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THE LAZARUS EFFECT

You've heard the words of John 11 at funerals, and perhaps have been a bit confused. Mary and Martha and the disciples were confused too. Jesus had said Lazarus' illness would not lead to his death. But he died. Mary and Martha wish Jesus had healed him, but their faith stays strong in midst of their grief.

We empathize when we lose loved ones. Even when death is a blessing due to circumstances, we still mourn the loss. But only Christians can look forward to life after death, as Jesus promised. In verse 25, Jesus says, "**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?**" Yes, Martha affirms. I pray YOU do also believe - that Jesus is the Lord of life and that He is Lord of your life.

That's the great message of Christmas too. Jesus, Creator and Lord of Life who breathed the world into existence, laid aside His heavenly glory to be born as a human infant, destined to pay for the sins of the world. Then He resurrects Himself to life - because He is the Lord of life. Because He lives, we will live.

The Bible says all who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior have already received His eternal spiritual life, being reborn by the Holy Spirit. For believers, earthly death merely gives way to heavenly life, as our bodies return to dust and our souls enter heaven. Believers will never die spiritually. And some will never die physically - specifically those who are alive when Jesus returns. Because as Jesus resurrects the earthly bodies of those who died in faith, He will also transform living believers for their new heavenly existence. You can read more about this in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Jesus provides a foretaste of all this in John 11. In verse 35, the shortest verse in the Bible, **Jesus wept.** He expresses genuine human emotion in the loss of His friend - which greatly encourages us in our own loss. You needn't say anything profound, just grieve with those who grieve, trusting the Lord together.

But some of the people questioned Jesus, saying "**could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?**" We understand the question. But be very careful about judging God, as though He fails when He chooses not to heal. The Bible does not teach God must answer your prayers the way or when you want. He is not an idol. He is sovereign. Only a weak faith demands signs and miracles. God knows best. And what faith really is becomes clearest in moments of grief and trial - to trust Jesus not because of, but in spite of, circumstances. That's the message of hope - that this life is not the end, and that God can be trusted, regardless.

More than this, Jesus completely understands the devastation of death, which is the wages of sin and deserved consequences of mankind's rebellion against God. And that's why He's come - to make things right. In verse 33, John records that Jesus was "**deeply moved in His spirit and greatly troubled**" which in Greek indicates visceral outrage. He has come to destroy death. Are you outraged by the forces of evil which perpetrate death in the world? Terrorism? Abortion? (3,800 every day, just in America). Fetal tissue trafficking? Disease? Slaughter of Christian believers around the world? Death is the wages of sin.

The next actions of Jesus demonstrate His divine power over death - and the eternal truth of His promise of resurrection life. The body of Lazarus has been decomposing four days in the tomb. Some rabbis believed that after three days there was no chance for the human spirit to resuscitate. Lazarus was dead. Jesus stood before his rock-hewn tomb, much like the one He would soon enter in His own death. He orders the stone removed from the entrance. In verse 42, He prays aloud to the Father, for the benefit of the crowd, "**that they may believe.**" Then Jesus says, "**Lazarus, come out.**"

As the breathless crowd looked on, "**the man who had died came out**" in his graveclothes. Why? Because when Jesus said "**I AM the Resurrection and the Life,**" He meant not just some day in future, but this day. Because Jesus IS the Lord of Life, he raised Lazarus. Then just a few days later He rolled His own stone away so people could see His empty tomb.

Because Jesus LIVES today - raised from death and reigning in heaven on high. Because the Jesus of Christmas is the Christ who paid for sin and who gives eternal life to all who receive Him. Therefore, you can trust Him in your grief and trials today - because He has proved His promises of ultimate triumph!