

An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN



“Victory Over Death”

Part 2

John 11:17-27

Theme: Because Jesus is the source of life, He calls us to trust Him to overcome death.

Introduction: There are few experiences more painful than standing face-to-face with death. Death seems so final. It separates families, silences familiar voices, leaves empty places at our tables, and reminds us that we live in a fallen world under the curse of sin. No amount of wealth, medicine, education, or human achievement has ever been able to eliminate its power. Every funeral is a reminder that mankind has a problem he cannot solve.

Yet for believers, death presents another struggle. It often raises questions about God’s goodness and His purposes. We pray for healing, but the sickness remains. We ask God to intervene, but the circumstances worsen. We know Christ has the power to help, but sometimes He appears to delay. In those moments, we can begin to wonder whether He truly cares or whether He has forgotten our need.

That’s exactly where Martha and Mary are in John 11. The brother they loved has died. Jesus knew about Lazarus’s illness. He had the power to heal him. Still, Jesus did not come. Four days had passed since Lazarus was buried, and the sisters are left with grief, unanswered questions, and deep disappointment.

From a human perspective, it appears that death has won.

But what Martha and Mary could not yet understand was that Christ’s delay was not negligence. His absence was not apathy. God was working on something much greater than simply stopping a death. He was getting ready to reveal His Son’s glory and to teach a lasting truth about the One who stands before them.

In this profound conversation between Jesus and Martha, the Lord shifts her focus from the grave to Himself. He doesn’t just promise resurrection; He proclaims Himself as its source: “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). Jesus shows that victory over death is not ultimately found in an event, a doctrine, or a wishful hope. It is found in a Person. **[READ TEXT]**

As we work through this passage, we will see three truths that call us to trust Christ in the face of death:

- I. **the Presence of Favor in Death (vv. 17–22),**
- II. **the Promise of Freedom from Death (vv. 23–26a), and**
- III. **the Profession of Faith in the Deliverer (vv. 26b–27).**

Through them, we learn that “**because Jesus is the source of life, He calls us to trust Him to overcome death.**”

I. The Presence of Favor in Death – *11:17-22*

A. The Inconspicuous Demonstrations of Favor – vv. 17-19

1. Jesus decides that the time is right to go and fulfill the intention of God for Lazarus' death—that is, “that the Son of God may be glorified by it.” – cp. [v. 4](#).
2. They left the Transjordan region for Bethany of Judea, and *“when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days.”*
3. Mary and Martha had experienced the painful silence of “unanswered” prayer – cp. [Psalm 77:7-9](#).
4. This represents the first “**inconspicuous demonstration**” of God's gracious dealing with us as we suffer the consequences of death – He is accomplishing something greater in us than death.
 - a) *As mentioned in the last section, Jesus' 4-day delay in coming was designed to provide incontrovertible evidence of His glory.*
 - b) *There was a false “superstition” swirling that the soul of a dead person hovered around the body until such a time as decomposition convinced them that reunion was impossible.*
 - c) *Some believe that the significance of 4 days demonstrates that the Lord's grace allowed any questions to be eliminated that Lazarus was truly dead.*
 - d) *This demonstrates that God desires to use death to accomplish His intention and to glorify Himself.*
5. The second “**inconspicuous demonstration**” is the number of people God gathered to witness and testify to the miracle He was about to perform.
 - a) *We are told that “Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother.”*
 - b) *As many who have endured the death of a loved one can testify, the ministry that people accomplish simply by coming to “pay their respects” is a tremendous encouragement to someone mourning.*
 - c) *Here we see that “many of the Jews had come” – indicating that God had provided them the blessing of many people coming to encourage and comfort them in their hour of loss.*
 - d) *But it also meant that many “skeptical” people (“Jews”) would be on hand to give testimony to the accomplishment of Christ.*
6. Once again, this offers a glimpse of how Lazarus's death was more than just the immediate situation – even as every believer's death provides an opportunity for God to work in the lives of those affected.
7. Throughout the four days of waiting, God was orchestrating circumstances, gathering witnesses, strengthening faith, exposing

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unbelief, and preparing a stage upon which Christ's glory would be displayed ... yet Lazarus' family thought Christ was not interested.

