

John 11:17-27, 38-45. ¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. ²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." ³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." ⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." ⁴⁵ Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.

Jesus blesses his people with the miracle... of faith.

Jesus creates faith where there is no faith

Jesus strengthens faith that is challenged.

Jesus gives eternal life through his gift of faith.

Today I want to talk to you about the other miracle that happened that day in Bethany. I'm sure you recognized the miracle of Jesus raising a man from the dead. It is incredible what the LORD Jesus did for Lazarus. For four days, this man was held captive by the grave. His body began to take on signs of decay, but then Jesus called out his name and the dead man came out. Jesus clearly demonstrated his power of death. He had done it before, the son of the widow at Nain, Jairus' daughter, and now Lazarus. And yet this was perhaps the most remarkable of the bunch. Lazarus was in the tomb. Dead for four days. And then without even a touch of his hand, from some distance away, Jesus calls out, and death releases this man at his command. Lazarus somehow hears the voice of Jesus and answers the call. His hands and feet still wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face and he still makes his way out to Jesus. Life is given to the one who was dead, and he is brought from death to life. Incredible... Simply incredible... This is a miracle that stands out as one of Jesus most memorable.

But there was another miracle that was on display there in Bethany that day. Did you catch

it? Did you see it? It was the miracle of faith. For through this miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus created and strengthened faith in a rather incredible way. Yes, through his mighty saving power Jesus created faith where there had been no faith, Jesus strengthened faith that had been severely challenged, and Jesus also proclaimed the miraculous blessings that his gift of faith brings. Gaze upon and marvel at this other miracle at Bethany. Give Jesus praise and thanks for the miracle of faith that he gives to you.

Bethany was just a few miles away from Jerusalem, and people had heard what had happened to Lazarus. Many people came down in support of Mary and Martha, to console and comfort their friends. Think of how many people come from our neighboring communities come out to give their regards and words of consolation. In other words, there was a crowd.

As this group was gathered in Bethany it was reported that Jesus was on his way. Martha went out to meet Jesus, and soon Mary would quickly go to her Lord as well. Both Mary and Martha were deeply troubled, and yet they both expressed their faith in Jesus. Martha confessed her trust in Jesus as the Christ and Mary fell at his feet. They came to Jesus with their concerns. And Jesus listened. He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ***“Where have you laid him?” He asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. And then... Jesus wept.*** The crowd took notice of his love of his compassion as Mary and Martha led him to the tomb.

What came next was simply incredible! ***Take the stone away.*** Jesus requested. How could Martha have expected what was going to happen next, so she in good taste objected, ***“But, Lord, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”***⁴⁰ That didn't seem to faze Jesus one bit and so he said to her, ***“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”***⁴¹ ***So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”***

As Jesus prepares to perform this incredible miracle he thanks his Father. He thanks him for both miracles that were about to take place. In a few moments, not only would a dead man come out of a grave, but those who were spiritually dead, a whole crowd of them, would be given the gift of spiritual life. Jesus was about to create faith where there was no faith, and so he thanks his heavenly Father as he thinks about this other miracle, ***that they may believe that you sent me.*** The people gathered in Bethany that day saw his power and his character, they saw his compassion, they witnessed his love and they heard his words. They heard his words and they would believe. They would put their trust in him. Gaze upon this other miracle as a whole crowd, a large group of people who came down to Bethany to gather around and support their friends and on that day they were saved by their friend and Savior Jesus Christ. We are told that as Lazarus came out of the tomb many people believed in Jesus. John's account of the gospel tells us, ***⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”*** What a miracle. ***⁴⁵ Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.*** Praise God for that other miracle.

I have referred to the miracle of faith a few times within this sermon as *the other miracle*, but which miracle was greater. Lazarus was raised from the grave and it was remarkable, but he would eventually die again. The miracle of faith is greater in this sense that its blessings last for eternity. Jesus in his power and in his compassion, gave the gift of *eternal* life to many people, to a whole crowd of people, at Bethany. Remember what he says to Martha, ***“I am the resurrection***

and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Gaze upon the great miracle of faith and praise your Lord that he has given that gift to you.

Too easily, I fear, we take this miracle of faith for granted. Many of us have been believers from a time before we can remember. But there was a time that we were spiritually dead. There was a time that there was no faith, no life in us, and we were destined for something worse than time spent in a tomb. We were spiritually dead and on our way to timeless agony in hell. But God intervened. In his love for us he was greatly troubled and he did not want all mankind to die in their sins and so he made a promise, and then he came just as promised, and he came to bring us from death to life. The one who called life into being and who holds power over death itself, lived in our place, took on death for us, and rose from the dead so that we might not die but live. The great “I am” came and lived and died and rose and left his word for us, so that you and I might believe and be saved, so that you and I might live and live eternally. Consider the great miracle of faith and praise your Lord that he has given that gift to you. He gave life, even eternal life, to a person who was spiritually dead. He gave life to this whole crowd of people that is sitting here with you, sitting and standing, singing and praying, all over the world in places like this today. Behold that miracle of faith that he has poured out on the many and thank and praise your God and Savior that he has given this gift to you.

