

John 61 – I AM the Resurrection

09/21/2025

Scripture 1: (Jn. 11:17-29 ESV)

Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 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. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.

Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.

Scripture 2: (Ezek. 37:1-14 ESV)

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know."

Then he said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD."

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD."

Sermon:

After receiving word notifying Him about Lazarus' illness, Jesus waited two days before leaving to go to His friends in Bethany (John 11:6). The evangelist explained that Jesus waited this extended period because of how He *agape'd* Martha, Lazarus, and Mary (11:5). However, before He left from where He was, Jesus knew {supernaturally knew} that Lazarus had already died, informing His disciples "*Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.*" (Jn. 11:14-15 ESV). These two details need to be remembered and kept at the forefront of our minds, as we continue to examine the story of Lazarus' death and resurrection. It is important for us to remember that:

- Jesus delayed going to His friends because He loved them; a delay which ensured Lazarus' death. And,
- Jesus was glad for the fact of Lazarus' death, for the sake of His disciples', to benefit their faith.

But, lest we confuse ourselves or doubt the love of Christ, we need to remember that while Jesus could have saved Lazarus' life and He could have saved Martha and Mary the heartache and grief of this situation, Jesus knew that the more compassionate and most loving thing He could do for the three siblings was to permit Lazarus to die. Jesus knew that this tragedy would be worked to their good, and to the good of countless generations of future believers, through the exemplary miracle of Lazarus being raised from the dead. Furthermore, although Jesus was glad for the fact of Lazarus' death because He knew what that long-term effect would be, He surely was not glad that Lazarus died.

"*Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.*". While the length of time since Lazarus' death and burial is a significant point of evidence for the debate over precisely where Jesus came to Bethany from {see *The Death of Lazarus* on 09-14/2025}, the greater purpose for its inclusion by the evangelist was to make it abundantly clear and certain for his audience that Lazarus was truly dead. This point will be further supported by the inclusion of Martha's objection, "*Lord, by this time there will be an odor; for he has been dead four days.*" (Jn. 11:39 ESV). Four days is significant because it dispels all doubt whether Lazarus was actually dead. It disproves the potential suggestion of him being resuscitated rather than resurrected.

Next, "*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.*". Bethany's close proximity to Jerusalem was why the disciples feared Jesus returning to Judea. Bethany was near the center of the Jewish leadership's social and political influence and their religious control; the same leadership who recently tried to stone Jesus to death for blasphemy (10:31). Yet the girls' consolation by the Jews would not have been done as an attempt to trap Jesus, hoping that He might return for this sad occasion. Rather, it indicates that these three siblings shared in the same theological convictions as the Pharisees, and that Lazarus was probably an adherent of the Pharisee sect, like Nicodemus.

Christians easily forget that despite the common Gospel description of Pharisees as having a great deal of social and political influence, most of them were merely ordinary, common citizens who kept a strong emphasis on their own personal holiness from an earnest desire to honor and please God (Josephus *Antiquities* 18:12-15); even the lowest socially-ranked Pharisee was respected and admired for their religious dedication and devotion. So, if this assumption about Lazarus is the correct, then it is not surprising that prominent members of society would come to grieve and mourn with the sisters. Furthermore, their attendance at Jesus's next miracle would either be a faith-building proof or an opportunity to refute and rebuke Jesus. As eye witnesses to His miraculous sign and by their virtue of social standing, they could credibly affirm or deny Lazarus' resurrection.

Yet, "*..when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.*", responses which would be odd if Luke's story about the sisters (Luke 10:38-41) was what John had meant for us to hold at the front of our memory. However, the division of their hospitality efforts makes perfect sense once you understand their social and relational context.

Hearing that Jesus was on His way, Martha left to go meet Him while He was still en route so as to stop Him from walking into a socially awkward mess with the Jews; a potentially dangerous mess. The sisters, having first called for Jesus to come, would not want Him to walk into a room full of enemies and be surprised. Martha went instead of Mary because, Mary was the sister most known to attend to Jesus, thanks to Luke's characterization. If she suddenly left the gathering of mourners (which was a social faux pas, at best), then the Pharisees might become suspicious about where she was going. But Martha, the perfect hostess, would more easily be excused, blaming her absence on the responsibilities of hospitality. She could more reasonably and believably use an excuse such as, "needing to go to the store", to give her the opportunity to intercept Jesus and divert Him away from danger. Thus this was purely a case of social intrigue.