B. The Inconsolable Desire for Favor – vv. 20-22

1. However, when a person is going through the heartache of mourning, they are looking for something conspicuous to comfort them and yearn to know why it has happened.
2. Here we see Martha – the one normally given to duty and responsibility – responding with impulse to the Lord – *“Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house.”*
 - a) Here you see once again the difference between Mary and Martha – Mary was more tender, emotional, and subjective in her spirit – possibly having isolated herself from the crowd as she tried to gather her thoughts and decide how she should respond if Jesus were to come.
 - b) Martha, on the other hand, was busy engaging with those present and quickly went to the Lord, whom she felt had “let them down.”
3. Even before sending the messenger to Jesus a few days earlier, the sisters had comforted themselves with the idea that if Jesus arrived, he could heal Lazarus.
4. This became the torture of their mourning – that Christ could have done something about this, but He wasn't here – *“Martha then said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.’”*
5. Martha, consumed by duty, may have resented the fact that Jesus could have done something about it but didn't “show up.”
6. Often, believers can struggle with thinking:
 - a) “If God loved me, He would have prevented this!”
 - b) “If God truly cared, He would have answered differently!”
 - c) “If God were working, things would not have turned out this way!”
7. Some of us struggle unnecessarily because we assume the loss of our preferred outcome in a situation means the loss of God's purpose, when it does not; it promotes God's purposes.
8. Although upset over what Jesus had failed to do, she expresses her strong desire for relief from the pain of death by referencing the message Jesus sent with her messenger: *“Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”*
 - a) The term used here for “ask of God” (*αἰτήση*) implies a petition from someone of lower status than the one being asked, unlike (*ἐρωτάω*), which more often signifies that the petitioner is on equal or familiar terms

with the person being asked.¹

- b) *By this, she is not claiming that she believed Jesus could raise Lazarus from the dead, only that He had a special relationship with God and might pray for her suffering to be eased.*

II. **The Promise of Freedom from Death – 11:23-26a**

A. **The Guarantee of Freedom from Death – v. 23-24**

1. In keeping with the statement that He had made in the Transjordan (v. 4), *“Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again’.”*
2. This is a promise directly made to Martha regarding what Jesus intended to accomplish immediately in her brother.
3. Because of her painful heart and past efforts to comfort herself—reassuring herself and being reassured by others that the promise of future resurrection would be fulfilled—she couldn't understand what Jesus was saying, but interpreted Jesus' words according to her expectations.
 - a) *Clearly, Scripture promised a future resurrection to Old Testament saints – cp. Psalm 16:9-11; Psalm 49:15; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2.*
 - b) *Her response demonstrates that her great hope was this future resurrection – “Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day’.”*
4. But Jesus was not talking about the final resurrection here, but about an immediate one to showcase His glory.
5. In a spiritual sense, based on the next several verses, Jesus references God's power to bring people from a state of spiritual death that is just as severe as physical death – cp. Ephesians 2:4-7.

B. **The Guarantor of Freedom from Death – vv. 25-26a**

1. To clarify His promise to Martha, Jesus makes one of the most profound statements in Scripture about death.
2. He says, *“I AM the resurrection and the life”* – emphasizing that Jesus doesn't have to approach God as a man would, but rather that all power resides in Himself as the Messiah – the Son of God.
 - a) *The statement “I AM” (ἐγώ εἰμι) when used by Christ is a divine formula that clearly affirms messianic identity as Jehovah – cp. Exodus 3:14.*
 - b) *This is the fifth of seven “I am” statements (I am the ... Bread of Life; ... Light of the World; ... Door; ... Good Shepherd)*

¹W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger and William White, *Vine's complete expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1996.

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3. He here emphasizes to Martha that all authority over life and death belongs to Himself—that Lazarus's hope is not in a “last day resurrection,” but in Jesus Himself.
4. Here lies the great and merciful lesson of Christ’s absence – without Him, only death remains; but with Him present, resurrection and life are guaranteed.
5. He doesn’t ask Martha to believe in a resurrection, but that she believes in Him (*“infinitely better is it for us to be occupied with the Giver than His gifts.”*²)
6. Thus, He calls Martha (as well as all other men) to personal faith in Him – *“He who believes in Me will live even if he dies.”*
 - a) *Clearly, Jesus here is “playing” on words as He contrasts different kinds of death.*
 - (1) ***Spiritual death*** – the separation of one’s soul from fellowship with God (the natural condition of men as they are born sinful, which results in personal sin – ***Romans 5:12.***
 - (2) ***Physical death*** – the separation of one’s soul from one’s own body (the inevitable result of personal sin) – ***Romans 6:23.***
 - (3) ***2nd (Eternal) Death*** – the separation of the body *and* soul from God eternally (the final judgment of God on all sinners not reconciled to God through faith in Christ) – ***Revelation 20:12-15.***
 - b) *By faith, men are given eternal life so that they will overcome Spiritual Death if they experience physical death – “He who believes in Me will live even if he dies.”*
7. He goes further in explaining this by stating: *“...and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.”*
 - a) *By this, Jesus declares that being made alive spiritually means never experiencing Eternal Death – “... will never die.”*
 - b) *The consequence of faith is life, and the consequence of life is faith in the Person of Christ Jesus, whom to know is Life Eternal – cp. ***John 17:3; 1 John 5:11-12.****

