

I Am the Resurrection and the Life

John 11:21-26

INTRODUCTION

- A. At the height of the Civil War, Oliver Winchester married Sarah Pardee of New Haven, Connecticut.
1. Oliver Winchester was the man who invented the Winchester rifle, the first true repeating rifle, and it was put to great use by the Union Army during the War.
 2. Because of his invention, Oliver Winchester and his new bride soon amassed a great fortune.
 3. Four years later, Sarah gave birth to a little girl named Annie, but the baby died when about two weeks old, and Sarah was so shattered that she withdrew into herself and nearly lost her mind.
 - a. Several years later, William himself developed tuberculosis and died.
 - b. Sarah became heir of a vast fortune, but no amount of money would assuage her grief. She possessed no answer to the death or loneliness that overwhelmed her.
 4. At a friend's suggestion, Sarah sought help from a spiritist.
 - a. During the session, the medium said, "Your husband is here. He says there is a curse on your family which took his life and that of your child. It is a curse that has resulted from the terrible weapon created by the Winchester family. Thousands of persons have died because of it and their spirits are now seeking vengeance."
 - b. Sarah was told that she, too, would soon die unless she sold out in New Haven and moved west. She would be guided by her husband who would tell her where to stop and build a house.
 - c. Sarah was told, "You must build a home for yourself and for the spirits who have fallen from the terrible weapon. You can never stop building the house. If you continue building you will live. Stop and you will die."
 5. Sarah sold her home in New Haven, moved west with her boundless fortune, and finally reached a spot near San Jose where she found a seventeen-room house under construction on 162 acres of land.
 - a. She purchased the house, tossed away the plans, and started building whatever she chose.
 - b. For thirty-six years her workers build and rebuilt, altered and changed and constructed and demolished one section of the house after another.
 - c. Railway cars brought in supplies, and every morning Sarah met with her foreman to sketch out new rooms.
 - 1) Rooms were added to rooms, wings were added to wings, levels were turned into towers and peaks.
 - 2) Staircases led nowhere. Doors opened to nothing. Closets opened to blank walls. Hallways doubled back upon themselves. The house became a vast, expensive maze, designed to confuse the evil spirits that tormented her.
 6. Sarah Winchester depleted her fortune by building and rebuilding, remodeling and renovating her vast, confusing, sprawling, unplanned mansion.
 - a. She believed that as long as she continued building, she would stay alive. But she didn't.
 - b. On the night of September 4, 1922, after a conference session with the spirits in the séance room, Sarah went to her bedroom and died in her sleep at age eighty-three.
- B. There's not a one of us who wouldn't say that Sarah Winchester had quite an eccentric way of avoiding death. Most of us have probably seen pictures of that strange, imposing mansion and scratched our heads.

1. Although we might scratch our heads when we think of Sarah Winchester, who among us really wants to die? How many of us — if we really believed building and rebuilding on our house would prevent our death — would meet with a contractor this very night?
 2. But, should we as Christians really be afraid to die?
 - a. If we really believe that a better future awaits us after our death, should we fear to go the way of all the earth?
 - b. I'm not at all saying that we should have a death wish where we desire to die, but I really do think we as children of the God who raises the dead should put faith and hope in God even in life's final moments.
- C. That same problem — how we as God's children should view death — plagued Jesus in his ministry.
1. In the passage we'll study tonight, Jesus talks with a grief stricken sister and the hope she could have in Jesus.
 2. We will speak specifically of: A Sister's Despair & The Savior's Hope.

