

BIBLE STUDY HELPS

TITLE: I Am the Resurrection

TEXT: John 11:32-46

TARGET: SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Jesus is the life-giver, and we can have eternal hope through Him.

LOOK UP: FOCUSING THE GROUP

Introduce: We hear the following statement a lot when someone dies: “He or she has gone to a better place.”

- What does this statement express about the one who has died? (No matter someone’s view of Jesus, everyone hopes for something better after death)
- Why do you suppose so many long for something better after death, yet refuse to accept the one Who guarantee’s eternal life to those who believe in Him?
- Have you ever heard someone question why Jesus/God didn’t heal someone but let them die?

1 Thessalonians 4:13 informs believers that, *“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope”* While we will grieve at someone’s death, followers of Christ don’t have to “grieve like the rest, who have no hope.”

We see a group in John 11 who were grieving over the death of a loved one named Lazarus. At this point they were grieving because they had lost hope. They felt that, if only Jesus had been there, Lazarus could have been healed. But opposition had grown against Jesus in Jerusalem, so He had left the city and traveled to an area east of the Jordan River. It was there that news came that His beloved friend, Lazarus, was sick and close to death in the town of Bethany. Jesus deliberately delayed going to him, actually waiting until Lazarus was dead. While this sounds like someone who didn’t care, there was a greater lesson this day for those who had seen Jesus perform miracles.

The passages today bring the work of Jesus to a climax and provide clarity to other verses regarding Jesus as the one Who gives life: “Life was in Him” (John 1:4); “The Son also gives life to anyone He wants to” (John 5:21); “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35); “Anyone who follows Me . . . will have the light of life” (John 8:12); “I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance” (John 10:10); I give them eternal life, and they will never perish – ever! (John 10:28).

It was in this setting that the “if only” statement was expressed to Jesus by a grieving sister, Mary – “If only Jesus had been there, Lazarus would not be dead.” Let’s first examine the response and how it reveals the reality of grief that comes when someone loses a loved one or close friend. This miracle gives us the full understanding of Jesus as the life-giver and the eternal hope we have through Him!

LOOK IN: UNPACKING THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Grief is a reality – John 11:32-37

³² As soon as Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and told him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died!” ³³ When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, he was deeply moved in his spirit and troubled. ³⁴ “Where have you put him?” he asked. “Lord,” they told him, “come and see.” ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷ But some of them said, “Couldn’t he who opened the blind man’s eyes also have kept this man from dying?”

Discuss:

- What statement is made twice in this passage that indicates the expectation they had of Jesus?
- What does Jesus’ response communicate about Him?
- What troubled Jesus about the response of Mary and the crowd?
- Consider how you might respond to the ETB Personal Study Guide question on page 122 – “How does Jesus’s emotional response help us approach Him with our hurts and pains?”

These family members and friends couldn’t understand Jesus’ delay in coming to heal Lazarus. They felt that, since Lazarus was dead, there was no longer a need for Jesus to do anything. They weren’t ready for the lesson Jesus was going to teach them because of their grief. While Jesus can heal, there is something much greater than healing; it is what Jesus offers beyond physical healing.

Jesus was troubled over the fact that the sisters—and the Jewish mourners—did not yet fully understand who He was. – They could not get through their grief to see Jesus for who He was. They could only see the loss they had experienced. When people struggle with someone's death today, they often ask, "Why didn't God heal him?" or "Why did God let him/her die?" So Jesus responded to the people's grief as the Son of God and Son of man. The Son of God had every right to be angry with an enemy that had ruined His perfect creation and hurt those He deeply loved. He also had every right to be disturbed that He, the Lord over death, stood right there in the people's midst, and all they could do was weep and wail hopelessly.

Jesus is deeply concerned that you do not grieve hopelessly, but recognize that His presence, hope, and life are right there with you, and that He has power, even over death!

Not only did they grieve as people without hope, but they also doubted Jesus.

Doubt is natural – John 11:38-40

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ "Remove the stone," Jesus said. Martha, the dead man's sister, told him, "Lord, there is already a stench because he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. The tomb would have been a cave with a large, round stone sealing it. To this day there are tombs like this scattered throughout Israel.

We again see the emotion of Jesus. He was deeply moved as He approached the tomb and now Martha, the other sister to Lazarus, approaches him expressing doubt. Martha believed Jesus could have healed Lazarus, but now he was dead.

