

**March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020. John 11:17-27,32-45.**

What's the death rate? They're figuring it out. Reports are coming in from different places around the world. The Covid-19 outbreak has brought the discussion of death into a lot more conversations than usual. In a modern, western culture like ours that has maybe attempted to keep death at arm's length as much as possible, it has now become a part of almost every headline.

It makes me think of another headline which I once heard: "Death rate remains steady: 1 out of every 1 of us still dies."

But then there is this memory, which comes as an answer:

"Death be not proud, though some have called you mighty and dreadful, for you are not so. For some you think you overthrow, die not. Nor yet can you kill me. One short sleep past, we – Christians – wake eternally. And death shall be no more for us. Death, thou shalt die!"

You know, you or I – or all of us even – could lose someone close to us if this spread of Covid-19 escalates here in the US. I'm not saying that to instill panic. There's no need for that among us who rest in Jesus' safekeeping. There's good reason though for us to take up the topic of death today, see death for what it is, and look to our God for His wisdom and truth for dealing with death. That's our topic: **dealing with death**. First answer the question:

### **Part 1 – What's your conviction?**

Come out with Martha to spend time with Jesus.

Sadly, I think Martha is often more remembered for another encounter with Jesus: a day recorded in Luke ch.10 (38-42). We can learn something from that day. Martha's kitchen management style got her off track. She forgot to sit at Jesus' feet and be fed. But we are served well today in seeing Martha's example of handling loss, dealing with death. Look at Martha's grasp on God's truth. She is quick to turn to it for comfort. Her confidence in the Lord's promise and witness to His truth teach and encourage us.

Review the exchange. It begins in vs.21. Martha: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother **would not have** died..." That's a lot of confidence. No uncertainty is heard there. Jesus: "Your brother will rise again." Martha: "**I know** he will rise again... at the Last day." Jesus: "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*" Martha: "Yes, Lord. I believe that **you are** the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

For you and I to have, or gain today, such spiritual maturity – like Martha's – is a true gift from the Holy Spirit. We're talking about the clarity and certainty: on the Last Day, Jesus – God the Son – will indeed visibly return, and life will be ours as a result. Not death. Resurrection Life for all who trust in Him.

Now take a look further. Jesus speaks of even more to Martha than the hope of life in the future. He says, "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" Present tense. Life dwells in Jesus. And... "Whoever believes in him *has* eternal life." That means for you, God's child through faith, at

the moment of your death your soul will pass through the door of physical death to life with God before His throne, in peace and joy eternal.

Dealing with death is a reality, even with all our modern medical advances. We have to face death. It comes. But you and I – as family in Christ – can face it confidently, like Martha. Our Risen Lord Jesus has the power to take you and me through the valley of death - from life here to life eternal.

**Part 2 dealing with death – Is it ok to feel sad when a Christian dies?** Does sadness have a place?

Mary hears the invitation, “the Teacher is here and is asking for you.” Quick she goes. Go out with her for this time with Jesus. Her first words confessed the same conviction as Martha’s – a trust in Jesus; trust in His power.

And yet, she wept. She, like Martha, knew the truth taught throughout the Old Testament. Think of Job’s confession: “I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And I in my own flesh will see Him.” They knew their brother, Lazarus, would rise again. They knew they would too on the Last Day. Yet, Mary wept. Even the certainty of the resurrection to eternal life did not prevent crying. There’s no need for you or me to bottle sadness up.

Jesus welled up with emotion too. Before He even makes it out to the grave where Lazarus’ body lay. He saw those still standing, those still breathing, those beside Him weeping. Mary wept. Others with her wept. Jesus wept.

Death’s tentacles had stretched out from the grave and touched the hearts of the living. God never created us for death, or to see death. He created us to live. And in a perfect world that is all we would have done. Live and live and live. Death is an intruder in our world. It came when sin entered the world. Jesus sees the pain and turmoil brought from death. And He welled up within... and, He wept. Sadness has a place. But not the victory.

The comments of the crowd, “See how he loved him – Lazarus,” don’t seem to capture enough for Jesus’ sadness. How about: “See how He loves *us*”?

