IF YOU BELIEVE

John 11:17-57

Key Verse: 11:40 “ Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

The movie “Facing the Giants” is the story of a high school football team that achieves the state championship after a three game losing streak and six year drought of any trophy. Winning each game was like facing a giant to the head coach and his players. But the head coach decided to praise God regardless of the results and encouraged his players to follow him. Their motto was “Never give up! Never back down! Never lose faith!” This lowest ranked football team in the state suddenly began to beat all the higher ranking teams one by one until they became the state champions for the first time in their school’s history. Our life is like facing giants every day: facing one problem after another. But when we do not give up, do not back down, and do not lose faith, we will experience the final victory, just as the high school football team did in the movie.

In today’s passage Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. Through this event we will study 1) What does Jesus mean when he says, “I am the resurrection and the life,” 2) What is the stone that blocks my way to Jesus? 3) How can we see the glory of God in the midst of facing giants?

First, your brother will rise again (17-27) In the previous lesson we studied that Jesus had delayed his visit to Lazarus by staying where he was two more days. (11:6) Then Jesus asked his disciples to go to Judea to wake up the dead Lazarus. His disciples did not understand why Jesus did not visit the dying Lazarus right away and what he meant by waking up the dead Lazarus. On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Jesus waited until Lazarus was completely dead. When Martha, the sister of Lazarus, heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, while Mary stayed at home. (20) Martha cried out to Jesus, “***Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.***” (21) She meant that Jesus had come too late to heal her brother. She was disappointed in Jesus’ late visit. But she did not give up on Jesus’ love and his power. She said, “***But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask***.” (22) Even though it was too late, she still believed that Jesus would do something for her and her brother.

What did Jesus say to Martha? Look at verse 23. “***Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.***” Jesus’ word was revolutionary, like the football coach’s message to his players, “We’ll become a state champion.” Martha thought that it was too late to raise her dead brother. Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Martha had never heard or seen anyone come back to life four days later after they died. So she said, “***I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.***” (24) She didn’t believe in Jesus’ word because it was against common sense and her experience. She had the Pharisaic knowledge about resurrection of the dead that we all will be resurrected at the last day. Jesus’ words challenged her common sense driven by human reason and experience. Modern philosophy has been developed with two main ideas: *reason* and *experience*. People don’t believe if it is not reasonable or if it is not proved by experimental process. Martha didn’t pay attention to Jesus’ message because it did not sound reasonable and realistic. She had knowledge about resurrection, but she didn’t have faith in resurrection. Faith overcomes knowledge and experience. Martha repeated, “I know, and I know,” but still she did not know what she was talking about. (22,24) People say that it takes thousand miles for us to convey our information from head to heart and that it takes a long time to transform knowledge into faith. Let us see how Jesus helped her change from saying “*I know*” to “*I believe*.”

Look at verses 25,26. “***Jesus said to her, “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***?” What does it mean when Jesus said, “*I am the resurrection and the life*”? He meant that he is the creator and the author of resurrection who gives us eternal life. He is the firstfruit of resurrection. (1 Co 15:20,23) Jesus explained what he meant, “the one who believes in me will live, even though they die.” Those who believe in Jesus will rise again after they die. Those who believe in Jesus while they are still alive will experience resurrection during their present life. Jesus didn’t say, “I will be the resurrection and I will give you life”, but he said, “I *am* the resurrection and I *give* you eternal life.” Jesus used present tense rather than future tense. He meant that we experience resurrection and eternal life at present while we are living, when we believe in Jesus.

In this way Jesus wanted Martha to believe that she would experience resurrection and eternal life at present when she believes in Jesus’ word. Jesus wants us to believe in Jesus today right here so that we may experience resurrection and eternal life. Salvation is not far, but near. In Deuteronomy 30:11-14 the Lord says, “*Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven,… No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it*.” Paul also quoted these verses to explain about ‘*faith*’ in Romans 10:8, “But what does it say? “*The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim*.” Jesus wanted Martha to believe that her brother would rise again not at the last day, but today.

When we read the Bible, we often think that God’s miracles and signs belong to those who were in the Bible, not to us. Crossing the Red Sea as on dry land and conquering Jericho were the stories of the Israelites, not us. Healing the sick, opening the eyes of a blind man, and raising the paralytic were stories in Jesus’ day, not today. We’re wrong. As Jesus healed the sick, opened the eyes, and raised the dead, so Jesus will also perform the same miracles today for each of us. Hebrews 13:8 says, “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*.” Jesus himself said in Revelation 1:8, “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty*.” Don’t think that you will rise again in resurrection at the last day only. We’ll rise today right here when we believe in Jesus’ words. Believe that miracles will happen *today* and *to me* and *to us* when we believe in Jesus’ word, “*I am the resurrection and the life*.”

What was Martha’s response to Jesus’ words? Look at verse 27. “***Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.***” Finally she said, “Yes, Lord. I believe…” It took long for her to change her words from “I know” to “I believe.” It is also amazing that she confessed that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. Her confession of faith reminds us of Peter’s confession of faith in the synoptic gospels. (Mt 16:16, Mk 8:29, Lk 9:20) But it took another hour for her to believe Jesus’ word from her heart, not from her head.

