HOPE BEYOND PANDEMICS

Hundreds of thousands died of the coronavirus in some nations and millions worldwide. Family members were unable to attend the funerals of their loved ones, and some bodies of the dead went unclaimed—they died alone. Losing grandmothers and grandfathers, fathers and mothers, siblings, children and friends was a painful ordeal. Many who did not contract the virus panicked at the thought of being infected. In these times when people face the reality of their mortality, the Bible offers the reality of God’s hope and assurance.

According to the gospel record, Jesus resurrected three people during His earthly ministry. He resurrected the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11–15) and the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:40–42, 49–56) shortly after their death. Because they had just died, the unbelieving religious leaders claimed they were not really dead, that Jesus faked their resurrection. However, the third person Jesus resurrected, Lazarus, proved they were dead wrong. Lazarus had been dead, wrapped in linen and buried in the tomb, for four days. At the time of his resurrection, Martha had even complained, “‘Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days’” (John 11:39). There was no way to explain this miracle away!

The story of the resurrection of Lazarus contains precious gems of truth which prove that Jesus is God in the flesh, the Life Giver, truly the Resurrection and the Life. And the same Jesus who resurrected Lazarus lives today and offers the assurance of life eternal to those who trust in Him!
Read John 11 from the translation of your choice. Write out John 11:21–27. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
BELIEF AND UNBELIEF

The central theme of the Lazarus story is “belief and unbelief.” At each turn, the disciples, Martha, Mary, the crowd, and the religious leaders manifested either a not fully informed belief or a boldfaced unbelief that Jesus was the Messiah.

When Jesus suggested a return to Judea, the disciples objected (John 11:7, 8). Thomas said, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him” (v. 16). Earlier the enemies of Jesus intended to stone Him in Judea (John 8:58, 59; 10:31, 39), but they were unable to because He was under the protective care of His Father. The disciples disbelieved that the Father could protect Jesus, however.

When Jesus said to His disciples, “Lazarus is dead, and I am glad that I was not there,” He explained why He was glad: “That you may believe” (John 11:15, emphasis supplied). When Jesus told Martha that her brother would rise again (v. 23), she responded that she knew he would rise at the last day (v. 24), to which Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (vv. 25, 26, emphasis supplied). Like Peter (Matt. 16:16), Martha replied that she believed Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (John 11:27), yet she did not fully understand her confession, as we can see by the way she reacted when Jesus commanded the removal of the stone (v. 39).

Mary echoed the words of Martha: “If you had been here my brother would not have died” (v. 32, emphasis supplied). When Mary met Jesus, the crowd was wailing, and Jesus “groaned in the spirit, and was troubled” because of their unbelief (v. 33). Jesus then came to the tomb and wept. He did not weep for Lazarus but rather because of their future actions (see inSight). They were oblivious to who Jesus really was.

When Jesus commanded the removal of the stone, Martha objected, to which Jesus responded, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” (v. 40, emphasis supplied). Jesus then prayed to His father so that the people would realize He and His Father were a team working in unison, that “they may believe that you sent Me” (v. 42, emphasis supplied).

When Jesus resurrected Lazarus, many of the Jews who witnessed the miracle “believed in Him” (v. 45, emphasis supplied). Despite the irrefutable evidence that Jesus was God incarnate, however, some in the crowd disbelieved and went to tell the Pharisees what Jesus had done (v. 46). The Pharisees responded by calling a meeting of the Sanhedrin to plan the execution of Jesus. Their concern was that everyone might believe in Jesus (vv. 47, 48). Later the Pharisees plotted to kill Lazarus also, “because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus” (12:11, emphasis supplied).
THE LAZARUS CONNECTION

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) is the only parable in which Jesus used a proper name. He predicted that the rich man (representing the Pharisees) would not repent even if someone called Lazarus was resurrected from the dead.

Some time later, Jesus resurrected a man called Lazarus. Instead of repenting and believing in Jesus, the Pharisees sought to kill Him, and they plotted to kill Lazarus as well (John 12:9–11)! There are some uncanny parallels between the lessons around the Lazaruses. Many Jews, however, did believe in Jesus (11:45), but not all. Some who had shed crocodile tears at the tomb of Lazarus went and told the Pharisees what Jesus had done, and the Pharisees gathered the Sanhedrin and sentenced Jesus to death. The Pharisees refused to believe the messianic prophecies given by Moses and the prophets (John 5:39, 40, 45–47), and therefore they did not believe when Jesus resurrected one called Lazarus from the dead.

What happened to Lazarus while he was dead? Jesus told His disciples, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up” (John 11:11). When the disciples misunderstood what Jesus meant, He plainly told them, “Lazarus is dead” (v. 14). Jesus did not say, “The soul of our brother Lazarus is in the Bosom of Abraham,” and He did not command Lazarus to “come down” but to “come forth”! When Lazarus came out of the tomb, he did not give any report about what had occurred while he was dead, because there is no memory in death. If the soul of Lazarus was in the Bosom of Abraham, it would have been cruel for Jesus to call him back from such a blessed place! Some fifty times in Scripture, death is compared to sleep (Dan. 12:2; Luke 8:52, 53; Acts 7:59, 60; 1 Thess. 4:15–17; 1 Cor. 15:6, 18, 20, 52).

