

Title: The Resurrection and the Life**[Slide 1]****Text: John 11:1-44****The Shepherd's Love****The messenger:****[Slide 2]**

The young man came running up the path, soaking wet from the waist down from crossing the Jordan River. He had come a long way: his journey had begun in the wee hours of the morning in the village of Bethany, just 2 miles east of Jerusalem. He had hurried down the 18 mile mountain road to Jericho, then on to the ford across the Jordan. Now his muddy footprints marked the end of his journey.

He came looking for Jesus. Jesus had come to this remote village because he was a man marked for death. He had broken the rules one too many times, doing things like healing a cripple and a blind man on the Sabbath. He had made one too many pronouncements about his relationship with his Father, the One True God.

This young man was coming with a desperate request for Jesus to perform one more healing. When he had left the house in Bethany, Lazarus lay close to death. His sisters told the messenger, find Jesus and tell him:

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"Lord, the one you love is sick." (John 11:3 NIV)

The young man looked over his shoulder one more time to make sure that he wasn't being followed, then turned down an alley and found the door to the courtyard of the house where Jesus and his disciples were staying.

To go or not to go, that is the question:

To go or not to go, that was the question. Should Jesus step out of seclusion and walk into the lion's den? Was this all some kind of trap? Wouldn't it be better to pray from a distance?

At first it seemed to the disciples that Jesus had decided on a long-range healing. His response to the messenger was:

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John 11:4 NIV

"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

It was a mysterious response, to be sure. But if Lazarus was going to get better, no need to risk the lion's den! Then again, what did Jesus mean by this all happening so that God's true splendor would be revealed in God's Son?

Two days later Jesus brought the subject up again, this time with a simple command:

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John 11:7 NIV

"Let's go back to Judea."

He went on to say that Lazarus had fallen asleep, and their mission was to wake him up. Now they were really confused. Didn't Jesus say a couple of days ago that Lazarus was going to get better? Why on earth risk your life to go interrupt his afternoon nap?

Jesus explained his riddle:

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"Lazarus is dead. And I'm glad I wasn't there to heal him, so that you may believe. Let's get going!"

The Good Shepherd's Love:

In every group of people there is usually someone who cuts right to the chase – someone who tells it like it is. In Jesus' group that person was a man named Thomas. Amidst all of the protests and confusion Thomas simply said:

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"Let's go, too, so we can die with him." (John 11:16)

Could it be that Thomas remembered how Jesus had described himself as a shepherd?

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John 10:11-12, 14-15 NIV

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

"The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.

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"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep."

The wolf was in the flock and had already taken down one of the sheep. Now the rest of that little flock – Mary and Martha – were scattered and lost, crying out for help. There was but one thing for the Good Shepherd to do. He must go rescue his sheep, even if it meant laying down his life for them.

The Shepherd's Voice**The Shepherd's Voice:**

One of the marks of a true shepherd is that the sheep **know his voice**. Jesus described the Good Shepherd by saying:

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John 10:3-4 NIV

"The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

"When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice."

It was time for the lost sheep in Bethany to hear the shepherd's voice.

Martha:

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Martha came out to meet him. The first person to speak was Martha:

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John 11:21-22 NIV

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

There she was, a lost lamb caught in the thicket of "if only." *If only* you had come sooner. If only we had sent word earlier. If only...this weren't happening at all! It's only after she unloads her grief and frustration that she opens the door for something more.

And then came the shepherd's voice:

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John 11:25 NIV

"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Are you ready for a new journey? Can you dare to believe that a funeral is not the end of this story? Can it possibly be that God isn't too late? Does God show up not just at weddings, but at funerals?

Mary:

The second lost sheep to hear the shepherd's voice was her sister Mary. Martha had gone back into the house, taken Mary aside, and said:

John 11:28 NIV

"The Teacher is here, and is asking for you."

Mary came out at the call of the shepherd, overcome with grief. Like her sister, she was caught in that same thicket of "if only." But her complaint came through sobs and tears.

This time the shepherd asked a different question:

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John 11:34 NIV

"Where have you laid him?"

And then the shepherd wept.

*Could it be that God not only came to funerals, but came as a mourner?
Could it be that the God who created the world was willing to ask directions
to a tomb? What kind of God would tremble with grief and weep openly?*

Lazarus:

There was one more lost sheep. This one lay behind a huge stone, deep in a cave tomb.

The shepherd gave an unthinkable order:

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John 11:39a NIV

"Take away the stone."

Martha protested.

John 11:39b NIV

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

Once again, a sheep caught in the thicket of "if only." "Now" was too late. The shepherd had failed to come for the lost sheep in time. The wolf had won.

But the shepherd was by no means finished.

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John 11:40 NIV

"Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

They took away the stone. Jesus prayed. And then the Good Shepherd called by name the sheep that the wolf had carried away:

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John 11:43 NIV

"Lazarus, come out!"

And Lazarus came, complete with strips of linen wrapped around his hands and feet and a cloth around his face.

"Now get that stuff off him and welcome him back to the land of the living!"

The Resurrection and the Life

The Shepherd's fate:

John tells us that when Jesus came to Bethany and raised Lazarus from the dead he in effect sealed his own fate. When news of the astounding miracle reached the ruling council in Jerusalem, there was much hand-wringing over how the people would make Jesus their Messiah and revolt against Rome, thus destroying the nation. Caiaphas, the high priest put an end to the discussion by saying:

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John 11:49-50 NIV

"You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."

Little did he know, but he had voiced God's own plan for rescuing the scattered sheep of the whole world. John explains:

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John 11:51-52 NIV

He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.

One flock, one Shepherd. And only one way for it to happen.

What God looks like:

John promised Martha that she would see what God looked like if she would give Him permission to go behind the stone that sealed her brother's tomb.

God had come as one of us into her world. He had walked of his own accord into mortal danger. The shudder of emotion at the tomb was, at the deepest level, Jesus' response to the horror of the cross he would carry to Golgotha in a few short weeks. Lazarus' cemetery was a foretaste of Jesus' Gethsemane.

God entered into the chaos of Mary's and Martha's grief. His tears mingled with theirs. He listened to their story. He gave permission for their frustration. He accepted their accusations. He gave no excuses, no easy answers.

God showed them what He looked like in the face of the final enemy we all face: Death. No heroics. No fire from heaven. No legions of angels. Just a weeping rabbi. He asked directions to the cemetery. He enlisted their help to move the stone. He dared them to move forward and trust Him.

And there in the midst of the tears, the confusion, the very stench of death, he stared into Death's mouth and called his lost sheep by name.

"Lazarus, come out!"

That's what God looks like. In all His glory.

The Resurrection and the Life:

Easter morning shows that God has all the power – even over Death itself.

But the death Jesus died on the cross shows us the Love that is His true glory.

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John 3:16 NIV

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.

The same Shepherd who put his life on the line for his friends, chose to lay down his life for you and me. Why? That's what a Good Shepherd does.