The Lord Jesus, together with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, has given us the gift of faith, but in a world like ours that faith can certainly be challenged. What then?

How the heart breaks as you look upon Mary and Martha in their sorrow and distress! How the heart breaks as you hear how they both bring the same complaint at lay it at the feet of Jesus! Both Martha and then Mary in their distress, in their hurt, express their confusion to the Lord. Both sisters lay this same complaint at the feet of Jesus. ***“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*** Their faith is challenged, but Jesus is there to preserve and strengthen this faith.

Notice how strong that faith is to begin with. As we look at Martha’s interaction with her Lord, we see the evidence of the kind of vibrant and living faith that God creates through the power of his Word. It must have been so difficult for her to meet with Jesus after that four day wait. Her faith in Jesus, her faith in God certainly would have been challenged. What those four days must have been like for the sisters! They had called out to Jesus and then they had to wait, they had to wait as their brother died. They had to wait as their prayer seemingly went unanswered. They had to wait as questions circled their minds.

A terrible thing has happened, Lazarus has died, and naturally Martha wonders why? Jesus could have kept this from happening; she knows it. She is sure about it. But she also believes that her Lord will do what is best. She knows and believes that her Lord Jesus is powerful, he can ask the Father for anything and God the Father will respond accordingly. She knows and believes that her Lord Jesus is caring and he will help her. Through this time of testing, this time of difficulty and death, Martha still came out to Jesus trusting and believing in him. ²¹ ***“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*** ²² ***But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”***

Our life of faith is certainly not without its challenges. Troubles and sorrows come, the symptoms of life in a sinful world press down upon us. We have to deal with the curses of sin and death, and it can be so terribly difficult. But God in his grace gives us a faith that continues

to look to Jesus. Through the power and miracle of faith God gives us a faith that trusts Jesus, that looks to him in good times and bad, and knows that he will do what is best. We may have doubts and fears. We might wonder why certainly things happen to us, but through this gift of faith we have a place to go. We have someone to look to.

As Jesus approaches Bethany, Martha goes out to meet him, and Martha talks to Jesus rather frankly, but with a faith that trusts in him completely. She expresses her confusion, she is honest in her prayer, but she trusts that Jesus can go to his father and whatever he would ask for the Father would hear him and answer him.

Perhaps she is thinking that Jesus would ask that God the Father would bring comfort and healing to this family, that he would assure them of his love and presence, that God would send strength for Mary and Martha so that they might recover, or resources and assistance so that these two women who probably depended on their brother for income and protection would be provided for. *Surely Jesus if you pray for such things they will come.*

But how does Jesus respond? ²³ Jesus said to her, “***Your brother will rise again.***” Again, Martha shows the strength of her faith as she expresses her confidence in a teaching that Jesus must have shared with her and explained to her. ²⁴ Martha answered, “***I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.***” But Jesus has something else in mind. He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead and in the process, he was going to teach a whole bunch of people a life changing lesson, *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”*

Martha gave her confession, Jesus proclaimed this powerful truth, and Martha’s faith was confirmed and strengthened, and soon many more would also believe. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and he comes into the world to bring the miraculous blessings that the gift of faith brings. Those who believe in him, those who believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, will have eternal life. Even more miraculous than bringing a man back to life, is what God does for those who believe in him. Through the gift of faith, he gives us the gift of eternal life.

Many of those who saw that incredible miracle put their faith in him, but for others this was the last straw. Some from the Jewish community went back to Jerusalem from Bethany and began to plot and plan to kill Jesus. But our Lord Jesus would make even this work out for our good. For the Son of God, Jesus the Christ, would willingly go to his death to pay for our sins and then he would show his power over death once again as he was raised from the dead. And all this happened so that perhaps the greatest miracle of all may take place, whoever believes in Jesus will not die eternally, but we live with God forever.

Yes, this the powerful truth that is once again made clear through this incredible miracle. Multitudes, crowds and crowds, of sinners through the miracle of faith have been called from eternal death and have been given the gift of eternal life. Through his grace and power, with his help and his Word, our Lord will keep us in the faith through all the joys and challenges, and then a day will come when you and I will take our last breath here on this earth, but this is God’s greatest promise made certain in Christ. Jesus is ***the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Jesus will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in Jesus will never die.*** Praise be to God for the miracle of faith. Praise be to God for our Lord Jesus Christ through him, we have the incredible, the miraculous gift of eternal life. Amen.