So, after leaving Mary to distract their other guests, *"Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.'"* This exchange supports the idea that this Bethany family were either part of the Pharisee sect, or at least shared their same view concerning the resurrection of the dead.

The Apostle Paul identified the doctrine of the resurrection as a key distinctive of the Pharisees (Acts 23:6-9). Similarly, Josephus includes adherence to the idea of a "resurrection of the just" and "judgment for the wicked" in his description of the Pharisees, *"They say that all souls are incorruptible; but that the souls of good men only are moved into other bodies,--but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment."* (Wars 2:163 JOE); doctrines he would have been familiar with personally, because he was affiliated with them in his youth (Josephus *Life of Flavius Josephus* 1:12). But as Paul noted, the resurrection was not a universally held idea among the Jews, with the Sadducees opposing it particularly (Josephus *Jewish War* 2:165; *Antiquity of the Jews* 18:16).

When examining the Old Testament Scriptures on their own, without the mediation of the Gospel's explanation, it is hard to justify and support or even understand where this doctrine of resurrection is sourced from. Meanwhile, the general resurrection is now an idea which we, as Christians, take completely for granted, despite it originally being exceptionally controversial.

When I was in seminary, during class one evening I asked my Old Testament professor, Douglas Stuart¹, this question, "Where is the doctrine of the resurrection found sourced from the Old Testament?" and he was unable to give me a satisfying answer. Searching the Scriptures for myself, I found the idea of a future "final judgment" most clearly expressed within the Psalms and Ecclesiastes (Psalm 75; Ecclesiastes 3:17, 11:9, 12:14) but, a bodily resurrection did not appear to be promised as either reward or prerequisite. Nor does the Old Testament provide clarity much about what is expected after a person's death, much less what happens after the judgment. There is nothing obvious that suggests eternal life and a physical resurrection.

Nevertheless, there is an ancient understanding identifiable which suggests a continuing individualistic and personal existence after death found in the prohibition of Torah against consorting with "mediums", or "witches", and "necromancers" (Leviticus 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:10-12); persons who were supposed to commune with the spirits of the dead. There is also the incident, recorded in 1 Samuel, when King Saul visited a "witch" who successfully summoned the spirit of Samuel, much to her surprise. Also, two narratives in Genesis indicate that a perceived lingering and personal importance was attached to an individual's burial location:

- Abraham's purchase of a tomb for Sarah, along with the later burials of himself, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah in the same tomb (Genesis 23); and,

¹<https://www.gordonconwell.edu/faculty/senior/douglas-stuart/>

- Joseph's request to have his bones brought out of Egypt and returned to Canaan when Israel would eventually leave, *"Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.'"* (Gen. 50:25 ESV).

The patriarchs believed that it was important to preserve their earthly remains, that there was some future purpose hoped for because otherwise, they would not have expended the necessary expense or effort if their burial site was just a simple memorial. Jesus explained and interpreted their hope when He said, *"And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not God of the dead, but of the living."* (Matt. 22:31-32 ESV).

But, interpreting such a hopeful doctrine, divining a resurrection from the dead, whether of the righteous alone (as the Pharisees believed) or of everyone (as Jesus taught in John 5:25-29) from subjective inferences based on minor evidences is very improbable, except as a mere imagining of fantasy and wishful thinking. But, the prophet Ezekiel offers us strong, Scriptural evidence of a (late) prophetic promise of a bodily resurrection; this also explains why the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection, since they did not affirm the authority of the Prophets as Scripture, only Torah. {Additional support for a doctrine of resurrection may be found in Job 19:26-27 and Hosea 13:14, but they are also subjective and most obvious in retrospect.}

The prophetic priest Ezekiel was taken by the *"Spirit of the Lord"* and placed in a valley filled with *"dry bones"* during one of his visions. Then, the LORD commanded him to prophesy several things until he was finally told *"Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD."* (Ezek. 37:12-14 ESV). But, while the vision itself was a wholly spiritual event and its imagery obviously carried allegorical meaning, there are parts which should reasonably be accepted literally because every promise that the LORD makes to His people implies literal fulfillment.

God explained to Ezekiel, *"Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.'"* (Ezek. 37:11 ESV), showing the prophet how desperate and devoid of hope Israel was. Thus, when God said, *"I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel."*, He meant that He would surely raise the righteous dead and bring them into the eternal "Promise Land". Whereas, despite the LORD not mentioning a resurrection of the wicked alongside the righteous, that does not refute the probability, but instead is more a lack of revelation for such an expectation.

