

## It's Personal

John 11:21–27

<sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” <sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” <sup>25</sup> 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?” <sup>27</sup> She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

Death is big news. It always is. There's a lot of death in the news every night, as we hear about the latest tragedy, the latest murder, or the latest disease. Major catastrophes such as hurricanes are covered in depth every season. The casualties of wars and terrorism are headlines in the papers and on the Web. If there's a major pileup on a freeway or a bus accident for a youth group that leads to death, we're sure to hear about it on the news. Yes, death is definitely big news.

Of course, as awful as it is to hear about this, for many of us, most of the time, it isn't very personal. It isn't our homes that are being flooded. We usually aren't the ones whose lives are in danger. It may not be our relatives whose lives are on the line.

But if we have a family member who's in danger, then it's different. If death takes away someone we love, then it becomes very personal. That's why you're here today. Death has personally impacted you. All of a sudden, death has become very personal.

Death is a very personal experience for you today because Betty was someone you knew. She was a mother, a grandmother. Maybe she was a friend of yours or perhaps a neighbor. Some of us worshiped with her. You knew her personally.

This was also the case for the family we read about in John 11. Martha and Mary were sisters to Lazarus, a man who had become very ill and then died. Like you, I imagine Martha went through a whole range of emotions as her brother became weaker and weaker. As death approached for her brother, she probably struggled with depression,

anxiety, and perhaps despair. Yes, death was very personal for Martha.

So when Jesus came, she poured out her heart to him. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died,” she said (v 21b). “My brother,” she said. This was not a news story to her. This was her brother, her blood brother. They had grown up together, played games together when they were little, and now death was all too personal for her. Like any other sister, when her brother died, it hit her hard. We don't know how she grieved, but we know that she did. Death was not some impersonal event that really didn't concern her. This was very personal. This was her brother who had died!

You are here today because death has become personal for you. It's personal because you have a connection with Betty. If you are part of her family, maybe until last week you'd never lived a day in your life without knowing she was there. If you knew her as an adult, maybe today your mind goes back over cherished memories and happier times, which are often connected to working with her and beside her. Whatever your connection today, because you knew Betty, death is very personal. That's why it hurts.

But I want to consider something else for a moment. Death will be even more personal when you experience it for yourself. That's a sobering thought, isn't it? There's no escaping death for us. You and I had better be ready, because it isn't *if* we'll die. It's *when*.

Houdini, the great escape artist, once boasted that he would escape death and return. It never happened. Houdini couldn't escape death. Neither will you, and neither will I.

That makes death very personal, doesn't it? Why does it have to be this way? It's personal because of sin. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” the Bible says in Rom 3:23. What does this mean in plain English? It means that not one of us is perfect, even though God created us to be perfect. It means that each one of us is accountable to our Creator, but we fail. We sin. And there are consequences for that sin.

And we die. The Bible says in Rom 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.” Our personal sin means that death is a personal experience every one of us will go through. Sin is why Martha lost her brother Lazarus. It's why we're here today, and it's why we will all die someday.

But wonderfully, gloriously, there is good news for us. Death is also a personal experience for Jesus. Our Savior is not a distant, cold God who issues decrees and then watches as we struggle with living and dying. Jesus is not a God who sees human suffering and remains unmoved, impassable. He entered human existence by being born as a baby. He walked on this earth and talked to Martha and Mary and many, many others. The Son of God personally experienced human life in all of its wonder and in all of its tragedy.

And Jesus did more than experience the life we live. He also experienced our death. The only Son of God was born to rescue humanity from sin and death. He personally took our sin upon himself and was personally judged guilty in our place.

Because of that, all who trust in Jesus, in this God who died for his people, have forgiveness and hope and peace. More than that, all who trust in him also have eternal life, for Jesus rose from the dead. Life, too, is a personal experience for those who trust in Jesus, for he gives us a promise of life that is stronger than death. In v 23 of our text Jesus said to Martha: “Your brother will rise again.” This was not some generic platitude about Lazarus being in a better place. This was no impersonal card printed on cheap stationery that promised a new beginning. No! This was a personal promise given by Jesus to Martha. “Your brother will rise again.”

