

# All Saints Sunday

## BOUND TO DEATH, BOUND TO LIFE

John 11:32-44

All Saints Sunday

Analysis by Bruce T. Martin

11:32When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 33When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35Jesus began to weep. 36So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." 40Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." 43When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

---

## **DIAGNOSIS: Bound to Death (that is, to Sin)**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Peeved at Jesus***

Mary, repeating what Martha had said earlier (11:21), said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (v. 32). Mary and Martha could not have been expressing their trust in Jesus. They were not saying, We know that, had you been here, you would have healed him; or: Had you been here, it would not have been possible for him to die. Mary and Martha were expressing the same sentiment as some of the others: “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” (v. 38). In other words: “You’re too late, Jesus. Death has claimed our brother and your friend. Your love and your tears can’t help him now.” Martha makes the point all too plain: the stench of death wins out (v. 39). On top of their being peeved at Jesus, his friends stick him with another, more personal, barb: “It’s your fault, Jesus. You shouldn’t have delayed your arrival. You’ve healed strangers. How is it that you don’t care about your friends?” And so it goes, even with us.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Blaming God***

Mary and Martha are incredulous that their brother, whom Jesus clearly loved, could have died. After all, their mutual friend was Jesus, a prophet of God. Blaming Jesus for being unable or unwilling to heal their brother (before he died) was therefore tantamount to blaming God for his death—and if his death, then theirs as well. Whether or not Jesus has power over death, Mary and Martha (and, ultimately, we too) must end by blaming God for their own eventual death as well. By not believing/trusting in Jesus (v. 40), we are bound to introduce contingencies—such as madness or war or death—which we suppose must limit the love of God for us.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Dead Anyway***

It's no use blaming God for our death. We will die anyway. Lazarus, friend of Jesus, died. And even though he was raised from the dead, he lived to die another day (see 11:4; though Lazarus truly died, Jesus intended an intervention). In that sense, Lazarus' resurrection, or resuscitation, was nothing more than another temporary bodily healing. So let's not get too exuberant here! The truth of the matter can only be seen from the other side of death: "None is righteous, no, not one . . . No one understands, no one seeks for God . . . No one does good, not even one . . . in order that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God" (Rom 3:10-12 quoting Psalms; 3:19). Add to that the final terrifying truth about ourselves before God: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23; already at 1:28-32). Inescapably, we are sinners, and therefore inescapably bound by sin to our own death, both physically and spiritually. Though we may attempt it, blaming God is useless.

## **PROGNOSIS: Bound to Life (that is, to Jesus)**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) :** *THE Resurrection and THE Life*

Jesus' resurrection was permanent. That is, Jesus was resurrected to eternal life. As the Son of God, his resurrection—even if it was the most fabulous event in universal history—would not of itself be important to us. It is only because he died for us that his resurrection is THE most important event in universal history. Jesus died and was raised, not to pave the way for us in some kind of nirvana show-and-tell, but to take our permanent deaths upon himself so that we don't have to bear them, in order that his own resurrected life might become ours as well as his (2 Cor. 5:21). From this perspective, Lazarus' resuscitation was a "sign" (11:47) of an eternal promise, namely "the glory of God" (11:4, 40). Yet God's glory is not so much in his own invincible power as in his

actually loving us (3:16). Such love is not a kindly sentiment or gratuitous theological commentary; it is actual freedom from death and hence from bondage to sin—but only in Christ (11:25).

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Bound to Jesus***

In the verse following our text, we see that “Many of the Jews . . . who had seen what Jesus did, believed in him” (v. 45); that is, “faithed” or “trusted” in him. The English variants “to believe,” “to trust,” and the somewhat clumsy “to faith,” all express the same Greek word. But notice that faith does not stand alone. Faith/trust/belief is “in him” rather than in the sign itself. Such belief is a living relationship with the Resurrected One. With such faith, then, permanent death is behind us and permanent life-in-Christ is before us. God’s love comes to us and is “owned” by us only as we are bound to Jesus by “faith/trust/belief” (again, v. 40). By faith “in him” we bask, so to speak, in the glow of the glory of God. Thus, “It is right to give him thanks and praise . . .”

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Bound to the Resurrection***

Still, death will claim us all. Our loved ones will die, and we ourselves will die. Although in this regard we find ourselves in the same position as Mary and Martha, we are not without hope. We are bound already to the Resurrected One! Death is not permanent for us. Already we rejoice in our resurrection, and we call this rejoicing “faith.” As to the further question, “Don’t you love us, Jesus?” the answer is: “See my hands? . . . Now receive my glory!”