Some people are terrified at the prospect of death. When we realize that death is like sleep, however, it loses its terror. Death is like a wasp without a stinger (1 Cor. 15:55) and a shadow without a substance (Ps. 23:4). Jesus promised, “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40).
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Luke 16:27–33
John 12:9–11
John 6:39, 40, 44, 54
Psalm 13:3
Jeremiah 51:57

What other verses/promises come to mind with John 11?

Review your memorized verse from John 11.
SAFE IN THE ARMS

John 11 assures us that if we walk with Jesus, we are safe in His arms in life or in death. When the disciples questioned the wisdom of going back to Judea, Jesus said “Are there not twelve hours in the day?” (v. 9) What did Jesus mean by this strange expression? The answer is that Jesus compared the length of His ministry with a twelve-hour day. Earlier Jesus had said, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work” (v. 4). The symbolic “day” marked the period of his life where the work of the kingdom and Christ’s ministry could be done while the symbolic “night” represented the time when His ministry would be over and the “power of darkness” would take control of the Jewish leaders to have Him arrested and crucified (Luke 22:53).

As long as Jesus walked in His Father’s path in life, He was safe in His arms at death. During Christ’s ministry, His enemies attempted to arrest and kill Him on several occasions, but they were unable to because His Father protected Him; His hour had not yet come (John 7:30; 8:20). However, on the way to Gethsemane Jesus declared that His hour had come (John 17:1). Even in death, Jesus commended Himself to the safekeeping of His Father (Luke 23:46). Likewise, those who abide in Jesus are safe in His arms in life and in death, and nothing can harm them. Neither life nor death can separate them from the love of God (Rom. 8:38, 39).

When Jesus spoke to Mary, He did not say, “I have the power to resurrect Lazarus from the dead,” but rather, “I am the resurrection, and the life!” (John 11:25, emphasis supplied). “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, undervived” (Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898], 530). Jesus not only has life, He is life! When we trust in Him, we have everlasting life and the assurance of immortality. Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life” (John 6:47, emphasis supplied). Believers die in this life, but their life is “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3), and Christ will resurrect them at the last day (John 6:40). He who has the Son has the life (1 John 5:12).

As long as we abide in Jesus, we have nothing to fear in life or death. Believers also have a day to minister in and a night where ministry ceases. As long as they are walking with Christ, they have nothing to fear, however, because God will protect them and bless their efforts. As with Christ, so with us: “So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans for Himself. He accepted God’s plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans. So should we depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will” (White, The Desire of Ages, 208).
THE AWAKENER

The words, “Mine hour is not yet come,” point to the fact that every act of Christ’s life on earth was in fulfillment of the plan that had existed from the days of eternity. Before He came to earth, the plan lay out before Him, perfect in all its details. But as He walked among men, He was guided, step by step, by the Father’s will. He did not hesitate to act at the appointed time. With the same submission He waited until the time had come. (White, The Desire of Ages [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898], 147.)

He who does the will of God, who walks in the path that God has marked out, cannot stumble and fall. The light of God’s guiding Spirit gives him a clear perception of his duty, and leads him aright till the close of his work. “But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.” He who walks in a path of his own choosing, where God has not called him, will stumble. For him day is turned into night, and wherever he may be, he is not secure. . . .

Christ did not weep for Lazarus; for He was about to call him from the grave. He wept because many of those now mourning for Lazarus would soon plan the death of Him who was the resurrection and the life. But how unable were the unbelieving Jews rightly to interpret His tears! Some, who could see nothing more than the outward circumstances of the scene before Him as a cause for His grief, said softly, “Behold how He loved him!” Others, seeking to drop the seed of unbelief into the hearts of those present, said derisively, “Could not this Man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?” If it were in Christ’s power to save Lazarus, why then did He suffer him to die? . . .

When Christ raised to life the daughter of Jairus, He had said, “The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.” Mark 5:39. As she had been sick only a short time, and was raised immediately after death, the Pharisees declared that the child had not been dead; that Christ Himself had said she was only asleep. They had tried to make it appear that Christ could not cure disease, that there was foul play about His miracles. But in this case, none could deny that Lazarus was dead. (White, The Desire of Ages, 527, 533–535.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

What did Jesus mean when He asked His disciples, “Are there not twelve hours in the day?” (cf. John 9:4)?

What did Jesus mean when He spoke about “walking in the day” and “walking at night”? How does walking in the day give us assurance of God’s protection?

What evidence do we have in John 11 that Mary and Martha did not understand that Jesus was the Messiah in the fullest sense of the word?

Why did Jesus pray to His Father at the sepulcher of Lazarus? Didn’t Jesus have the power in Himself to resurrect Lazarus without deferring to His Father?

In what two opposite ways did the eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Lazarus react? How are the same two reactions possible today?