III. The Profession of Faith in the Deliverer – *11:26b-27*

A. The Call to Believe – *v. 26b*

1. The faith that Jesus asks Martha to show is the reason Lazarus died – to reveal the glory of the Son of God.
2. He draws her attention to Himself as the source of God's provision, who has the authority and power to give eternal life, and asks her, *“Do you*

²Pink, *The Gospel of John*, p. 595.

believe this?”

3. This is where Jesus enters every heart that considers His claim to be the Promised One of God — each person must decide on their own (with God's Spirit's help) whether they believe Jesus Christ is this provision — cp. [John 8:24](#).

B. The Confession of Belief – v. 27

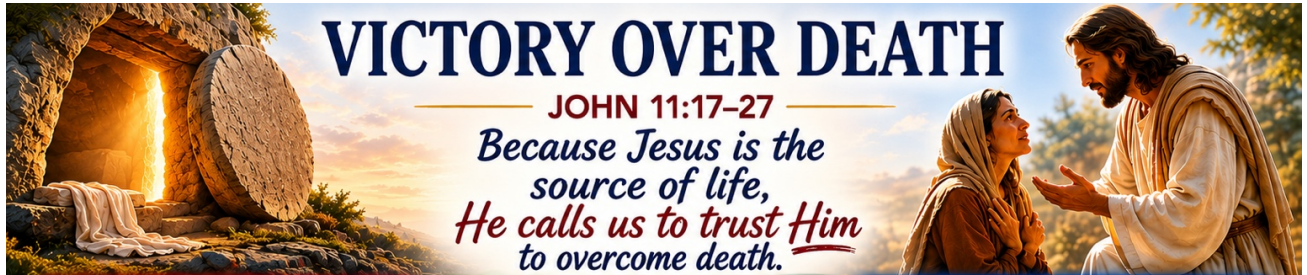
1. Martha's response is powerful—despite her grief and pain, she says: *“Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ ...”*
 - a) *The use of the perfect tense shows that it is a faith once given that remains forever.*
 - b) *Essentially, she says, “What has happened to my brother does not change my awareness that You are the Promised One of God.”*
2. She goes further to ascribe divinity to Him – *“... the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.”*
3. This is one of the greatest declarations of faith in John's Gospel – cp. [John 20:31](#).
4. Although she believed Jesus was indeed the Messiah, she had no idea what this would mean amidst her current distress and heartbreak.

So What?

1. **What circumstance in your life currently feels like God's silence, and how might He be accomplishing purposes you cannot yet see?**
2. **How does the reality of eternal life reshape the significance of your present trials and losses?**
3. **How would your perspective on suffering change if you truly believed Christ was accomplishing something greater than immediate relief?**
4. **Because Jesus is the source of life, what specific area of your life needs to be surrendered more fully to His care and authority today?**

Theme: Because Jesus is the source of life, He calls us to trust Him to overcome death.

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VICTORY OVER DEATH

JOHN 11:17-27


Because Jesus is the source of life, He calls us to trust Him to overcome death.

1 THE PRESENCE OF FAVOR IN DEATH


11:17-22



God is at work behind the scenes even when it seems He is late.



Jesus' four-day delay reveals His purpose to glorify the Son of God.




God gathers many people to comfort, witness, and testify to His power.


In death's darkness, God's favor is still present.

2 THE PROMISE OF FREEDOM FROM DEATH


11:23-26a



✓ Jesus promises: "Your brother will rise again." (v. 23)



✓ Jesus declares: "I AM the resurrection and the life." (v. 25)




✓ All authority over life and death belongs to Jesus alone.

In Jesus we have freedom from every kind of death.

3 THE PROFESSION OF FAITH IN THE DELIVERER


11:26b-27



✓ Jesus asks: "Do you believe this?" (v. 26b)



✓ Martha responds in faith: "Yes, Lord; I have believed..." (v. 27a)



✓ She declares Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

Our response: Trust Him today— He is the source of life. He will bring victory over death!

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live even if he dies; and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die." — John 11:25-26