



Unbound

Sermon Growth Guide

March 19, 2023

I Believe

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John 11:17-27 (ESV)

Key Verse: John 11:25 (ESV) Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,”

Big Idea: Jesus is the life-giving God; whoever trusts in Him has eternal life, beginning now.



Foundations

The day that Jesus arrives in Bethany is called by some the “hopeless day.” This is because it was understood that God always works on the third day. But not only that, the people of Jesus’ time also thought that a person’s soul hovered over their body for three days, keeping alive the hope that perhaps they weren’t dead. But the fourth day? Not a chance for life. By the fourth day, death ruled. And this was when Jesus decided to come.

That delay creates all sort of questions, but the big question is, “Why the delay?” Mary, Martha and Lazarus were among Jesus’ best friends. Couldn’t Jesus show some of the same urgency that must have been in the message Jesus received about Lazarus’ illness?

But Jesus’ purpose is not just to restore Lazarus to life. Jesus wants to demonstrate that He alone is the source of life. Had Jesus come earlier, some would have said that Lazarus’ soul had just re-entered his body. In the words of *The Princess Bride*, he wasn’t dead, he was only *mostly* dead.

So, on the hopeless fourth day, Jesus shows up to make the most astounding claim—the most certain thing, death, does not have the last word. Jesus does, as He boldly claims when He declares to Martha that He is the resurrection and the life.

Understanding God’s Word

Read John 11:20–27 and John 4:7–15.

We don’t have audio or video that would help us understand the tone of this conversation. How would you describe the flow of this conversation? Compare it to Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well. In both cases, what is Jesus offering and why do you think both women receive His offers with boldness?

Applying God’s Word

In verse 11, Jesus says that Lazarus is just sleeping. While it is a metaphor for real death, sleeping can also describe how we go through life before Jesus raises us to new life in Him. From what kind of “sleep” does Jesus awaken us in this life?

In verse 25, Jesus declares that He is the resurrection and the life. In what ways is this statement both a claim and a promise?

Witnessing God’s Word

The world is frenetic in its efforts to find life, only to be disappointed in the brief shelf life of its remedies for staving off death. In what ways does, or can, your life demonstrate that?

You have been made alive in Jesus...now. What qualities of your life are markers of the kind of life Jesus gives?

Maybe you've heard the story about the performer who walked across Niagara Falls on a tightrope. He said to an onlooker, "Do you believe I can do it?" "Sure," said the man. "No, you don't." He walked back and forth. "Do you believe I can walk across carrying this chair?" "Yes." "No, you don't." He did it and came back. "Do you believe I can do it pushing this wheelbarrow?" "Yes." "No, you don't." "Yes, I do." "No, you don't. If you did, you would get in the wheelbarrow." Do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe Jesus Christ is who He says He is? Do you believe He is able to save you from your sins and give you eternal life? Do you? No, you don't. If you did, you would stop trying to save yourself and you would get in the wheelbarrow and trust your life, your forgiveness, your standing before God...you would trust it all in the hands of Jesus.

A friend here in church said to me, "I still have this need to prove myself to God, like I have to do enough to earn my way into heaven. I have to do more good than bad, and outperform my father, my grandfather, my family, my friends. I have to do enough to deserve it." I said, "You know that's not how it works, right?" "Yes, I know. But I still struggle. I'm still performing for God." Jesus shows us salvation, eternal life, is not about what you can do for Him or what you can get Him to do for you. Salvation, eternal life, is being in Him, your life in His hands. Get in the wheelbarrow. Trust and believe in Jesus. In our series, *Unbound*, we are studying John 11 when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead—just about two weeks before Easter by the way. Jesus challenged Martha to believe in Him. She did. She said **I Believe**.

