

A Case Study in Trusting Jesus
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John 11:17-27
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I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles now to John 11. The text this morning is Verse 17-27. We covered the first 16 verses last week, and we'll cover the next 11 this morning. The title of the message is 'A Case Study in Trusting Jesus'. You might call it a case study in growing faith, a case study in persevering faith, but it is a case study because the subject in this passage is Martha, the sister of Lazarus. She comes into the spotlight in this section, and not so much Martha in the spotlight as Martha's faith. Her knowledge of and trust in Jesus, that is what is focal in the text. We're going to see that her faith, when you look at it, is impressive, but it is imperfect, it is a work in progress, it is incomplete. The words 'believe' and 'faith' are central to all of John's Gospel. His goal in his writing this book was so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing you may have life in His name. There in John 20:31, the word 'believe' occurs twice. It occurs more than 90 times in this Gospel, more than any other book in the New Testament, and 9 times in this chapter, in John 11. Four times in three verses, at the climax of the present passage, Verses 25-27, the word 'believe'. This text heightens the importance of faith because of the penetrating question of our Savior that punctuates this dialogue between Him and Martha when He asks her in Verse 26, "Do you believe this?" That is the question, for her, and for every reader, and indeed for us this morning, "Do you believe this?" We begin reading at Verse 17, John 11:

*John 11:17-27 ~ So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother. 20 Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. 21 Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." 23 Jesus *said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha *said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She *said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world."*

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we come to Your word as always mindful of our inadequacy, our inability, to understand these things, to take these things to heart. We know that we need Your Spirit to work, and so we ask that You might bless Your word with the illuminating power of the Spirit, and that You might help us to see wonderful things from Your law. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

'A Case Study in Trusting Jesus'. Now the general principle upon which this entire chapter turns is laid down in Verses 1-16, and we really began to look at it last time as we unpacked those verses. I want to review it quickly, very quickly, so that we see what that underlying principle is. You remember that we looked at the unfolding of the drama of Chapter 11. I encouraged us to read this as though we were reading for the first time. We know that Lazarus is going to be resurrected, this is such a well-known story, right? But read it as if you were there in the story and feel the weight of the impact of Jesus' actions, His words.

We noted last time, we started off, there were four points in my message. An intimate relationship, Jesus, and Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus had a very close relationship. The text tells us Jesus loved them. It says that a number of times, how He loved them. Then we saw an urgent request, that Mary and Martha sent an urgent request to Jesus, "Lord, he whom You love is sick." Didn't even have to ask for Him to come, they assumed He would come because they knew how much He loved Lazarus, and the need was great. "Surely He will come," and the text highlighted for us an astonishing, the third point last week, an astonishing response. Jesus delayed two full days. The text is emphatic in the way it describes it, especially in the original, but it makes clear that He, in a decided and determined way, waited. No explanation given, no account of the things that He was doing, though we know that He is always about His Father's business, and He was doing great works.

The text wants us to feel the weight of anticipation of Mary and Martha as they wait for Jesus to come. The messenger comes back without Jesus, and his message is even more perplexing because he tells them that the sickness is not unto death. When he arrives back home, Lazarus is probably already dead, so these words are doubly perplexing. "This sickness is not to end in death." The Master didn't come, and we saw the astonishing response, there was a loving reason for that, that Jesus is clear about His purpose in waiting.

His purpose in the sickness itself, has two points in it. It is a two-fold purpose. First, that His disciples might see the glory of God, that they might see the glory of the Son of God, specifically. Verse 4:

John 11:4 ~ ...“This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.”

The reason Lazarus is sick, the reason God has allowed Lazarus to be sick, the reason that Lazarus is in the condition he is in is because the Son of God must be glorified in it. The Son of God must be revealed in the wonder and majesty of who He is.

