

# The Treasure of Eternal Life

John 11:17-27, 38-53

## Introduction

“It’s a matter of life and death.” How many times have you heard that said, or said it yourself? The truth is, we use that phrase to stress the importance of an issue. But many times, life and death are not at stake. Today, what we are talking about *is* a matter of life and death. It’s the most important issue there is. It’s a matter of *eternal* life and *eternal* death.

## Dead Like Lazarus

Last week, I said that we are born blind. Paul uses even stronger language when he says in **Colossians 2** that we were *dead in our sins (Colossians 2:13)*. Just like Lazarus in our Gospel story today, we are dead.

## “He Stinketh!”

Lazarus was not only dead, he had been dead for *four days*! In Palestine, with no embalming process like the Egyptians had (the spices were merely to mask the odor of decay), decay starts quickly. So, Martha was accurate in her assessment of the situation when Jesus told them to remove the stone. *“He stinketh!” (John 11:39 KJV)*. *ESV* and other modern translations have her saying, *“by this time there will be an odor.”* But the Greek word is more accurately translated “stinks.” We “stink” too. We are not just dead in our sin, we have been decaying as we have been going steadily downhill since the fall. In **Romans 1**, Paul uses the phrase *God gave them up (Romans 1:24, 26, 28)* three times to show the downward spiral of humankind.

## Martha’s Limited Faith

Martha shows her limited faith in Jesus when she says, *“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died” (v. 21)*. She knew Jesus could heal people, but this was different. Now, there was no spark of life. Her problem was, she really didn’t know Jesus. She didn’t know His full range of capabilities. How well do we know Jesus and what He can do for us? We learn all that when we read the Bible.

## Jesus Identified

Jesus assures Martha that her brother will rise. When she replies that she knows he will rise on the last day, 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” (John 11:25-26)*. Whoever grasps hold of Jesus has life because He is life. As Martin Luther said: *“Whoever believes in me will live even if he dies.” You do not believe in a crazy idea or an error, but rather you put your trust in me, says the Lord, because I am the resurrection and the life. Our ears and eyes may not judge. You believe in the resurrection. Good! I want to tell you what it is. I am it. Whoever possesses me has the resurrection (Sermon on the Fifth Sunday in Lent)*. The resurrection is one of those ridiculous sounding things we read in Scripture that we can only grasp by faith. The life He gives is eternal life, beginning now, which is why He can say, *“whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (v. 26)*.

## Jesus Takes Charge

Then, Jesus takes charge. He gives three simple, straightforward commands. And they apply to us today.

### “Take Away the Stone”

The first thing He says is, *“Take away the stone” (v. 39)*. This is when Martha reminds Jesus that Lazarus has been dead four days and he probably already stinks. What happened to her faith? After telling her that He is the resurrection and the life, He asks if she believes. And she responds, *“Yes, Lord; I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world” (v. 27)*. Sometimes there is a gap between what we say we believe and what we actually believe. That shows up in how we live. To grasp the resurrection takes a lived faith, not just a confessed faith. This is what James is talking about when he talks about faith being dead apart from works. Saving faith affects how we live.

### “Lazarus, Come Out”

After they remove the stone, Jesus prays to the Father, then shouts, *“Lazarus, come out” (v. 43)*. The Word that brought life into existence is the Word that restores life to the dead. This might remind us of something Paul says in **1 Thessalonians 4**: *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16)*. Have you ever wondered what that cry of command will be?

### “Unbind Him, and Let Him Go”

When Lazarus comes out, he is bound up by the burial cloths. Jesus says, *“Unbind him, and let him go” (v. 44)*. When Christ gives us life, He frees us from the power of sin and the bondage to it (read **Romans 6:5-11**).

## Life from Death

But how does Jesus give us this eternal life? Caiaphas gives us the answer in **verse 50**: *“Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.”* He didn’t realize this, but John says this was prophecy. Caiaphas was prophesying Christ’s death. But he didn’t realize that Jesus was going to die for all people. It was in His death that He paid the price for our sin and bought us back. With the price of sin, which is death, being paid, we can live forever.

## Word and Sacrament

How does He communicate that life to us? He has chosen to give us this life through the means of grace. Through the Word and Sacrament Christ forgives our sins and gives life everlasting. That eternal life begins now, as He strengthens our faith for life in this world through His body and blood. That’s **THE TREASURE OF ETERNAL LIFE**.

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*And the peace of God,  
Which surpasses all understanding,  
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

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