Second, Jesus wept. (28-37) In these verses Jesus reveals his divine humanity as the Son of Man. After talking with Jesus, Martha hurriedly went back to her house to bring Mary to Jesus. Mary also quickly came to Jesus and fell at his feet crying, “***Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.***” (32) Her crying was the expression of her resentment and sorrow over her dead brother. There were many mourners who followed Mary to comfort her. When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. (33) Here, the words “was deeply moved in spirit and troubled” indicates that Jesus was in agony of seeing Mary and the people’s crying. When people have no resurrection faith, they cannot but cry like Mary. The power of death brought them with sorrow, fear, and resentment. Jesus asked them, “***Where have you laid him***?” They replied, “***Come and see, Lord***” (34) ***Jesus wept***. (35) People remember that this verse is the shortest verse in the Bible. But, they do not know it shows the deepest humanity of Jesus as the Son of Man. Jesus wept not because of sorrow in the loss of Lazarus, whom he loved, but because of people’s unbelief and their surrender before the power of death. Jesus wept before he arrived at Lazarus’ tomb. Jesus wept because Mary and the Jews were imprisoned in the tomb of death.

The word “weep” in verses 33 is different from the word in verse 35. The word Mary wept is, “*claio”* in Greek and the one Jesus wept is, “*dakryo*”. *Claio* is lament or mourn caused by physical suffering whereas ‘*dakyro*’ is ‘shed in tears’ caused by compassion. The cause of Jesus’ sorrow was different from the cause of Mary and the Jews’ sorrow. Jesus wept because of their unbelief. Mary and the Jews wept because of the loss of Lazarus. Jesus knew that he would raise Lazarus from the dead. He said that Lazarus’ sickness would not end in death, but it was for God’s glory. His heart was troubled because of people’s unbelief. God is deeply troubled because of our unbelief. God is sorrowful when he sees his children not believing in him. Suppose your children always worry about their security even though their parents are able to support them. Jesus will weep if we show him our unbelief. Let us not grieve Jesus because of our unbelief. Let us make Jesus happy with our faith and trust.

Third, you will see the glory of God if you believe. (38-44) When Jesus arrived at Lazarus’ tomb, his heart was deeply moved. He must have had compassion on Lazarus whom he loved. The tomb was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. (38) Jesus said to Martha, “***Take away the stone***.” (39) What was Martha’s response? “***But Lord, said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days***.” (39) Not long ago Martha confessed that she had believed in Jesus’ word and that he is the Messiah and the Son of God who came to this world. (27) Still, she did not believe in Jesus’ word in front of the tombstone. Her faith was tested before reality and she failed the test. She should have said, “Yes, Lord. You are the resurrection and the life. I believe that you will raise my brother Lazarus today.” But, she said, ‘But Lord.” She thought that it was impossible for Lazarus who had been dead four days to come back to life. What is miracle? Miracle is the supernatural phenomena which cannot be explained or proved by reason or scientific way. As long as we live in the realm of reason and experience only, we cannot experience miracles. On the other hand, when we live by faith in God, we experience one miracle after another. Jesus said, “*What is impossible with men is possible with God.*” (Lk 18:27).

What did Jesus say to the weeping Martha? Let us read verse 40 all together. “***Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God***?” Jesus meant that if Martha believed in Jesus’ word, she would see a miracle, the resurrection of his brother Lazarus. Here we learn that the glory of God is revealed when we believe. Our faith reveals God’s glory.

At Jesus’ word people took away the stone. In order to obey Jesus’ word, they had to deny themselves. They had to overcome the bad odor coming from the decomposing corpse. In order to remove the stone of our unbelief we must deny our own ideas, feelings, and horrible circumstances. Obedience is the expression of our faith in Jesus’ word which makes the impossible possible. Look at verses 41b-42. “***Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me***.” Jesus prayed before he raised Lazarus. By praying to God Jesus wanted people to believe that he came from God the Father. When he had said this, ***Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out***!” (43) What happened to Lazarus when Jesus called him out in a loud voice? Look at verse 44. “***The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go***.” At Jesus’ word, the dead Lazarus came out of the tomb as he had been laid. Jesus restored Lazarus’ mortal life. By raising Lazarus from the dead what Jesus said was proved true: *I am the resurrection and the life.* The day will come when all the dead hear the voice of Jesus. John told of the day of our resurrection in 5:28,29, “*Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out---those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.*”

In today’s passage Jesus wants us to hear his words and take away all the stones which block our way to him. Jesus wants us to take away the stone of doubt, the stone of unbelief, the stone of pride, and the stone of fatalism in order to see God’s glory. Jesus said again to each of us, “*Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God*?” We face the tombstone like giants. But we will see the stones being rolled away when we hear Jesus’ words and believe in him. We will see many dead men coming out when they study the Bible. We will see the glory of God when we meet Jesus face to face after we leave from this mortal body. Amen! Let us read verse 40.