Then the second part of this purpose, two-fold purpose, was the glory of God and also the faith of the disciples, the faith of His children. Verse 15, after he says in Verse 14, ...***“Lazarus is dead,...*** They didn’t understand when he said, “Lazarus has fallen asleep.” He says now, “Look guys, ...***“Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe;...*** “The reason I’m glad I wasn’t there is so that you can grow in faith.” In fact, the way He says, ...***so that you may believe;...*** I didn’t get to share this last week. The idea is, first of all, He is talking to His disciples. He’s talking to those who already believe. He is going to be demonstrating His glory to them, and to Mary and Martha who already believe, who already are saved. It is clear the disciples were born again. Jesus tells them in John 13, the night when He’s washing the feet, remember? And Peter says, “Don’t wash my feet. You can’t wash my feet. How can you possibly wash my feet? I’m not worthy for You to wash my feet.” And Jesus says, “If I don’t wash your feet you have no part in Me.” And Peter says, “Well, not my feet Lord, but also my head, and my hands. Everything, wash everything.” Jesus says, “If you bathed you don’t need but just to wash your feet and you are clean, but not all of you,” because He was speaking of Judas Iscariot. So what He was saying was, “The 11 of you are clean. You have been bathed. You have been born again.” Now they don’t possess the full package of the Holy Spirit that they are going to get after Pentecost, but they have truly been born again. They are truly standing in faith. They have repented and believed in Jesus, and the level of knowledge they have, they are standing in it. But He tells them in Verse 15, “The reason that this has happened is so that you may believe.”

It is interesting, the word there is in the aorist tense, “So that you may believe,” it is aorist tense, and the aorist tense is a past tense in Greek, but it is a tense that emphasizes. A tense in Greek emphasizes not so much the time of the action as the kind of the action. The kind of action in the aorist is punctiliar, the idea is a point

in time. So when He says, “I’m glad that Lazarus is dead so that you may believe,” what He has in vision is, “I’m going to show you something of My glory and it is going to result in a decisive, point in time advance in your faith. It is going to produce something that is dramatic and decisive. You are going to trust in Me in a new way. You are going to grow decidedly because of what is about to happen.” What you have taught in this passage is that the Christian faith is not a static entity, but a living relationship. It is not theoretical, and it is not static, or just unchanging. “You get saved, and there you’re saved. You’ve got your ticket to Heaven, and so now you just live your life until then.” That is not the picture of what the Gospel is about. It is not about punching a ticket, it is about knowing a person. What we see is that it is a living relationship. When someone comes to know Christ, that they have just begun on a journey to know Him more, and that God’s purpose, and I would say the central proposition of this entire chapter, this entire passage is this: The Savior’s goal in allowing Lazarus to die, and delaying, the Savior’s goal is that His disciples may come to know Him more fully, and in turn trust Him more completely. That is His purpose. That is what He is about. He is a Good Shepherd who leads His sheep to where they can find pasture. He’s a loving Shepherd who is willing to take them through the dark valley so that they can find the green pasture, and the sunlit meadow on the other side. This is what He is doing. He is leading them in the way that He leads you if you are a follower of Jesus Christ. His goal every day is that you might know Him more fully, and trust Him more completely. That is His goal for today. That is His goal for tomorrow. Praise His name, that is His goal for all eternity. That is what it is to be a Christian. Like I said, it is not to have a ticket punched, it is to know a person, and to grow in the knowledge of that person every day that you live, and that is living, knowing Jesus Christ.

Now, so we see that His delay is calculated to lead His beloved into the dark, so to speak, so that they can see His glorious light. I think this explains Verses 8-10. You know I was really kind of at break-neck pace last week, the shortest sermon I’ve ever preached I believe, or at least in the last 15 years, because of the time when I got up to speak. I kept looking at my watch, “Oh my goodness, Lord, praise Your name. Okay,” and I was just cutting material, cutting material as we go. “Okay, four points, boom, boom, boom, boom.” It’s probably good discipline to have though, when you are long-winded like I am. I didn’t get to talk about something that He says in the passage that is really intriguing. When the disciples say to Him in Verse 8, Jesus says to them in Verse 7 after the two-day delay, He says, “*Let us go to Judea again.*” Verse 8:

John 11:8 ~ The disciples *said to Him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?”

“This is suicidal madness. What are you thinking? We just left there. We just escaped. Why would we go back?” They probably assumed that is why He didn’t go when He received word that Lazarus was sick. “It is too dangerous.” No, that is not it at all. “It wasn’t an issue of danger, it was an issue of need, for you and for My other followers to see My glory.” And what He says in Verse 9:

John 11:9-10 ~ ...“Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.”

Bible interpreters and commentators wrestle with this. This is a somewhat mysterious saying. What does He mean by this? Does He mean...? Now I think it is possible that there are kind of two meanings. One that is often proposed is that Jesus says, “Look, I’ve only got 12 hours in the day,” this is realistically the average. You have 12 hours of sunlight a day, and so when you average it all out that is how it works out. Twelve hours of sunlight a day and you have to do all of your work during the sunlight. “So I’ve only got so much time, and so I need to go.” I think that is part of it, but I think there is really something more than that because when He says:

John 11:9-10 ~ ...If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.”