Jesus cares about individuals. Jesus cared about Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus. He cared so much that when he made the journey to the tomb of Lazarus, he cried as he saw the sorrow in the faces of those who had gathered to mourn. He cared enough to give to Martha the promise of the resurrection, of a new life for her brother.

Jesus cares about you and your family and your friends. He knows the tears you’ve cried, especially recently, and he understands the emptiness that you might feel at times. So Jesus gives that same promise to us. “Betty will rise again.”

Jesus can make that promise to you and me because he has been raised from the dead! Jesus gives life to all who trust in him, because he has been raised from the dead! Death could not and cannot stop him, because he has been raised from the dead! Jesus is life incarnate, life in the flesh!

One of the most powerful statements that Jesus makes here is found in v 25, when he says, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Think for a moment

about what Jesus is saying here. We often view the resurrection as a distant event sometime in the future. And while it’s true that someday our Lord will raise all the dead from their graves, Jesus is saying something more here; he’s making a bold and fantastic claim. He’s saying that the resurrection is more than an event. The resurrection is a person. *The life, the resurrection, is a person, Jesus the Messiah!*

When Jesus walked up to Martha near the tomb of her dead brother, life himself walked up. And when Jesus told Martha’s dead brother to walk out of that tomb, he brought about a resurrection for Lazarus. He chose to give him life.

Only God can do that. God is the one who created all things and gave life to all creatures. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). Only God can speak life into existence. “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” (Heb 11:3). Jesus is the resurrection and the life because he is God, and he can raise the dead. By raising Lazarus, Jesus was showing that life itself resides in him.

Jesus gave that same life to Betty when she was baptized. Jesus strengthened that gift of life each time Betty worshiped, each time the Word of God was read and preached to her. In the Lord’s Supper, Betty was given the body and blood of Christ for forgiveness, life, and salvation. Life eternal was Jesus’ very personal gift for Betty.

Jesus gives this same life to all who trust in him. When you know Jesus, you know the resurrection not as a future event to come, not as a theological topic for Bible classes and seminaries, but as a person. Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and he gives to others the life and resurrection that are found in him. When you have received the gift of faith in Jesus, the resurrection himself lives in you. That makes life in Jesus very personal.

So in a world of death, we have comfort and life. Life himself has come to live with us. So what does this mean? It means that Betty’s soul is alive with her Lord, awaiting the resurrection of the body. It means that Jesus will give hope and healing in the midst of your grief, in a personal and meaningful way as you meditate on his Word, as you worship alone and with others, and as you pray. And it means that we will see Betty again. We will see all

of God's people into whom he has breathed the breath of life with his living Word.

That living Word gave Martha strength to speak out her faith joyfully and clearly. She said, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world" (v 27). This is the kind of faith Jesus wants to give to all people, for when you've been given Jesus, you've been given a life that physical death cannot take away. Some of you may not know Jesus in the same way Martha did, or in the way Betty did. You may be feeling the very personal effects of death today.

Jesus wants you to know that the life he gives is also for you. In the person of Jesus, the Son of God personally took our sin and our death upon himself, and because of that, we can really live. Jesus personally loves you, and he wants you to live now and forever. What Jesus said to Martha he says to us: "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" (vv 25–26).

That's a personal promise from Jesus you can count on as he walks with you through the difficult days of grieving ahead of you. It's a personal promise you can count on as you go through the rest of your days. And it's a personal promise he will fulfill when he comes to gather all his people in eternity.

I never knew Betty as a driver of a car. I understand that if you were following her on the road, or if you parked beside her in a lot, you would see the words from the prophet Micah, which we heard earlier:

"Do justice; love kindness, and walk humbly with your God."

You could follow Betty and watch her do what God urged her: She walked with her God, humbly, while living. She now beholds the face of the living God in glory! Amen.

Philip Tesch  
January 27, 2018  
North Highlands, California