A SISTER'S DESPAIR, vv. 21–24

- A. Martha came to Jesus and she said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him," vv. 21-22.
1. You know this narrative quite well.
 - a. Lazarus, Martha's brother, became quite ill. Martha and her sister Mary called for Jesus to come to Bethany.
 - b. Jesus received word that Lazarus was ill, but he did not go immediately to Bethany. While Jesus was delayed in going to Bethany, Lazarus died.
 2. When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Martha heard that he was close by, and she ran out to meet him. She said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."
 - a. Martha had every reason to believe that if Jesus hadn't been there, Lazarus wouldn't have died.
 - 1) She believed in Jesus. She told him, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world" (v. 27).
 - 2) Jesus had healed so many: he opened the ears of the deaf, opened the eyes of the blind, healed Peter's mother-in-law, made the paralyzed to walk, cast out demons.
 - 3) No doubt, Martha had heard Jesus' great deeds, and she knew that all that she and her family needed was for Jesus to come and heal Lazarus.
 - b. Notice the despair in Martha's words.
 - 1) She knew that Jesus could have saved Lazarus from death, but when she needed him the most, Jesus was nowhere to be found. And she says, in essence, "Jesus, why didn't you come and help me. I needed you, and you weren't here to help."
 - 2) Have we ourselves not felt Martha's despair?
 - a) How many times have we prayed to the God with all power for a loved one to be healed, but the dearest person in our lives died?
 - b) How many times have we wanted to say, "God, why? Look, I prayed and I prayed and I prayed, but nothing changed. Why didn't you come and answer my prayer like you promised?"
 3. Even in her despair, Martha holds out a little hope, "But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him."
 - a. Even though her brother had died, Martha knew that Jesus was still the Messiah, and that he could still do great things, if only he would ask God.
 - b. Whether or not Martha believed Jesus could raise the dead, we can't be sure, but she seems to have a little hope, at least.
- B. Jesus said to Martha, "Your brother will rise again." Martha replied, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day," vv. 23-24.

1. Jesus says to Martha, "I'll raise your brother."
2. She, not fully understanding what Jesus promises, says, "Yes, Lord, I know that he will be resurrected on the final day."
 - a. Martha's faith in a final resurrection was common among the Jews of her day.
 - b. Only the Sadducees denied the resurrection, and the Pharisees claimed that anyone who denied the resurrection would be lost for so doing.
- C. Martha hurt deeply, and she felt a great deal of despair because Jesus didn't help her when she needed him the most. What would Jesus say in response?

THE SAVIOR'S HOPE, vv. 25–26

- A. "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.'"
- B. Jesus said that he was the resurrection and the life.
 1. There are some who attempt to see "resurrection" and "life" as being redundant. However, "resurrection" and "life" aren't synonymous concepts, and I doubt seriously we should see them as synonymous here.
 2. Jesus said he was the resurrection.
 - a. Jesus claimed to be the resurrection in response to Martha's stated belief that her brother would rise on the last day.
 - 1) Jesus says, "I'm not talking about some great mass resurrection. I'm the One who will go to raise the dead."
 - 2) Jesus was moving Martha's faith from a concept - the resurrection - to a person, himself.
 - b. Our faith as Christians is not just that the dead are going to be raised at the end of time, but our faith is rooted in Jesus Christ, the One who will raise the dead.
 3. Jesus had every reason to claim to be the resurrection.
 - a. He raised the dead during his ministry — the widow's son, the centurion's daughter, and he's going to raise Lazarus in this narrative.
 - b. Even though Jesus did raise the dead in his ministry, that's not the reason we can place our hope in him as the resurrection.
 - 1) Lazarus, the centurion's daughter, and the widow's son are as dead tonight as they were before Jesus raised them. Although they were raised by Jesus, they did not overcome death.
 - 2) Jesus, in his resurrection, overcame death, for he was raised never to die again.
 - a) "Since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ" (1 Cor. 15:21-22).
 - b) We're going to be raised from our graves, not because the widow's son was raised or the centurion's daughter was raised or because Lazarus was raised, but because Jesus was raised never to die again.
 - 3) He is the resurrection, and we have that hope in Christ: that if we are in Christ, we will rise again.
 4. Jesus had every reason to claim to be the life.
 - a. The Book of John begins by declaring that Jesus is life. "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (1:3-4).
 - b. We were created through Jesus, and the physical life we enjoy is a result of his being life.
- C. According to Jesus, those who believe in him will never die.
 1. In a sense, that sounds so strange to our ears. How many have we known who believed in Jesus, but they died?
 2. You know what Jesus meant.

- a. We're all going to die physically; only the Lord's return can prevent that.
- b. But, those who believe in Jesus will simply go from life here to life in the Paradise of God when they die physically.
 - 1) Physical death for the Christian should not be something which frightens us to our core.
 - 2) But, we need to view death as Jesus here presented it, as simply going from this world of sin and death to live in a world with neither sin nor death.
3. You also know how forcefully Jesus here proved to be the resurrection and the life. He raised Lazarus from the dead. One day, that same power will raise us from the dead.
4. A friend asked a German preacher, "Are you afraid of death?" "Which death do you mean?" replied the dying man. "Jesus, my Savior said, 'He that believeth in Me shall never die.' Why then should I be afraid of what I shall not even see?"
5. Why should we fear that which we shall not see? Do you need to come this evening and be prepared for your physical death?