So, when Martha responded to Jesus' statement about Lazarus, saying *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."* she affirmed her Pharisaical hope in the resurrection of God's people and confidently asserted her conviction that her brother was a righteous and just man; that he was a "good person" who deserved to have eternal life with God. She was affirming her trust in God's promise, given through Ezekiel, for a resurrection unto eternal life for His special, chosen people. Yet she was also affirming her ignorance and spiritual error through her trust in the righteous effectiveness of Jewish works of religion (Galatians 2:15-16) and her confidence in the favored status of their Jewish ethnicity (Philippians 3:3-7); two critical errors of the Pharisees that the Apostle Paul often confronted in his letters.

Now, once we better recognize what Martha believed about the resurrection and what she meant when she responded to Jesus, we may also better understand the a fuller meaning of Jesus's fifth "I AM" declaration, when *"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.'"*

A key observation from Ezekiel's vision of bones is the fact that, although Ezekiel is commanded three times to “*prophesy*” (Ezekiel 37:4, 9, 12) while he slowly witnessed the analogical regeneration of God's people, the observed restoration and resurrection was ordered and effected by the LORD alone:

- “*Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.*” (Ezek. 37:5 ESV)
- “*Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.*” (Ezek. 37:9 ESV)
- “*Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel.*” (Ezek. 37:12 ESV)
- and, always for the singular purpose of, “*And you shall know that I am the LORD...*” (Ezek. 37:13 ESV)

So, when Jesus said, “*I am the resurrection and the life.*”, He was applying Himself to this prophesy. Through this declaration, He claimed the right and authority to command the breath of life to restore and to raise His chosen people. Through this declaration, He also claimed to be the source of life, as the LORD God who originally “*...formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life...*” such that “*...the man became a living creature.*” (Gen. 2:7 ESV). Like His grant of sight to the man born blind, Jesus's claim to be “*the resurrection*” was a claim that went beyond the ordinarily expected bounds of miraculous power and wonders. Jesus was claiming creative and generative power for Himself; original powers that belong only to the non-created, Creator God. By claiming to be “*the resurrection*”, Jesus claimed to be the LORD who commands “*the breath*” and the LORD who resurrects, who “*... will open [our] graves and raise [us] from [our] graves.*”. An impossible prophetic claim, yet one which He would soon prove by the resurrection of Lazarus.

Then Jesus offered Martha a strange and rather confusing if only accepted plainly, explanation, that “*Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.*”. If taken plainly and literally, it sounds contradictory:

- “If someone believes but dies, then they will still live.” and,
- “If someone lives and believes, then they will never die.”.

Both expressions could not be objectively true if live/life and die/die were meant the same way and in the same sense. Unfortunately, the Greek grammar does not help us much in this case {the vocabulary is the same and their grammatical use is equitable}, so we must rely entirely upon the narrative context to help us understand.

- Applying His statement to their immediate situation, we assume that Lazarus shared the same quality of belief in Jesus as Martha, thus, since he had recently died, their expectation would be of some future resurrection. But, if that first expression was true, then the second one could not be true or reconciled with the first because, if Lazarus had that same quality of belief in Jesus, then he should not have died.
- Or, if we consider that they understood a continuing spiritual existence after a person's physical death then, while the first expression would reaffirm their present expectation, the second one would deny the quality of Lazarus' faith since, because he died, he therefore, must not actually have believed in Jesus.

Rather, the solution to our problem is to not consider them as separate expressions, but as a single unified and continuous whole. Jesus' explanation was not conditional, but straightforward and absolute. Jesus was saying:

- “*Whoever believes in me...*”; whoever has been given the *pistuo* to believe in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-10), whoever has been “born again”, *anthen*, “born of the spirit”, and regenerated (John 3:3-8).

- “...*though he die, yet shall he live...*”; though their physical body will die, they will be caused to live again (“yet shall he live”; ζήσεται, verb indicative future middle 3rd person singular from ζῶω. The middle voice in Greek generally indicates an action being performed upon the subject.).
- “...*and...*”; AND, a unifying conjunction which helps the second expression build upon the first.
- “...*everyone who lives and believes in me...*”; meaning, everyone who is caused to live again AND who has *pisteuo* in Jesus. This conditional clause implies the presence of its opposite, that there will also be some who are raised to life that will not have *pisteuo* in Jesus,
- “...*everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.*”; echoing Jesus's earlier declaration about the authority of the Son of Man, “*Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*” (Jn. 5:28-29 ESV), promising a resurrection to eternal life for the righteous and a resurrection followed by judgment and the punishment of death for the wicked. A punishment which John will elsewhere describe as the “*second death*”, an eternal existence in “...*the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.*” (Rev. 21:8 ESV)