I think what He is really saying here is, He is getting ready to tell them, “The night has descended on someone I love, someone we all love. He stumbled, and what he needs is to see the light of this world.” That is more urgent than anything else, so the light of this world, Jesus Himself, is going to remove the darkness. I say that, let me show you why I think that. Look at Verse 11, this is what He follows up with what He just said in Verses 9-10, in fact, this is emphatic. ***This He said, and after that He *said...*** He could have just said, “After that He said,” or he could have just gone right into it.

John 11:11 ~ This He said, and after that He *said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep.”

Do you see that? I think He is explaining what He said in Verses 9-10. “Our brother Lazarus is asleep. Death, darkness has overtaken him, but I go to awaken

him.” So what we see in this is that Jesus has allowed the darkness, in a calculated and deliberate way, He has allowed the darkness to come into His beloved child’s life, Lazarus, and Mary, and Martha, this family that is so dear to Him. He has allowed the darkness to come in, to envelope them, to cover them, so that they can feel the weight of that darkness, and He has waited, and He has waited until the right moment. Then He goes to show them the glory of His light. This is the way of God. This is the way God operates and has operated.

I mentioned Exodus 6 earlier, and I said that the Lord is showing them there that though Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob knew the name Yahweh, they really knew God more as God Almighty, the One that nothing is too hard for. He gave Abraham a son in his old age, He gave Isaac a son when they couldn’t have children for so long, He showed His glory by protecting Jacob, etc. They didn’t know Him as Yahweh, not the full meaning of what Yahweh means. God longs to be known, it is His mercy. He doesn’t need to be known, He is glorious in Himself, but He is such a benevolent and merciful God that He invites people to come to know Him, and He delights in showing the wonder of His goodness and showering it upon people. What He does in Exodus, when you read through the book, He says that in Chapter 6, basically He says to them, “Look, Moses I’m about to do something so wonderful that you can’t imagine. I’m going to reveal to you My glorious name, what it means that I am the Lord, that I am Yahweh. The way you are going to find out what it means, is partly, you have had to enter into suffering.” The reason that Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob didn’t know what Yahweh means is they weren’t slaves.

It struck me when we began the study of the Bible, we call it ‘The 30,000 Foot Overview’. [Laughter] I don’t know what is so funny about that? We have slowed down a little more. It’s not really like an airplane flight, it is more like a bus ride maybe through the Bible. So maybe it shouldn’t be 30,000 feet, but we did spend eight weeks in Ezekiel, but Asher appreciated all 8 weeks I think. But when we were studying through that, it hit me for the first time really, I hadn’t thought about this. When God revealed Himself to Abraham, makes a covenant with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, why did He allow the Israelites to become slaves? They did not do anything to deserve it. I mean, it wasn’t like He says, “They sinned and they caused it.” Remember what happened?

They had a famine and the Lord miraculously provided and demonstrated His salvation by sending Joseph ahead, the whole story, because God is about revealing His glory. But then He lets them become slaves after a period of time, for a while there they are celebrities in a way. They are the relatives of Joseph. Then

later a Pharaoh rises up who doesn't know Joseph, doesn't remember him, and he makes them slaves, and they spend 400 years in bondage, tyranny. Why? So that they could know that Yahweh delivers from tyranny. You can't know that God saves if you are not lost. You can't know what it is like to know a God that delivers unless you have been bound. Praise God, He is willing to let you be bound so that you can know Him. That is what you see and you see it throughout, as you follow the narrative of Exodus you see it.

See, the 10 plagues happen. Why was the Pharaoh so stubborn? So that God could, He even says, "I've raised you up for this purpose that I can make My name known through you." Pharaoh has hardened his own heart, but God is also hardening his heart. There is this dual thing going on, Pharaoh is doing what he wants to do, hate God, but God is allowing it, and provoking him by showing His glory. God is doing only good things, showing His glory, and Pharaoh is hardening, and hardening himself against it. It took 10 plagues. Why? Because God wanted to show His glory in 10 plagues. He wanted to show His complete dominance over the pantheon of Egypt, all the gods, all of the flies, and the frogs, and all that stuff, the darkness, was all about God basically calling the names of their pantheon. "Bring the Lord of the flies up. I'll show you flies." Yahweh reigns over the flies. Yahweh reigns over the sun. "Don't worship Ra, worship Yahweh." God is showing His glory and there were many Egyptians that got saved on account of that.

