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John 11:17-27:

## **Yes, Lord: I Believe**

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## **Our Journey to Calvary**

### **“Yes, Lord; I Believe”**

**John 11:17-27**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

There was once a family that lost three of their four children within just a few weeks because of a deadly infectious disease. Only one child remained, a four-year-old boy. The third funeral had taken place just two weeks before Easter. On Easter morning, the parents and their little boy went to church. The mother and father taught their Sunday school class about Jesus' resurrection. They listened as the Easter Gospel was read and the resurrection of Christ was proclaimed. People in the congregation who knew what they had endured could hardly understand how they were able to do it.

As people were leaving church, a teenage girl turned to her father and said, “Dad, that couple and their son must really believe everything about the Easter story, don't they?” The father replied, “Of course, they believe it. All Christians do.” The girl thought for a moment and then said quietly, “But not like they do.”

What does it really mean to believe in the resurrection like that? In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus asks Martha that very question as she stands before the grave of her brother Lazarus. “Do you believe this?” And Martha answers with one of the simplest but most beautiful confessions in all of Scripture: **“Yes, Lord; I believe.”**

#### **I. From Wavering to Confession**

We do not enjoy thinking about the very hard reality of death. In fact, most of us spend a great deal of time trying not to think about it at all. You may have already tried to put the story I just told you out of your mind. We distract ourselves with anything that might push the thought out. Yet no matter how hard we try to ignore it, death always remains in the background of our lives. As the Psalmist writes, “What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?” (Psalm 89) It waits quietly but relentlessly for every one of us. And when we are forced to face it, when sickness comes, when a funeral is held, when a loved one dies, it is an understatement to say that the fear and anxiety it brings are overwhelming.

The questions begin to race through our minds. How will it happen? When will it happen? Why must it happen at all? Where will I be when that moment comes? No matter how strong a person tries to be, those questions reveal something deep inside us. Death is not natural to us. It feels wrong. Every generation before us faced it, and every generation after us will face it too.

Scripture explains why this is so unsettling. Death is not merely a biological reality. It is the wages of sin. From the moment Adam and Eve fell into sin, the curse of death entered the world and wrapped itself around every human life. As the apostle Paul says in Romans, “The wages of sin are death.” Death is the final and undeniable reminder that we are sinners who cannot rescue ourselves. When death stands before us, all human power collapses. Every plan we have ever made, and every achievement we have ever accomplished, suddenly proves powerless.

During the season of Lent, the Church does not allow us to hide from this truth. And most especially, the death of Lazarus and the dreadful mourning we see displayed in Mary and Martha strips away the illusions we like to build for ourselves. It confronts us with the reality that our sin has consequences we cannot escape and cannot fix. No amount of effort on our part can undo what sin has done. No human wisdom can break death’s grip.

These very facts that are revealed to us in Scripture are exactly what cause Martha to respond to Jesus first with wavering. Considering all she knew of Jesus and the miracles He had performed in His ministry, her confidence should have far outweighed her grief. And yet, she responds to Jesus’ promise with these words, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” As if to say, “I believe in the resurrection someday... but today my brother is still dead.”

Reasonably so, she misses Lazarus. She and Mary would do anything to have him back with them. Like all who know the loss of a loved one, there is seemingly nothing that can comfort or alleviate the pain. But with the Lord Jesus, something remarkable happens for Martha and for us. Jesus says 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.”

Standing there in the shadow of her brother’s grave, hearing Jesus speak, her faith is drawn away from what she can see and toward who stands before her. She has moved from wavering to confidence and a confession that Jesus is not merely one who asks God for things, but one who possesses the authority and power to act over sin, death, and the devil. The grief is still there, and the loss is still painfully real. But Jesus, with so few words about who He truly is, has lifted her eyes from the grave to Himself. And in doing so, He leads her to that most beautiful confession.

## **II. A Shared Confession**

As men, women, and children who live by faith, this comfort of the Lord is not always so obvious to us. But be assured, when death stands before us, and all our strength collapses, Jesus does not tell us to look within ourselves for courage or peace. We don’t need to count on ourselves or others to solve the problem of death or to overcome our mourning with enough faith and determination. Rather, the Lord Jesus does exactly for us what He did for Martha. He lifts our eyes away from the grave and fixes them firmly on Himself.

He does this for us in every moment that His Word of promise is spoken into your ears. When the promise of the resurrection is proclaimed, it is Christ Himself reminding you that He is the Lord who not only raised Lazarus and repaired what was broken for Mary and Martha, but His walk to Calvary was so that we all would experience that same peace and joy.

Christ, the incarnate Son, who proclaims, "I am the resurrection and the life," willingly walks to His own death to carry the burden of your sin to the cross and ultimately the grave. And when those three days passed, and He walked out of the grave alive, it became the sure and certain promise that His grace was not simply a one-time event for Martha and Mary. It proclaims that by faith in Him, neither sin, nor death, nor the devil gets the last laugh for us or for those we love.

Therefore, His promise has not changed: "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live." This means that the faith of that grieving family on Easter morning is not extraordinary, given only to a few. It is the same faith that Christ gives to all who hear His Word and cling to His promises. It is the faith that can look at the grave, rightfully feel the sting of death, and yet still confess with the whole Church: "Yes, Lord; I believe."

### **III. Resurrection and Life**

When Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life," He is not speaking poetically or symbolically. He is declaring exactly who He is. Jesus' resurrection makes it plain that He is the one through whom and in whom the fate of mankind is overcome. Death entered the world through sin, and since that day, every grave has stood as a reminder of our fall. But in Jesus Christ, life lost in sin is once again offered to humanity as an undeserved gift.

As the resurrection, Jesus is the one through whom we will be raised. The power that will call the dead from their graves on the Last Day does not come from within us. It comes from Him. Just as He stood before the tomb of Lazarus and called him out with a word, so on the Last Day the voice of the Son of God will sound again. And all who believe in Him will rise.

And as the life, Jesus possesses the authority and power over death itself. He does not merely pray for life. He does not simply ask God to raise the dead. He gives life because He Himself is the source of life. In these words, Jesus is revealing His divinity. The one standing before Martha is not merely a prophet or teacher. He is the eternal Son of God, one with the Father, the Lord of life itself.

And that is why *Our Journey to Calvary* is filled not with despair, but with hope. The one who says, "I am the resurrection and the life," is the very one who goes to the cross. There, He carries the full weight of our sin and enters the grave that our sin deserves. But death cannot hold the one who is life itself. On the third day, He rises, and in His resurrection, the fate of mankind is forever changed.

Yes, we still stand beside graves. We still mourn. We still feel the pain of death in this broken world. But for those who belong to Christ, the grave has become only a temporary resting place. The same Lord who called Lazarus from the tomb will one day call you as well. And when that day comes, the voice of the Son of God will sound across every graveyard and every place where the faithful sleep. And all who believe in Him will rise with their body and soul reunited, never to face death again. Until that day, let us hold fast our confession of faith. Through tears, through grief, through every shadow of death, let us confess the Lord Jesus with confidence that does not waver.

Amen.