

Introduction: List evidence you see in the world of people’s fear of death and ways they try to cover up that fear.

Read John 11:1-16.

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²(This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) ³So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.” ⁴When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” ⁵Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

⁸“But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”

⁹Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. ¹⁰It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.” ¹²His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” ¹³Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. ¹⁴So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” ¹⁶Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

1. Mary and Martha identify their brother to Jesus as “the one you love,” using the Greek word “phileō,” which denotes the love of friendship, companionship, and brotherhood (v. 3). John takes it one step further, when he reports that Jesus “loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus,” using the Greek word “agapaō,” which denotes selfless, unconditional love that acts in the best interest of others without any expectation of love in return (v. 5). Which kind of love would you want from Jesus, when you or your loved one is dying?

2. The “yet” at the beginning of verse 6 is better translated “so” (as it is in the NIV 2011, HCSB, ESV, and other translations). The meaning: Because he loves Martha and Mary, Jesus waits to go see Lazarus. This seems strange. How did Jesus’ waiting show his love for them?

3. Jesus doesn’t say, “Let us go to Bethany,” but, “Let us go back to Judea.” Explain the significance of Jesus’ setting out for Judea. (cf. v. 8; v. 45-53)

4. (v. 16) Thomas says, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” The “him” could refer to Lazarus or to Jesus. Lazarus seems more likely, since Jesus just said, “Lazarus is dead...let us go to him.” In either case, how do Thomas’ words show a lack of faith?

Read John 11:17-44.

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now 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. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

²⁸ After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

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 believe, you will 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.”

5. What is the significance of Lazarus being in the tomb for four days?

6. What emotions do we hear from Martha in her conversation with Jesus? Compare these emotions to what people typically experience or express at the death of a loved one.

7. Jesus could have just said, “I am the Resurrection,” but he adds, “and the Life.” What is Jesus saying, beyond giving us the assurance of the resurrection on the Last Day? (cf. John 1:4; John 10:10; Acts 3:15; 1 John 1:1-2)

8. Jesus asked, “Do you believe this?” Martha’s response in verse 27 is a model for all believers. Explain her three-part confession.

9. Jesus is “deeply moved in spirit and troubled,” and then he weeps? How is this a comforting scene in the midst of our grief and sorrow over death?

Application:

10. When attending the funeral of a loved one, both believers and unbelievers will be blessed by hearing this account from Scripture. Why?

11. Generally in our circles we do not encourage friends and relatives to offer eulogies at funerals we conduct. Why not?

A. Most people in our world today believe falsely that a person can earn their way into heaven by their ‘good deeds.’ This directly contradicts Scripture which clearly teaches that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Ro. 3:23) and are only saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus (Eph. 2:8-9). Eulogies, where loved ones usually point out all the ‘good’ things their dear departed did during the course of their life, clearly reinforce the false narrative that we are saved by what we do. Plus, eulogies tend to rob God of the glory *He* deserves for all the grace and mercy He showered upon this individual during the course of their life.

12. Generally in our circles pastors do not conduct funeral services for people who were not under their spiritual care. Why not?

A. **Short answer: *Because the pastor has no way of personally vouching that the person died in the Christian faith.*** Important note: Only God knows the heart. It is certainly possible that a person was denied a Christian funeral but nevertheless is still in heaven because God could see saving faith in the person’s heart. However, here on earth, we can only operate based on a person’s public confession of faith in word and deed. Did the person belong to a Christian church? Did they regularly attend Christian worship? If not, why not? If so, then it is proper that their “home” church be given the privilege of conducting the funeral. If there was no Christian church affiliation, did the person, at some point, clearly confess their saving faith in Jesus to the attending pastor? Otherwise, if there was no church membership or worship or confession of faith in Jesus – then you might well ask why the family is insisting on a Christian funeral. Clearly the person wanted nothing to do with Jesus during their life so the pastor can’t really comfort the family with the good news that their loved one is in heaven – because the departed’s “public confession” pointed to just the opposite. Some pastors will still officiate at these funerals with the thought that at least they can preach the law and gospel to people who really need to hear the Word. But it seems pretty difficult to navigate that situation without giving the false impression – now ‘sanctioned’ by the pastor and church – that you can live a life of unbelief and still go to heaven. So, public worship, service in the church and other fruits of faith don’t *save* you but they are important indicators that saving faith exists in the heart.