They see that in the 10 plagues, but then they leave and what happens immediately? They were delivered from Egypt, they go out plundering the Egyptians, and then the next thing you know, Pharaoh has had a change of heart and is chasing them down. He is pursuing them with a bloodlust, he is going to let them have it. The Lord was foolish enough, at first glance it looks like, to lead them to camp by the Red Sea. There is no escape route, it is just the Red Sea on one side, and Pharaoh on the other. Why was that? Because God is about showing His glory. They couldn't know that God could open the seas unless they had been by the seas and needed Him to open the seas. They couldn't know that Yahweh is a God who delivers like that.

Then the next thing you know they are through the Red Sea, they sing the song of Moses there in the aftermath of that, and they glory in Him. The next thing you see happen is they don't have any water. "We forgot to fill our canteens." The Lord didn't make provision for this. Why? Because the Lord wants to show that He is able to give water, and He gives them water. When you read that in Exodus 15, it

says that he made the waters clean, and he says, “You may know that I am the Lord who heals you. I am Yahweh Rapha, Jehovah Rapha.”

See? God is about showing His glory. He is about letting His people go through difficulty and adversity so they can see His faithfulness, and that He is with them in it. You see what kind of God this is? He is not a God who has these rules up in Heaven, and He is busy with doing His stuff, and He is just getting reports on whether or not you are being good or not, and then sending somebody after you. This is a God who is intimately face-to-face relating with His people, who has orchestrated your life, and my life, so that everything that happens is happening for a purpose. This is what it means, “All things work together for good of those who love Him, and who are called according to His purpose.” What is His purpose? That we might be conformed to the image of His Son, that we might be like Jesus.

And how do you get like Jesus? You get like Jesus as you get more and more united *to* Jesus. You get like Jesus as you see that Jesus is everything that you need, as you see that He is the ‘*I AM*’, ‘*The Great I AM*’. That is the reason they didn’t have bread. They get water and then they don’t have bread, and God gives them bread out of Heaven so that they could know Deuteronomy 8:3, that you don’t live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. That you and I would come to know that what we need more than anything else, today, and tomorrow, and the next day, is the living and abiding word of God which reveals Him to us. What we need is to know Him. We want to be like Paul who says, “The one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and pressing on toward what lies ahead, I press on toward the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, and the one thing I want is that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.” The way you get to know Jesus is through the pathway, the valley of suffering. This is the way that God has revealed Himself, and this is what God is teaching in John 11. This is what Jesus is so gracious to make known to His people in this passage.

I mentioned last time the word ‘*glory*’ is important, it is twice in Verse 4:

John 11:4 ~ He said, “This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.”

So it occurs twice there: ...*glory of God*... and ...*the Son of God may be glorified by*... Then Verse 40:

John 11:40 ~ ...“Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

I mentioned that the word ‘glory’, or remind you that the word ‘glory’ in Greek comes from a word ‘dokeō’ which means ‘to think, or to seem’. The word ‘glory’ in the Greek is from a word which means ‘to think, or to seem, or to estimate, to value’, ‘dokeō’, ‘to place value upon something, to estimate the value of something’. So the idea is that glory is the honor, and the value we attach to something is its glory. So God’s glory, it means that we learn to attach the greatest value to God. We learn to attach an appropriate value to God, which if we have an appropriate value of God, He is everything. But our problem is that we are constantly undervaluing Him. What we need every day is to have a greater sense of His value, and His worthiness, the treasure that He is.

The Hebrew word in the Old Testament translated *glory* is the word *kavod* (כבוד) which means weight or impact, and the idea is weightiness. And again, it has something of the same idea. He carries a lot of weight with me, is a way of acknowledging that idea of *kavod*, glory. But in the Old Testament, you also see that the glory of God is the impact that the revelation of God’s attributes have when God’s character is revealed in some way, some attribute of God, His goodness or His holiness, His power. The glory is not an attribute so much. It’s the effect of an attribute. That’s glory. It’s when God’s power is revealed, there’s a weightiness to that that people feel and they feel the weightiness and the incredible power, how powerful He is versus how small and weak we are. That’s glory, and so we learn to have a whole new view of God because of the power that we see in Him. Any attribute is that way.

So our greatest need and what Jesus desires is that you and I come to understand more and more of the weightiness of His attributes. That’s His purpose, and then once you understand who He is, you can give yourself more fully to Him and trust Him. Now, that kind of sets the stage for the rest. There are three points that we want to cover today. The first is *The Faith of Martha*, the second is *The Glory of Jesus*, and the third is *The Pathway to Glory*.