Finally, Jesus asked Martha the most important question, not because He did not know the answer but because He wanted/needed her to know that she knew the answer. He asked her, “*Do you believe this?*”. Martha confidently answered Jesus, “*Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.*”. Martha gave Him the answer which I hope, and expect, that we all would be willing and able to truthfully give. She gave Him an answer which cannot be given through words alone, but which must be completed through consequential response to the truth expressed. Not only may we believe in Who Jesus is, because even the Devil believes that much (James 2:19), but we must also live our lives responding to that truth and how that truth effects our lives.

If we earnestly believe that Jesus is the Christ: that He is God the Son, the Son of God, the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*; then we will live according to and because of that truth.

- We will become obedient to His Word and His commandments; loving what He loves and hating sin, which He hates.
- We will proclaim the truth about “Who He Is” and “What He Has Done” to all the world around us (Acts 1:8).
- We will live as disciples of Christ by making disciples of Him, teaching them to do all that He has commanded us (Matthew 28:18-20).
- And, we will each live our lives trusting in Jesus' promise that, “*Whoever believes in [Him], though [they] die, yet shall [they] live, and everyone who lives and believes in [Him] shall never die.*” because He is “*the resurrection and the life*”.

As Christians, we have our hopes set on so many divine promises from God, more than we regularly pause to remember or consider, and some whose benefit we begin to feel during this present life. We have the promise of adoption as the children of God (WSC #34). We have the promise of being {forensically} justified as righteous before the Holy God, clothed in the righteousness of Christ (WSC #33). We have the promise of sanctification, of being made holy and perfect, as we are washed and cleansed by the blood of Jesus, by His death and resurrection (WSC #35). While the present benefit we experience from these three are the “assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.” (WSC #36).

But, we also have hope in the promise of a future bodily resurrection; believing that just as Christ was raised, so

too, we will be raised (1 Corinthians 15:12-23). Then, beyond our hope of resurrection, we have the hope of eternal life lived within Christ's Kingdom upon the New Earth (Revelation 21-22). Although we must continue to wait upon the LORD's timing, His perfect kairo, before we receive the fullness of that benefit. Yet having this hope remains extremely beneficial for us, now. This hope is a source of comfort and encouragement during our times of tragedy and sorrow.

The first question of the Heidelberg Catechism asks, "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" and answers, "That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him."

Sadly, as we each continue on in life, we find ourselves needing to rest upon this hope more and more often. Our older family members pass away and die. Our friends or other relations may become severely ill or die. Accidents beyond our control occur, causing other tragedies or reasons for us to be sorrowful. Yet it is during such times of tragedy, misfortune, and sorrow that Christian believers have a distinct advantage over the worldly and godless people surrounding us because, while we mourn and grieve, we mourn in hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

It is in such times of tragedy, when Christians encounter untimely or tragic deaths, such as with the recent murders of Charlie Kirk and Iryna Zarutka, we are able to comfort ourselves and one another by remembering that our hope is in the resurrection promised by Jesus Christ, of a future unending eternal life, and not in this present life. While we did not know either of these people personally, it is a matter of public record that Charlie Kirk (at least) was a professing Christian. We know that his proclaimed hope for salvation and for life was in Jesus Christ; a hope that he has now realized and has begun to benefit from. Therefore, because we know that the end of this life is not our final end, because we believe that Christ has already raised us to life, spiritually, and He will also raise us up physically one day, we may both mourn the tragedy of Charlie Kirk's death, and celebrate because of his shared hope for life.

Charlie hoped that one day he will be raised by Christ, hoping that he would hear Jesus say, "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*" (Matt. 25:21 ESV). That same hope is shared by every believing Christian. We all share in our hope that we shall each be raised. We share in the hope that we will be raised alongside our Christ believing loved ones and that we will share in joy at our reunion; a joy which shall only be overshadowed by the joy we shall feel when we finally see Jesus' face as He welcomes us in His embrace. Jesus is "*the resurrection and the life*". Everyone who trusts in Him will live, and all who live and trust in Him shall never taste the final death which we deserve for our sins.

So, repent and turn away from your sin. Trust in Jesus, love Jesus, and obey Jesus. Rest secure in the hope of His promises and believe that Jesus is "...*the Christ, the Son of God...*" and He will be returning soon.

AMEN