He wept. Sadness had its place for Jesus. But He wasn’t immobilized by it. He was moved to act. And I’m not taking about just for Lazarus. As Hebrews 2:14 states: “*Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*” Jesus gave his own life, so that we might have eternal life through trust in him.

He isn’t content to stand by and leave us to face what our sins rightly merit. Romans 5:12: “*...death came to all men for all sinned.*” God couldn’t say anything more serious than this. The terrifying consequence of sin is death. Greed that says, “I’m not happy with what you’ve given me.” Sentence? Death. Selfishness, quick to demand service but so often failing to offer love

and service to others. Sentence? Death. Sinful pride. Sentence? Death. Gossip. Sentence? Death. Misplaced priorities. Sentence? Death.

Lord, speak hope to us otherwise hopeless sinners.

Romans 5:19 – *“through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”* The one man! Jesus, God the Son, took on human flesh and lived perfectly in our place. Our Lord took the burden of sin on his own shoulders. He suffered the full weight, the punishment that our sin deserved. And so! Heaven is won, and eternal life is prepared, for all who trust in Him to save.

Jesus knew this victory over death that He would go on to win for us. Yet still this day, He wept. There’s comfort for you and me in this. He is still here. Unseen, but present. He views every event in our lives – from the days in the hospital when we welcome new life, to days of uncertainty quarantined in our homes, to the days when we weep over loss – the death of someone dear to us. He is able to sympathize with us. And He lives to help us in our need, to calm us with His love, to comfort our sad hearts. And...

He, who faced the cross, lives triumphant from the grave, so that we can have the ultimate comfort: that a fellow Christian who has died has crossed over to eternal life.

And then... one day... that fellow Christian will be you, or me. Death will come; but death will not win the victory, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ. For Jesus faced death to destroy death’s power to confine us. And that means... the day of your death is the day He will usher you into the glorious freedom of the children of God. Sadness has its place as we face death. But it does not hold the victory. Not over you, dear child of God. Jesus holds you.

We’ve seen Martha’s time with Jesus. And Mary’s time with Jesus. There’s one more encounter to witness this day. See Jesus meet with death. And for dealing with death... **Part 3 – What do we learn at the tomb / the grave?**

Come out to where Lazarus lay breathless, and... watch Jesus come face to face with death. This is not friends meeting now. Two powers meet here this day. Who will be stronger? Who will win the day? “Take away the stone!” Martha’s reply to Jesus’ words does not mean she has lost faith in Jesus. She doesn’t evidently grasp yet what Jesus intends. Yet her words are worth noting for this reason: they attest to the magnitude of what is about to happen: “Lord, now he smells. For it is the fourth day.”

Jesus’ gentle reply redirects her to His power. What power? Human experience had taught Martha: every person dead four days remained dead. Jesus says: “Watch, and let me display the one thing that surpasses human experience. Death is not the invincible enemy. It’s an enemy that I will defeat for all who believe in Me.” This day serves as a sweet sample of what you, and all who believe in Jesus, will get to experience on the Last Day.

When death meets with Jesus, when Jesus gives the word, death is forced to let God’s child go free. “Take away the stone!”

And then... what do we see? The scene this day closes with Jesus and Lazarus together. And how did that happen? What did it require? Jesus' word. Only that. Jesus said: "*Come out!*" Jesus commands. And just like that Lazarus and Jesus are together again, on the outside of Lazarus' tomb.

Jesus will say those same words to you on the Last Day: "*Come out.*" John 5:28-29 – "...a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out..." "And so we [Christians] will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thes.4:17).

Jesus and you together outside your tomb. You can be sure of it. 100% confident. How? The one who left His own grave empty, with His grave clothes sitting in a heap, has promised the same victory for you over death.

Jesus is the answer to dealing with death. "I am the resurrection and the life," He says, "whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies." Hear Him today in his Word. See Him for who He is and what He alone does. And don't ever lose sight of him. Welcome the opportunities to hear Him now. You are hearing Him speak every time you read and study His Word (the Bible). Rejoice in the life you have in him now, and the peace it brings. Trust His Word. Follow His will. Give thanks for His care. And look forward to the Day when you will meet him face-to-face, and see him with your own eyes, and live with him forever. Oh how my heart – our hearts - yearn with us. Amen.