1) The Faith of Martha:

I mentioned that her faith really is impressive. It is in this passage. If you read it, it’s impressive, but it is not adequate. It’s impressive, but when you really read it carefully, there are some real problems that Martha has.

Now, let's look at this together. She speaks three times in the passage that we read, and four times in the chapter as a whole. Her first words are found in Verse 21, and I think it's interesting to note Verse 20, actually:

John 11:20 ~ Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house.

True to form, Martha is a person of action. She gets up, leaves the house, and goes to meet Jesus. Mary, the contemplative one, she stays in the house and continues to mourn. When Martha gets there, what does she say to Jesus? She expresses her faith. It is an impressive faith but an imperfect faith.

John 11:21 ~ Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

Now here is a measure of faith, isn't it? ***...if You had been here, my brother would not have died.*** That is, "I believe that You are able to heal any sickness. You could have healed my brother." That's impressive. She's come to know this about Jesus. She has a real faith in Jesus, but I think the fact that she says it and then Mary says it, there's also an undertone of discontent with Jesus, isn't there? "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Why weren't You here?" And isn't that the opposite of faith? I mean, faith is to trust, "Lord, I know Your ways are best. You weren't here," not, "If You had been here, my brother would still be alive." So there's this kind of mixed bag. Her faith is good on the one hand and it's bad on the other. She is like the man who said, "I believe. Help my unbelief," and thankfully if you see yourself correctly, you are just like that too. I know I am. "I believe. Help my unbelief."

Now that's the first thing we see about her. In Verse 21 she takes it to another level. When she says in Verse 22, "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You," this really looks like a great moment of faith, and it is certainly, and it's impressive. ***...whatever You ask of God, God will give You.*** There's no doubt she's saying, "I know that You have God's ear in a way that nobody else has God's ear. You are specially related to God." She has a good view of Jesus, but it's inadequate. It's not enough. In fact, you might think she's saying, "Will You please raise my brother right now?" Well, maybe in some mixed way she is, but we see as the passage goes on, she doesn't really expect Him to raise her brother, because when Jesus says, "Your brother will rise again," in Verse 23, she says:

John 11:23 ~ ...“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

You see, she wasn't looking for what He was saying. "He's going to rise again in just a few minutes." She wasn't looking for that. She didn't expect that, and in fact, later when He actually says, "Roll the stone away," who is it that speaks up in a nay saying way? Martha says, "Lord, but please don't do that because by now he stinks. Decay has set in." She's not ready, and Jesus then challenges her, "I told you if you believe, you'll see the glory of God." Her faith is inadequate.

In fact, it's even more inadequate than that when you look at it, and the original brings this out. When she says in Verse 22, "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You," it's interesting the word translated *ask* is a word that is used of us when we ask God. It's the word of an inferior asking a superior. She's saying, "Jesus, when You, the inferior, ask the superior, God, whatever You ask He'll give it to You." She sees a distance between Jesus and God. She sees a distance between herself and Jesus. There's no question about it. She sees Jesus as lifted up in some measure, but not as high as He needs to be, because there's another word that's used throughout the New Testament, in that when Jesus speaks of asking the Father, it's a different word, and it's a word where an equal asks an equal. The equal asks the equal because an equality of dignity requires this particular word. She doesn't understand the equality of dignity, the equality of being. So her faith is inadequate.

Now Jesus lets that apparent slight go unrebuked because He's there to teach her. The gracious Shepherd is kind in His response. When she says, "Whatever You ask of God, God will give You," in fact, let me just add one more thing. The fact that I think the word God appears twice in the text, it appears twice in the Greek as well, "Whatever You ask of God, God will give You." Do you see that? That's redundant, isn't it? Wouldn't it be easier to say, "Whatever You ask of God, He will give you"? That's how I would normally say it, but she says, "Whatever You ask of God, God will give you." It's again emphasizing the distance she sees between Jesus and God. Now, how does Jesus refer to God? When He asks God for something, what does He say? His normal way of responding to God is *Father*. If she had understood more correctly, she would have said, "Whatever You ask from Your Father, He will give you," and she would have used a different word for ask. So she needs her faith to grow.