"Her reaction, however, contradicted her earlier expression of faith in Jesus as the Son of God (John 11:27). She believed Jesus could ask the Father to intervene in the situation, but when faced with the reality of Lazarus's tomb, Martha hesitated. Jesus gently reminded her that she would see the glory of God, as long as she believed." – ETB Leader Guide

Discuss:

- Why did Jesus ask the people to be involved by removing the stone?
- How is understanding that Jesus is not only one who heals but one who rules over death, help us deal with doubt when a believer dies or when we are facing death? What should this do regarding putting one's faith in Christ, even as we face death?

When people believe Jesus is only strong enough to do something in the here and now, it will be difficult for them to understand that Jesus can do anything regarding the hereafter. This is where faith is required, and trust is given through God's Word. Jesus reminds Martha, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" God's Word is oftentimes the only thing that helps us overcome our doubt. It is always constant and will remind us that we can overcome doubt that comes when we do as Martha did and act on human rationale and logic.

Ask: In what ways has God's Word and your personal relationship with Christ helped you overcome doubt?

Martha's faith was going to be challenged to think of Jesus as one who overcomes death and not just a healer of those who are sick. What happens next is something that no one could understand at the moment. It would require trust. While we may grieve and even doubt, ultimately, we must trust Jesus.

Trust is a Must – John 11:41-46

⁴¹ So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you heard me. ⁴² I know that you always hear me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, so that they may believe you sent me." ⁴³ After he said this, he shouted with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unwrap him and let him go." ⁴⁵ Therefore, many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what he did believed in him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

Guide:

- Describe the words and instructions Jesus used to help people understand who He was.
- What was the purpose of Jesus praying to God aloud?
- It had been four days since Lazarus had been buried. Have you ever had a time when God taught you something about Himself days or even weeks after you had lost all hope? Share your story.
- In what ways do we discount or underestimate our Savior's power because 2,000 years separates us from His earthly ministry?

Jesus earlier had told His disciples that Lazarus' sickness would result in their seeing God's glory. Indeed, the delay in Jesus coming to Bethany was for the purpose that the Son of God would be glorified through the raising of Lazarus from the dead (see 11:4). Jesus displayed His power over death and the grave.

During His ministry, Jesus raised three people from the dead: a little girl (see Mark 5:35-42), an only son (see Luke 7:11-15), and a beloved friend (see John 11:3,44). Like the previous six miracle-signs John featured, this raising of Lazarus from the dead was designed to reveal who Jesus is. He is the resurrection and the life.

Jesus' miracles were not intended just to alleviate temporary pain but to convince people to trust Him for hope, joy, and eternal life. We can be certain Jesus loves us and works for our good and God's glory even in death. We can deal confidently with death by having a relationship with Him.

Just like today, when God demonstrates His power to save, there will be those who respond by believing in Jesus and there will those who will become more cynical . . . until their death. Then someone might say, "they are in a better place," indicating that their doubt about eternity was never resolved. Trust is a must!

LOOK OUT: LIVING OUT THE TARGET

As we conclude a study of this passage, let's consider the life of Lazarus after his resurrection. We know that Lazarus was raised from the dead only to die physically again one day.

Process: How would you finish Lazarus' story after his resurrection? How would he have lived? What would have been his legacy of faith? How do you suppose he faced death when it was his time to die again?

Imagine Lazarus living a life of faith because of the new life he was given through Christ. Imagine how he faced his death the second time. What a powerful message of hope and faith he might have portrayed to a lost world who had no hope without Christ. What a powerful message this communicates to believers today. Jesus, through Lazarus, gives us the complete gospel message.

1. We were dead in our trespasses and sins. Ephesians 2:1 tells us that you were "dead in your trespasses and sins." We were just like Lazarus spiritually. We were dead and in the tomb, destined for decay. But now . . .
2. Jesus gives us new life as described in Ephesians 2:4-5: *"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses."*
3. We are expected to do something with our new life in Christ as Paul reminds us in Colossians 3:1-5 – "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵Therefore, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature . . ."

Challenge: Before Billy Graham died he expressed his trust in Christ for the here and now and the hereafter in a [Newsweek article, August 14, 2006](#): *"I do not fear death. I may fear a little bit about the process, but not death itself, because I think the moment that my spirit leaves this body, I will be in the presence of the Lord."*

- Can you be as confident as Billy Graham?
- How can you express your confidence about life and death with people who are desperate for hope? Make a list of people you know who are grieving, but are struggling with trusting Christ, and begin praying for them.