

# Death, Life, and Tears

Thomas Robinson, January 10, 2010

## John 11:17-46

<sup>17</sup> On his arrival, Jesus found that **Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.** <sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup> and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

<sup>20</sup> When **Martha** heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup> "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "**if you had been here, my brother would not have died.**" <sup>22</sup> *But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.*"

<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "**Your brother will rise.**"

<sup>24</sup> Martha answered, "I know he will rise in the **resurrection at the last day.**"

<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life.** Anyone who **believes** in me will **live**, even though they **die**;<sup>26</sup> and whoever **lives** by **believing** in me will **never die.** Do you **believe** this?"

<sup>27</sup> "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the **Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.**"

<sup>28</sup> After she had said this, she went back and called **her sister Mary** aside. "**The Teacher is here,**" she said, "*and is asking for you.*"

<sup>29</sup> When **Mary** heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup> When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

<sup>32</sup> When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother **would not have died.**"

<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was **deeply moved** in spirit and troubled. <sup>34</sup> "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

<sup>35</sup> **Jesus wept.**

<sup>36</sup> Then the Jews said, "See how he **loved him!**" <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

<sup>38</sup> Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. <sup>39</sup> "**Take away the stone,**" he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "*by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.*"

<sup>40</sup> Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the **glory of God?**"

<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "**Father, I thank you that you have heard me.**" <sup>42</sup> *I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.*"

<sup>43</sup> When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "**Lazarus, come out!**"<sup>44</sup> The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "*Take off the grave clothes and let him go.*"

<sup>45</sup> Therefore **many of the Jews** who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, **put their faith in him.** <sup>46</sup> But **some** of them **went to the Pharisees** and told them what Jesus had done.

John 1:3-4

<sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> **In him was life**, and that life was the light of all people.

John 5:24

<sup>24</sup> "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has **crossed over from death to life.**"

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## **In the Midst of the Story**

We resume our reflections on John's Gospel in the middle. Series of "signs" pointing to the meaning of Jesus' challenging presence - man and God. Healing, confronting, teaching - a warrant for Jesus' arrest, beyond Jordan.

Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, close friends. Lazarus is desperately ill. They send word to Jesus: "Your beloved friend is ill." Jesus responds, delays, arrives. Lazarus had died as they sent word. Jesus knows and chooses his last sign.

Here drama of meaning surrounds the sign before and after, leading us into the great and final sign of the whole Gospel: Jesus' own death and resurrection.

## **Martha: Resurrection Present**

Martha and Mary each react to Jesus' arrival with the same words. Not blame, but faith and longing that he had not been under threat of stoning and far away.

With Martha Jesus unfolds a vision of the great story in which he is the turning point. From the trees of life and death in Eden to the final resurrection. Jesus is the true tree of life. Whoever lives/believes in him will never die.

"I am the resurrection" - Life conquering death through death. No escape.

From sin death defines human life as mortals, but it's not the final definition.

## **Mary: Anger and Tears**

No extended conversation with Mary. Jesus responds to her grief. Jesus was angry ("deeply moved") and troubled, not at her but at death, loss, pain, love cut short, the depth of sorrow of humanity that he entered and shared. Jesus burst into tears. We understand. We are amazed. What does it mean?

Death and Life - multisided realities. Death is the great threat, wages of sin, the last enemy. Death is also Jesus' weapon against sin and all its consequences. Faith in Jesus is about abundant life, eternal life, but it has death at its center, a cross as its sign. We live in the midst of that process of passing from death to life. We live with death and learn empathy, care, mutual service. We live toward resurrection and learn hope, no despair, life, action matters.

## **Lazarus: A Sign and a Challenge**

Perhaps Jesus weeps for what he is about to do to Lazarus - to call him back. He is laid out in a tomb as Jesus will be, but he will only be a sign pointing to resurrection. He will not experience resurrection itself. God the creator can continue to create, rewind entropy. In this amazing reversal of our experience, Jesus points to a reality that is entirely beyond our conception.

Lazarus becomes a challenge to faith; many believe, but others refuse to see. There's a stirring deep within me. Is He calling me. He is calling me.