Now, that's the first saying of Martha. We see her faith impressive but in need of improvement. Her second, after Jesus says, "Your brother will rise again," she says:

John 11:24 ~ ...“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

I mentioned she's not really aware of what Jesus has said. Perhaps she thinks it's too good to be true. We don't really know, but I think what's interesting is she affirmed in this verse a confident belief in the resurrection on the last day. She has a faith in a cardinal doctrine of biblical teaching. She believes that the body will be raised, and she interprets what Jesus said as basically what you or I might say when we're comforting a bereaved person we care about. It makes us look forward to heaven and makes us look forward to that last day when we'll all be raised with new bodies, and a new heaven, and a new earth. She's thinking He's saying something like that, and perhaps some of the other Jews had said something very similar to that. So though He said it clearly, she's not catching on. She has a faith in kind of a theoretical doctrine, but what she needs is a living faith in a Person. She needs to move from the abstract to the real and personal. It's not just the belief that something's going to happen one day in the future. It's that something can happen right now in the present, and so her faith needs to be stretched.

The third statement as we look at Martha's faith, the faith of Martha, is in Verse 27, after Jesus says these incredibly powerful words:

John 11:25-26 ~ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”

She says to Him:

John 11:27 ~ “Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.”

Now I would say at first glance that's a very impressive statement. In fact, I would go so far as to say she hits the home run in the gospels right here. The closest rival to this is when Peter is asked. Remember when Jesus says, "Who do men say that I am?" They said, "Some say You're a prophet, and some say You're Elijah." Jesus says, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter jumps to his feet and says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

What does Martha say?

John 11:27 ~ ...I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world."

She gives a three-fold statement about Jesus. Remember we talked about the superlative as saying something three times? She basically says three times, "You are the Man of God. You are the Messiah. You are the chosen One." In fact, when she says, "Son of God," she says it the same way I think Peter did. They didn't really understand what that meant fully when they said it. They talked better than they knew, and how often that's true of us. We say something more than we even understand. They knew the son of God was a title used in the Old Testament of the man that belonged to God in a special relationship. David was God's son in this way, and so they were looking to the Davidic Messiah. They were looking to a human, and Jesus certainly was that. He was the Man of God, but when He is known as the Son of God, there's something far greater and richer that John is communicating to us in his Gospel.

So she says something powerful, but it's even what highlights the fact that her faith is inadequate, even though like I said it's a home run in one way, but then almost it's kind of a strikeout. I don't know how that can happen, but it is, because when she says, "Yes Lord, I have believed," this is where almost all the translations miss this. This is why I love the New American Standard. That's why I preach out of this Bible. The ESV is good. The King James is good. The NIV is less good, but okay. And this is where you see it. The Greek text says, "Yes Lord, I have believed." It doesn't say, "Yes Lord, I believe." It doesn't say, "Yes Lord, I am believing." It says, "Yes Lord, I have believed."

There are many different tenses in Greek, and there's a great precision in the tenses in the language, and this is the Greek perfect tense. I mentioned that aorist is punctiliar. It's like a period if you think of it in a picture form. The present tense is ongoing action. It's like a line. You remember the old picture of a line with two points on the end and it goes on forever in both ways. The present is like that. It's ongoing. The perfect is like a ray. Remember a ray? It's a point and then an arrow going out from it? That's what the perfect is like. It starts at a point in past time and it goes on with ongoing results. But the decisive thing is what happened in the past that has ongoing results.

Jesus has just revealed His glory to her. Jesus has just taken her to the mountaintop and shown her, when He says standing in the graveyard in the shadow of death, “I am the resurrection and the life,” not, “I am the one who raises people,” not, “I am the one who gives life. No, it’s not that I have a commodity that you need to receive. I am a reality that you need to know. I am the resurrection and the life. To overcome death, you must be in Me. You must know Me. It’s not that I need to ask God something for you. You need to come to Me fully, more completely.” He’s revealed His glory. She’s been on the mountaintop and then she basically says this. He says, “Do you believe this?” and she says, “I believe what I’ve always believed.” That’s what she says. “I have believed.” She’s stating what her former doctrine was. “What I’ve already come to understand about You is You are the Christ, the Son of God. You are the one who was to come into the world.” It’s like this has fallen on deaf ears, and this is why Jesus has taken her through the valley, because you cannot come to know some things unless you are in the valley.

