

The Day Death Took a Hike

John 11:38–45

My hope for resurrection rests in my faith in Christ's death at the cross. Does yours?

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

PEOPLE are living longer. Thanks to advances in medical care, the average life span has extended beyond the age most people lived a generation ago. We eat better food, enjoy healthier lifestyles, and have access to a pharmaceutical fountain of youth. Even so, no matter how long people live, death eventually comes.

“Who can live and not see death,” the psalmist queries, “or who can escape the power of the grave?” (Psalm 89:48 NIV). The obvious answer: *no one*.

No one except Jesus.

Jesus escaped the power of the grave when He rose from the dead, and He offers eternal life to all who put their faith in Him. In an amazing display of His authority, He demonstrated His death-denying power at a cemetery—a place where death normally rules. On that day, however, Jesus overruled death when He called Lazarus out of the tomb. When Jesus spoke, death took a hike!



PREPARE YOUR HEART

You may be grieving the death of a loved one. If so, the Lord is with you just as He was with Martha and Mary in the cemetery. Write a prayer inviting the Lord to minister to you through His Word and His tears.



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Take time to read the full account of the raising of Lazarus in *John 11:1–45*. Enter the scenes with your senses. Hear the weeping mourners, see the tomb, and imagine the reassuring voice of Jesus bringing calm and comfort.



Observation: The Miracle and the Reactions

Now, go back over the passage and observe key words that John repeats for emphasis, such as *love, death, weep, believe, glory, and life*. Circle or underline these words in your Bible, if you wish, and any other key words, contrasts, or cause-and-effect statements that you find. Take notes below.

The Sickness of Lazarus—John 11:1–3

Now that you have your bearings, focus on *John 11:1–3*. Write down the crisis, problem, and names of the central characters. Why do you think the sisters assumed Jesus would come right away?

Martha and Mary's spirits sank deeper with each sun that set without Jesus by their side. *What could be keeping Him?*

Jesus often did the unpredictable to accomplish the incredible. In fact, so incredible that those who lived in that day found themselves unable to explain it as the plan unfolded. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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The Response of Jesus—John 11:4–16

John 11:4–7 explains the reason Jesus delayed going to Bethany. What did Jesus mean when He said, “Lazarus’s sickness will not end in death” (John 11:4), if Jesus knew Lazarus would die or was already dead?¹

Jesus has higher purposes—reasons so vastly important as to defer His love and restrain His power. What greater good compelled Jesus to delay going to Lazarus (*11:4, 15, 40–42*)?

Now examine *11:8–16*, which describes the disciples’ attempts to talk Jesus out of returning to Judea. What were their concerns?²

In the meantime, back in Bethany, the mourners had already arrived. And Lazarus was a cold cadaver. He was placed in a cave-like tomb, which was where they buried people in ancient days, rolling a huge stone over the mouth of the cave to keep the animals out and grave robbers away. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Reaction of Martha and Mary—John 11:17–35

Finally, Jesus arrived. Martha ran to meet Him outside the village, and Mary met Him outside the house, according to *John 11:17–32*.

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We'll come back to Jesus' "I am the resurrection and the life" statement when we interpret the passage (John 11:25). For now, enter the heartache and confusion of the two sisters. What emotions were they expressing when they both exclaimed to Jesus the same line: "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died" (11:21, 32)?

Although the sisters' words were identical, their manner was different. What do you observe about Martha's approach to Jesus in [11:21–22](#) versus Mary's reaction in [11:32–33](#)?³

Martha expressed her grief in words; Mary, in tears. Martha needed an explanation; Mary, an emotional connection. Compare [11:23–27](#) and [11:33–35](#). Write down how Jesus met each woman at her point of need.

The Raising of Lazarus—John 11:36–45

No more delays. *It was time for Jesus to act.* Read [John 11:33–38](#), and notice the range of Jesus' emotions: anger, anguish, grief, and love all mixed together. What do you think prompted so many emotions in Jesus—even anger?

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How did Jesus explain the reasons He brought Lazarus back to life in [John 11:40–42](#)?

What commands did Jesus give, according to [11:43–45](#)? Had you been there, what would your response have been?

This was a resuscitation, not resurrection, meaning when Lazarus came out of the tomb, he was still in his earthly body. Death still awaited him later.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: “I Am the Resurrection and the Life”

As we *interpret* a passage, it’s helpful to consult a reliable Bible commentary. Take a few minutes to read page 216 of Pastor Chuck’s *Insights on John*—if you own a copy. Or consult the online commentary, *Constable’s Notes*, at [netbible.org](#). Find [John 11:25–27](#) in the left panel, and then select “Constable’s Notes” in the right panel.

Martha believed the doctrine of the resurrection, but Jesus invited her to trust not just in a creed but in Him. Based on your reading, what did Jesus mean when He said, “I am the resurrection” (John 11:25)? When He said, “I am . . . the life” (11:25)?

What is the meaning of Martha’s confession of belief in [11:27](#) in light of John’s purpose for writing his gospel ([20:31](#))? By comparison, Peter’s similar confession is the focal point of Matthew’s gospel and the foundational doctrine of the church ([Matthew 16:16–19](#)).

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Are you sitting in the waiting room of God's delays? Are you mourning the loss of a loved one or a cherished dream? We leave Lazarus' empty tomb with hope in a God who cares and comes just when we need Him.



Correlation: Jesus, Our Redeemer

Martha and Mary trusted in Jesus, even though they didn't understand all His ways. Similarly, Job clung to God through his terrible suffering, even though he didn't know why God allowed it. What words of faith did Job declare from the ashes in [Job 19:25–26](#)?

The Hebrew word for *Redeemer* can mean "Defender." What reassurance does it give you to know that your Savior will defend you at death?

At death we don't need a priest. We don't need an attorney or physician. We need Someone to acquit us before a holy God. How can we who are sinful stand before a holy God when we are raised? We must have a Defender. The One who paid a price for us on the cross. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Truth for Today

Two statements of counsel emerge with Lazarus from this passage. First, *although the Lord delays, He is never late*. God keeps time by His watch, not our deadlines. Remember, when delays occur, God has better timing and a better way.

Second, *when facing sickness and death, we can trust God*. The human perspective demands God take immediate action, but the divine perspective trusts Him to accomplish His higher good.

In your waiting period, how can you trust God?

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How is God glorified as you trust and wait?

Jesus gave Martha and Mary exactly what they needed in their grief. Martha needed His truth to comfort her, and Mary needed His tears. What do you need from the Lord when you grieve?

Jesus speaks to our minds where faith is formed, and He ministers to our hearts where devotion is kindled. Take a moment to express your heart to the Lord as Martha and Mary did. Never has the Lord refused His tearful child who draws near for reassurance. What do you need to express to the Lord, and what is He saying to you through His Word?

Let's close in prayer with the assurance of the Lord's promise of eternal life and the anticipation of our own empty tomb.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, like Martha, I confess my belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, who has come into my world. I proclaim my trust in Him who will take my weak body and change it into a glorious body like His own. Thank You for this hope. You are my resurrection and my life. Amen!

ENDNOTES

1. Jesus waited two days (John 11:6). The trip by foot from Galilee to Judea took two additional days. When Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days (11:17), which meant that Lazarus may have died around the time the messenger arrived (11:3).
2. Jesus faced increasing danger with each trip to Jerusalem, narrowly escaping arrest and stoning on several occasions (John 7:30–32; 8:59; 10:31, 39).
3. Each time Mary, the sister of Martha, appeared in the gospels, she was at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39; John 11:32; 12:3).

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2003, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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