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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE”

John 11:1-44

❓ How much time do we have? How much *life* do we have?

🕒 Time is not merely the system with which we measure earthly existence; it is the very *substance* of that existence. To be alive is to *have* time – or, to be more precise, it is to *experience* time.

Time is our great treasure, great gift, great blessing.

🕒 It is also our burden, our bane, our curse. For while time is the measure and substance of earthly existence it is, equally, the *substance and sign* of creaturely *mortality*.

The phrase **“gone before their time”** conveys our distress when death strikes earlier than usual. Yet it is not technically accurate, for time itself is an agent of death.

☑️ {Fellini; Boucicault} Quote: **“Death hides in clocks.”**
We **“talk of killing time, while time gently kills [us].”**

☑️ Edward Young was not entirely off-base when he wrote, **“Our birth is nothing but our death begun / as [candles] waste the moment they take fire.”**

Time is the measure and the substance both of our earthly existence and our mortality.

❓ How much time do we have? How much *life* do we have? How near is death? Only God knows.

▣ Time, death, and life collide in John 11:1-44. Please turn there with me.

■ Jesus’ friend Lazarus is gravely ill. In **verse 3** his sisters Mary and Martha send urgent word about his condition: **“Lord, the one you love is sick.”**

■ Verse 5 affirms that Messiah has deep affection for the whole family. **“Jesus [loves] Martha and her sister and Lazarus.”**

■ And they love Jesus. Not only have they made their home a place of refuge and refreshment for him on several occasions, according to **verse 2** Mary is the woman who will soon anoint the Savior’s feet with costly perfume **“and [wipe them] with her hair.”**

“Lord, the one you love is sick.” Reading between the lines, his illness is life-threatening. The very fact that the sisters send this message indicates that they do not expect Lazarus to recover naturally. Without supernatural intervention, he will die.

“Lord, the one you love is sick” is not just the latest news; it is a heartfelt plea for help with a tinge of desperation.

Can’t you see Mary and Martha wringing their hands, holding their breath, calculating and re-calculating how long it will take for the message to reach Jesus? When is he coming? Why isn’t he here yet? How long will it be?

Time is of the essence! It always is, but sometimes more so.

How long till the ambulance gets here? Tick-tock!

How soon can treatments begin? Tick-tock!

Will my loved one hang on long enough for me to get there? Tick-tock!

Mary and Martha are acutely aware of the passage of time. They assume that the Savior will make haste.

■ He does not. When he hears that Lazarus is sick (verses 6-7) **“he [stays] where he [is] two more days, and then he [tells] his disciples, ‘Let us go back to Judea.’”**

{Jn 10:40; 1:28} **“Where he [is],”** is **“the place where John had been baptizing in the early days.”** Elsewhere it is identified as **“Bethany on the other side of the Jordan,”** the east bank of the river. Modern scholars have not yet pinpointed the specific site.

{Jn 11:18} Meanwhile, Lazarus lies dying in another village called Bethany. We do know where *this* town is: it is located **“less than two miles from Jerusalem,”** just off the road to Jericho. This puts it roughly twenty miles west of the Jordan River, as the crow flies.

Jesus gets the message that his friend is deathly ill but remains **“where he is”** for two more days. He does not set out till after forty-eight precious hours have passed.

Meanwhile, Mary and Martha are left to wonder: Has the Lord heard? Does he understand how sick Lazarus is? Has he been detained?

Some of us have been there. We took our heart - ache to God *and waited*, asked *and waited*, cried out *and waited*, pleaded *and waited*. For us time was a crushing burden (tick-tock!), but did the Lord feel it?

{Ps 22:2} David speaks for us when he laments, **“My God, my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.”**

■ When Jesus finally arrives in verse 17, **“Lazarus [has] already been in the tomb for four days.”**

“Four days” is a culturally significant duration. Many first century Jews believe the soul remains near the body for three days after death, hoping to return to it. Then, on the fourth day, it leaves forever.

Lazarus has been buried **“for four days.”** That seals it: he is undeniably, irreversibly, hopelessly dead, with no possibility of coming back.

The time of Lazarus is over. His days have passed, and with them his life.

“In the tomb for four days”! He might as well have died a thousand years ago.

■ No wonder Martha greets Messiah the way she does! In verses 20-21 she goes **“out to meet him”** on the outskirts of Bethany. **“Lord,”** Martha says, **“If you had been here, my brother would not have died.”**

■ A short while later, in verse 32, Mary **“[falls] at his feet and”** repeats what her sister has said: **“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”**

It is a mournful dirge, frustrated complaint, and angry accusation all rolled into one: **“If you had been here,”** if you had not taken so long, if you had not delayed, Lazarus would have had more time!

The sisters are not wrong. Humans are flotsam in the ocean current, dust blown in the wind – but YHWH is not subject to time: he is its Creator and Master.

⌚ Time is no problem for God, but it is the conundrum of our existence. We cannot live without time – but eventually we cannot live *with* it.

? Oh Lord, why didn't you intervene on behalf of my loved one? Why did you let time have its way?

■ Martha's anguish is mingled with faith: **"If you had been here my brother would not have died"** (verse 21). **"But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask"** (verse 22).

■ Christ speaks directly into Martha's condition, and ours. In verses 25-26 he declares: **"I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."**

■ Then he reveals his power. Verses 38-44:

Jesus ...deeply moved, [comes] to the tomb. It [is] a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he [commands].

"But, Lord," [answers] Martha... "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

...Jesus [replies], "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So they remove the stone.

After Jesus prays out he calls **"in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man [comes] out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face."**

He is indeed **"the resurrection and the life"**!

✈ First, Messiah gives life.

{Jn 3:16; 10:10} **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** It was his purpose in becoming incarnate: **"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."**

This *fullness* is multi-dimensional. It describes quantity and quality: vitality of body, mind, soul, and spirit.

✈ Second, the life Messiah gives culminates in resurrection.

Many people assume that God's great desire for us is that we escape this material world. In this unfortunately popular view, the ultimate Christian hope is to live a purely spiritual (that is, disembodied) existence in Heaven.

{Ro 6:4} They are mistaken. For **"If we have been united with [Christ] in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his"** – a physical resurrection into a glorified corporeal body.

The miraculous raising of Lazarus is not our model. As amazing as it was, it was a temporary cure: Lazarus was still trapped in time, and accordingly he died again.

{Rom 6:9; Rev 21:4} Still, it points to the resurrection of Christ who **"cannot die again"** since **"death no longer has mastery over him."** He will return and usher in a new reality, in which **"There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the**

old order of things” – including the tyranny of time – “[will have] **passed away.**”

✎ Third, we experience life in Jesus by believing in him.

He says, **“Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”**

Belief is not bare intellectual assent to the existence and Lordship of Christ. Defined in those terms, **“even the demons believe”** (James 2:19).

{Mt 7:21} Likewise, belief is not only formal verbal confession. The Savior warns, **“Not everyone who [calls] me, ‘Lord’... will enter the kingdom.”**

Belief is profound trust in eternal God. Trust incorporates intellectual assent and verbal confession, and transcends them. It enables us to rely on his generous forgiveness and abundant provision. It equips us to open our souls to be filled up by the presence of his Holy Spirit. It empowers us to share in Christ’s life. Participation in him is everything!

❓ How much time do we have? How much *life* do we have? How near is death? Only God knows.

May we find vitality, abundant and eternal, in the Lord Jesus! He is **“the resurrection and the life.”**

John 11:1-44 is the Word of the Lord.