Now, at the end of chapter 11, if you ask her what she understands about this, it’s going to be completely different. She’s going to come to know her Savior in a much more glorious way, and that’s why chapter 12 opens with the story of Mary lavishly pouring the perfume on Jesus’ head, the extravagant love that is now pouring out of these two sisters as they look at their Savior in a whole new way. It’s not, “I have believed and I just believe what I’ve always believed,” but, “I have a new and greater understanding of the glory of this Man, the God-Man, Jesus Christ.” So Martha’s faith is this impressive but inadequate. The glory of Jesus that she sees here, let’s just look at these verses for just a moment.

John 11:25-26 ~ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Basically there are two things He says here. “I am the resurrection and I am the life.” Now, what does that mean? Is that two ways of saying the same thing? Is it just restated? I don’t think it is. I think it’s complimentary. It’s very close, but I think when He says, “I am the resurrection,” He explains that in the first clause after that statement, “I am the resurrection and the life,” and I think He explains what He means by, “I am the life,” in the second clause. That is, “I am the resurrection,” is explained in Verse 25b, and “I am the life” is explained in Verse 26. Let me show you what I mean. “I am the resurrection.” Look at the clause in Verse 25:

John 11:25b ~ ...Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,...

Jesus is saying in this statement, “I am the resurrection,” He’s saying, “I am the victor over physical death.” He’s not saying, “I give you victory. I can give it to you.” He’s saying, “I *am* the victory.” Everyone is going to die. He’s saying if you want to be delivered from the fear of death, you need to trust in Me, and you need to come to Me. You need to be united to Me.” This is really what this is about. I think the reason He says, “I am the resurrection and the life,” the Christian faith is union with Christ. It’s not something that you believe out here. It is a transaction that happens in the soul where you unite to Jesus Christ. Faith is not just knowledge and assent. It’s knowledge, assent, and trust, and it’s personal trust. It’s leaning on Jesus.

In fact, when He says twice in the passage in Verse 25, “He who believes in Me,” literally in the Greek it’s believes *into* Me. And Verse 26 is the same. “He who believes in Me will never die.” Literally it’s “He who believes *into* me.” So He’s saying, “You must come to Me to be delivered from physical death. I am the victor.” He says this, like I said, in the graveyard and in the shadow of the cross. The cross is only weeks away, and Jesus must feel the weight of the cross beginning to impinge upon Him as He makes that journey. Think about the thoughts of the Son of God, the Man Jesus Christ, as He knows what’s lying before Him, the horror of death, and then He comes and He sees the ugliness of death in this passage, and He’s going to be moved deeply in verses that immediately follow this, and He says, “I am the resurrection.” This is the shout of victory before the battle, the announcement of it. “You need only trust in Me. You need only cling to Me and you will be raised.” So that’s the first clause. “I am the resurrection.”

Then He says, “I am the life.” I think that’s explained in Verse 26. Verse 25b is describing resurrection. If you die, you’re going to live. A man will live even if he dies. He dies and then he lives. That’s physical resurrection. Look at Verse 26:

John 11:26 ~ and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.

This is spiritual life, deliverance from spiritual death. “Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.” I think what He’s describing here is spiritual life that comes to the person who is born again. When you are born again by the power of God, by the power of God’s word, when God gives you new life and implants that new life in you, then you come to know the living God. You come to live, and when you live and it’s coupled with believing in Jesus, God regenerates you and

the first thing when the Gospel comes, you believe. The process happens in different ways, but that's essentially the order of salvation. Regeneration precedes faith. Regeneration precedes conversion. This is the orthodox, Reformed way of understanding it, and I think that's what He's describing here. He who lives and believes... You must live.

Remember what He said in John 3? "Except you're born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God. You can't even see it til you're born again." You need to be born again first, but He's saying here, "I am the one who brings this new life, and if you live and believe in Me, you will never die. You will never lose your spiritual life. To come to live and know God is to know Me forever," and it's in Jesus Christ that these things happen. Now the Pathway to Glory, the third point.

3) The Pathway to Glory:

I've hit on this a little bit in the introduction, so I'm going to wrap this up. There are really two things that summarize the pathway to glory, the pathway to growth, we could say. The pathway to growth spiritually, the pathway to grow in faith, the pathway to grow in Christ-likeness, depends on two things. It depends on how much you know the Savior and it depends on how much you need the Savior, and this means that you and I should be constantly seeking to know more about Jesus every day, every moment. If we can turn our hearts to knowing more of Jesus, we are profiting our souls to the greatest degree. The Christian can't be the person who doesn't try to grow in knowledge. A true believer to be in that state is denying his birthright. When people say, "I've already studied that. I know that," if you come to a sermon and you hear somebody preaching on a text you've already heard, and you're thinking, "I've already heard this," what foolishness. That's stupidity. For a preacher to come and hear somebody else preach a passage he preached that Sunday, he should come saying, "Lord, feed me. I need to see Jesus. Let this brother show me things I didn't even see when I was studying it."

