

introduction

In our culture, we are obsessed with "limitless potential." Many move to NYC to escape the boundaries of our hometowns, seeking to build lives that are bigger, faster, and more enduring. But eventually, everyone hits a wall that no amount of ambition, networking, or medical advancement can scale: the wall of death and decay. Whether it is the literal death of a loved one or the mini-deaths of a failed career, a broken relationship, or fading youth, we are a people who live in the shadow of the inevitable.

As C.S. Lewis wrote in *A Grief Observed*, "No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear." When Martha and Mary face the death of their brother, they aren't just looking for a religious platitude; they are looking for a way through the fear. In this passage, Jesus doesn't simply offer a doctrine about the future; he offers himself as a present reality that changes how we face the end of all things. John 11 is less about Lazarus being raised from the dead than what it means that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. The miracle proves the claim.



When you face a major disappointment or ending in your life (a job loss, a move, a project failing), are you more likely to talk it through and find a logical explanation or withdraw in silence and emotion?

read **John 11:17-44 (NIV)**

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

²⁸ 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.” ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ 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.

³² 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.”

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

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ “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.”

⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² 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.”

⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ 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."

Take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture. Share some insights, questions, or points that strike you. Then read what follows.

context

The context of the previous section in John 11 is crucial. Jesus purposely delayed his arrival until Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days — the point at which, in Jewish thought, the soul was believed to have finally left the body. Jesus allowed the situation to become hopeless by human standards so that the glory of God might be revealed. He isn't interested in just managing our crises; he wants to transform our understanding of life itself.

the "if only" of the human heart

Both Martha and Mary greet Jesus with the same haunting phrase: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (vv. 21, 32). This is the "if only" of the human heart — the belief that God is only useful if he prevents our suffering according to our timeline. And in that sense, every person who has grieved and wrestled with the mysterious actions — or seeming inaction — of God in their grief can join Martha's cry, "If you had been here..." Still, she's able to come to grips with the goodness of God.

discuss

- 1. In your own life — career, singleness, health, or family — where are you currently tempted to say to God, "If only you had been here/acted sooner...?"**
- 2. How does Jesus' response to Martha (vv. 23-26) shift the focus from a missed miracle toward his presence as a Person? How would you have**

reacted to Jesus offering himself as the answer when you were hoping for a different outcome?

the present reality of the new creation

Martha believes in a "resurrection at the last day" (v. 24) — a distant, abstract hope. Jesus corrects her: "I am the resurrection and the life." As N.T. Wright emphasizes in *Surprised by Hope* that the resurrection isn't just a happy ending to a sad story; it is the "New Creation" breaking into the middle of the old one. D. A. Carson writes, "Ordinary, mortal life ebbs away; the life that Jesus gives never ends. It is in that sense that whoever live and believes in Jesus will never die."

Jesus' claim is not just that he will do resurrection, but that he is the resurrection. In him, the future has arrived in the present.

—N.T. Wright

discuss

3. How does knowing that the Future King is with you now change the way you view your grief and current situations that feel dead or beyond repair?
4. Jesus asks Martha, "Do you believe this?" before he performs the miracle. Why is it important to trust his identity before we see his intervention?

the God who weeps and works

In verse 35, we see the shortest and perhaps most profound verse: "Jesus wept." Even though he knew he was about to raise Lazarus, he was deeply moved by the evil tragedy of death. Jesus isn't a Stoic who is indifferent to our pain; he is a King who is incensed by the unnaturalness of death. As J.R.R. Tolkien might suggest, death is the "Great Enemy," an

intrusion into God's good world. That Jesus weeps, even knowing what he's about to do, shows how human he really is, and what a good and kind King and Friend he is.

Jesus does not come to explain away our tears; he comes to share them, and then to wipe them away.

—Tim Keller

discuss

5. Christians often think of mature religious people as being above deep emotion. How does the sight of a weeping Jesus change your image of God?
6. When Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb, he tells the community to "take off the grave clothes and let him go" (v. 44). In what ways is our community (the church) called to help one another live out our new-creation identities?

group application

Paul writes, "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Consider together how you would help one another or a friend facing a tragic loss.

[NOTE: If someone in the group is grieving, sensitively listen and point to Jesus. Don't try to fix or provide advice.]

upcoming

- Sunday, March 29 | **Evening Worship begins, 5pm**
Invite a friend who doesn't yet know Jesus to check out our new evening service with you.
redeemerws.com/evening
- Friday, April 3 | **Good Friday Service, 12 pm & 7pm**
Consider attending one of the special services on this date as a CG to be led in a pointed reflection on Jesus' death and return on Sunday for the good news of his resurrection.
redeemerws.com/lent
- Monday, April 6 | **Early Bird Pricing ends**
Get the best rate now to attend our "Redeeming Anxiety" spring conference together as a CG on Friday, April 23 & Saturday, April 24.
redeemerws.com/anxiety