Lazarus' sisters are Martha and Mary of Bethany. John assumes we know them. It was Luke who told the famous story: "As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't

you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!' 'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her'" (Luke 10:38-42). From this comes the tragic trope that bedevils every Christian women's conference, "Are you a Mary or a Martha?" Are you a busybody doer or a hairbrained dreamer? Are you anxious and worried about getting things done, or just chill with Jesus? It's an unfair distinction. The short answer, for all of us, women and men, the short answer is, "yes."

Every one of us wrestles with believing salvation is either about us doing for God, or getting God to do for us. It's the same in the story Jesus told of a father and two sons, the parable of the Prodigal Son. The younger brother said to the father, "I want you to do for me. Give me what I want." The older brother did everything the father asked. "I did everything for you, and I got nothing in return." What did he want? He wanted his obedience to pay off. Both of them are saying, give me what I want. What does the father say to both of them? "All I want is you." As long as you believe that your salvation, eternal life, is about doing for God or about getting God to do for you, you will never be settled no matter where you go. You will never find peace, you will never feel the truth and reality of the eternal life Jesus offers. Jesus says, "It isn't about what you can do for me. And it isn't about what I can do for you. It's me. I am the life, I am the resurrection, I am what you need. Me."

"Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house" (John 11:17-20). True to form, Martha went out to meet Jesus on the road. "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 from God, God will give you” (John 11:21-22). I said last week we were going to rehabilitate Martha’s reputation a little. Look at this. Martha is supposed to be the practical one, the realistic one, she is supposed to be the one who operates more by deeds than faith, practice than belief. But, when you compare the two statements the sisters make to Jesus, and Mary’s will come next week, you see it is Martha, not Mary, who goes further out on the limb. They both say, “If you were here, my brother would not have died,” but it’s Martha who says, “Even now.” “Even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” That’s remarkable faith. Even now.

“Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again’” (John 11:23). Now, this was what everybody would say. This was, as it turns out, a very common way to console a person who lost a loved one. As it says, many had come out from Jerusalem to console them, so this is what the sisters were hearing from everyone. “Your brother will rise again.” They believed in the resurrection of the just at the end of time. You know how you go to a funeral and if you haven’t thought of what to say beforehand, you get up to your friend, and the most ridiculous things start spilling out of your mouth? “God needed another angel.” Please, no. God doesn’t need anything. He is the Undiminished Giver who lacks nothing and gives all things. And we don’t turn into angels when we die! You just say things in the discomfort. Well, people would walk through the receiving line, give that awkward smile, a little handshake or hug, look down at the floor and say, “Your brother will rise again.” Not bad, really, in the range of things. But Jesus means so, so much more when He says it. Martha replies, “I know. I know.” “Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day’” (John 11:24). Good faith.

Now comes the bomber, one of the greatest statements in all of Scripture. In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes seven “I am” statements. What are those? Well,

going back to Exodus when Moses stood before the burning bush and God told him to go free the slaves from Egypt, Moses said, “And who should I say sent me?” “God said to Moses, ‘I AM who I AM.’ This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14). “I AM” was taken as the name of God from then on. Jesus repeats “I AM” seven times in John. It’s no use pretending Jesus was just a man who never claimed to be God. You would have to rip this gospel out, and the other three, and make up your own. This is the fourth of seven “I AM” statements in John, and it’s a doozy. “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’” (John 11:25-26).

The resurrection is what everyone has been referencing. Lazarus will rise again at the resurrection, in the last day. “Your brother will rise again.” The faithful believe it. Martha does too. The resurrection is comfort. The resurrection is an idea that gives hope, a promise that offers some consolation in times of loss. The resurrection is faith in the face of death, that God will one day overcome death, will one day reverse the power of death and restore the separation and heal the pain. One day. Jesus says, “Wait a minute. Wait a minute, Martha. No. I’m saying more than that. Look at me. I AM the resurrection. It’s right here.”

Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life.” The life. There are two words for life in Greek, *bios* and *zoe*. *Bios* just means you’re a living, breathing creature. Worms have *bios*. Moss has *bios*. Pond scum has *bios*. *Bios* is no great shakes. What you want is *zoe*. This is the life that is truly life. This is eternal life. It’s not about quantity, though. *Zoe* is not just *bios* that goes on and on forever. It’s quality, not quantity Jesus is talking about. So now we have had two lessons this series. We had, if you remember, two times: *Chronos*, linear time, the god who eats his children; and *Kairos*, rich, full, meaningful time—a moment when time stops. Now we have two types of

life. Jesus says, “I am the life,” and he is not talking about keeping you breathing forever. He is talking about eternity. Eternal life. It’s not out there in the future somewhere. Jesus says to Martha, “I am that life. That life, eternal life, is standing right in front of you.” Jesus is saying, right in the face of death, within spitting distance of the tomb of her brother, His friend, Lazarus, who is lying there dead, “Whoever believes in me lives in me and even when they breath their last, they do not die.” “Do you believe this?” He asks her. “Do you believe this? No, you don’t. If you did, you would get in the wheelbarrow. You would stop trying to do good things to prove your worth. You would stop trying to do good things to get me to do what you want. You would give me your life, and all the good you do, all your faith and obedience, it would be a joyful response to my love, not an attempt to prove your worth. Do you believe this?”

In his book, *Eternity Is Now in Session*, John Ortberg says we think too much about salvation as attaining the minimum entrance requirements to get into heaven. We think of it like our airline miles flight status. What’s the minimum miles I need to stay silver? What’s the least I need to do to get into heaven? That’s not the relationship Jesus invites us into. God wants a relationship with you that’s more like a healthy marriage. Marriage comes up again and again as an illustration of how we are meant to be with God. What if, John says, instead of telling his wife Nancy how much he loved her, what if he went to the wedding day and stood up before the pastor and the family and everyone and asked, “What are the minimum requirements for keeping my husband status? What is the absolute least I can do to stay married to you?” It would have been a short ceremony, he said. Salvation, eternal life, is not about doing for Jesus—the minimum required—or getting Jesus to do for you—the minimum you have to do to get the response you want. It’s about Jesus Himself. Eternity starts right now. Eternal life stands before you. It’s Jesus. Loving, trusting, believing in Him.

“I am the resurrection,” says Jesus. “I am the life,” says Jesus. “I am eternal life standing right before you. It isn’t about you doing for me; it isn’t about getting me to do for you. It’s about me. Me. Myself. Do you believe this?” It comes down to that. Jesus asks Martha, “Do you believe?” And Martha, practical Martha, doing, action Martha, what does she say to Jesus? Up to now, others have raised the question, “Is this the Christ?” Some said He is the Prophet from God, some have called Him the Holy One, and some even “Son of God.” No one, up till now, has said it quite like Martha does here: “She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world’” (John 11:27). I believe. Even now. I believe.

Do you? In the words of Jesus, I ask, “Do you believe this?” Don’t tell me. Tell Jesus. He is here. He is present. Eternity is now in session and you can taste heaven today when you believe. It isn’t about earning your way into His good graces. You can’t. It isn’t about performing enough to get God to do what you want. You can’t. It is about Jesus Christ, and believing in Him. Eternity has invaded time. *Kairos* has invaded *Chronos*. *Zoe* has invaded *Bios*. Life has come to invade death. Jesus, the obedient Son, invades this rebellious world. He stands at the door and knocks. Martha, she opened the door to Jesus. It isn’t about getting you into heaven; it is about getting heaven into you. It isn’t about getting you into eternal life, it is about getting eternal life into you. Do you believe this? Don’t tell me. Tell Him. I ask you to pray. Repeat after me and make this your own prayer. Tell Jesus. Let us pray: *Jesus, I do believe. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who comes into the world. I believe you are the resurrection and the life. Come into my life. I trust in you. Forgive my sins. Help me believe. Make me your own, in the power of the resurrection. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*