Even when we've seen so much, isn't it funny how you go back to a passage that's been precious to you through the years and you keep mining truth out of it deeper and deeper? That's the way the true believer should come to the Scriptures, always wanting to know more. We should be like Moses who after he had lived through so much of that glory of Yahweh being made known in Exodus 33:18, he says, "Lord, show me Your glory. I want more." So it's a function of how much you know the Savior, but it's also a function of how much you need the Savior.

Knowledge can't penetrate the heart fully unless the heart is broken. It's kind of like ground. You've got to till up the soil. You don't just go out and plant your garden by throwing seed out. Now, I know Jesus says that parable about the sower throwing seed out, but He's assuming that you've tilled the soil. You till the soil, you break up the fallow ground, and then you sow the seed, and God knows that we need that. He breaks up our fallow ground, and as we're growing in our knowledge of the Savior, then that seed's falling down in that broken up ground, and the good news is God is committed to breaking up the ground, and God is committed to planting His seed.

This is the way of God, and it is the best way. He knows there are some things that we'll never know and that we'll never come to understand if we don't live through it. Think what Mary and Martha experienced. Think in heaven when we're celebrating the various things, the splendor of Jesus, whenever maybe one angel begins to recount that or Jesus says, "I am the resurrection," what a special place in their hearts that the song just wells up within them, because they've been through that, and God has ordained that you and I walk through valleys, unique and different valleys, different periods of darkness, so that we can sing a song about our Savior. And each one of us has a different path to walk.

This is really what Paul is saying in Ephesians 2:10, when he says that we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Remember that? It's after he tells us we're saved by grace alone. "For by grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves. It's the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship." We're to trust in Him. That's faith. Trust in Him. Place all of your trust in Him. Learn how wonderful He is and give yourself to Him. That's faith. That's growing faith, knowing the Savior more and trusting Him more. And then he says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has foreordained beforehand that we would walk therein."

The Lord has laid out a path, and it's like Pilgrim's Progress. You've got to go through the Slough of Despond, you've got to spend some time in Doubting Castle, you've got to have some time where Mr. Worldly Wiseman is filling your mind with all kinds of foolish thoughts, so that you can know that Jesus is the only answer, and you will find that in every one of us, God has ordained and written before the foundation of the world for every one of His elect, that we would have a unique song to sing.

What you're going through, and what you're going to go through, and what you have gone through is a part of that perfect plan, that tapestry that He is weaving, and that song, that note that you will bring to heaven's choir that will sound distinct and clear, and the Savior will hear it when you sing, and will recognize you as you sing it. You're singing a song that's a little different than everybody else, but at the heart, the message is all the same. We're all singing, "It is all about Jesus." He is marvelous. He is the great I am. Everything that we need, He is. He is the bread of life. He is the Light of the world. He is the resurrection and the life. He is the way, the truth, and the life. He is everything that we need, and when we embrace that this is His way of dealing with us, and we understand, would you want to go through life and have everything go easy, or would you rather come to know the incredible joy of knowing your Savior?

I mean, it's a no brainer, and we're so foolish. We grumble and complain when He's basically bringing something beautiful to us. It's like a child getting a birthday present, and he plays with the wrapping paper instead of the present. You know, it's like a 2-year-old. They get over this pretty soon, but the idea is we don't know what we even want. We'd rather eat M&Ms than eat the kind of food that's going to give us strength and life. God is so good. He's a loving parent. He's a wonderful Shepherd, and He is determined that His children see His glory and praise His Name.

Let's pray together...

Father, we rejoice today in who You are. We rejoice that Jesus Christ is the Savior of everyone who believes, that He came into this world, that He lived a perfect life, that He entered into all of our experience of the pain and the agony that sin had brought, and He experienced it to the full, yet without sin. He offered His life as an atoning sacrifice, He rose again from the dead, and He stands to deliver all who have faith in Him, and He is a great Savior. Lord, we pray that everyone in this room would have the joy of knowing Jesus Christ as their personal Master, their loving Savior, their faithful Shepherd. Open eyes and hearts. Father, thank You that the work that You have begun in us You will complete until the day of Christ Jesus. Thank You that You are faithful, and we pray this in Your matchless Name, Amen.

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