everlasting life give you comfort?
5. How does this statement, *I am the resurrection and the Life*, impact your life and faith? How does this show the proof and power of the Gospel?
6. How is Jesus your source, substance, and Truth in good as well as dire times? How must He be for you to not just survive but to thrive?
7. What is the greater purpose we might have in our lives in times of grief, waiting, and confusion? Have you realized that there is nothing too difficult for God to do? What gets in the way of this statement?
8. Even though Martha questioned and may have doubted Jesus, she remained gracious and faithful. What can you learn from this?
9. What happens when there is less fretting and fussing and more hope and faith and prayer? What are you going to do about it?
10. How and why as a Christian must you raise your character and Fruit of the Spirit so you are more joyful and productive?
11. How does Jesus' declaration in this passage affect (influence) and effect (have a result in) you? What helps you to focus on God and not on circumstances?
12. How do you feel that God is still at work in you and in others through you? How do you think Jesus wants you to be challenged? What do you need in order to learn and grow? How can you better cultivate your faith and maturity? Why does the easy life not allow for such lessons?