

Dialogue 2 - Jesus and Martha

Introduction: (John 11:17-27) In Jesus' dialogue with Martha John provides the theological content which gives meaning to the sign of the raising of Lazarus. He identifies the substance of the glory of God revealed in Jesus. It is the glory of God who is supremely loving toward those who are His own because His love is eternally, perfectly, and fully in act. In addition, as was the case with the disciples in the previous narrative, Martha is called, by faith, to experience the glory of this love in a person.

Jesus' Dialogue with Martha – Its Setting - In the first verses in this passage John again provides the reader context to the dialogue to follow. As Jesus and his disciples approach Bethany, John states that Lazarus was already in the tomb for four days. This confirmed both that Lazarus was dead, and that his family and friends were in the midst of the mourning process, making clear how grave the circumstances were into which Jesus and the disciples entered.ⁱ John notes that Jerusalem was near to Bethany. Martha and Mary were home surrounded by many Jews, apparently from Jerusalem, who were mourning with them. The presence of these Jews serves to highlight the danger in which Jesus placed himself by going to be with Martha and Mary, a danger which plays out at the end of the narrative, in the response of some of these Jews to the miracle of the raising of Lazarus (11:45-53; 12:9-11).ⁱⁱ

The reader is told that when Martha heard that Jesus was coming,ⁱⁱⁱ she did not wait for him to arrive. Rather, she went out to meet him. Mary, on the other hand, apparently ignorant of the Lord's arrival, remained back with the mourners. It seems that Martha, and later Mary, upon hearing of the Lord's arrival, and burdened with a grief, which is complicated by the confusion caused by his absence and apparent indifference, raced out to meet him.^{iv}

Jesus' Dialogue with Martha – Martha Expressed Her Disappointment and Confusion – 11:17-22 – ***This dialogue lacks the details provided with Jesus' dialogue with Mary.*** Unlike with Mary, in the following dialogue, John provides no description of the details of their meeting. The fact that John has chosen to use both the Martha and Mary dialogues is significant.^v

- Each dialogue is significant in the development of John's narrative. It seems clear that John record of the dialogue with Martha lacks many of the details that he includes in the dialogue with Mary. The distinct structure is likely because these dialogues are intended to a different element in explicating the sign miracle.

1. The dialogue with Martha provides the theological substance of the glory of God's love in Jesus - on display in the raising of Lazarus.

2. His interaction with Mary puts the glory of that love on display and pictures it as a very present and active love. It may be said that these dialogues, taken together, fully address the tension identified in 11:3-6.

- It appears as though the details of Martha's meeting with Jesus are intentionally structured in such a way that the emphasis is placed on the content of the dialogue not on the emotion – though the emotion is palpable.

1. Martha came to Jesus, knowing that he could have come in time to heal her brother. What she said to Jesus captures the essence of the confusion she felt, and the crisis of faith she had been experiencing, over the events of the past four days (κύριε, εἰ ἥς ὥδε οὐκ ἂν ἀπέθανεν ὁ ἀδελφός μου).

2. Martha's statement is in the form of a conditional sentence which clearly has meaning beyond that provided by the structure of the condition. Daniel Wallace, employing "speech act theory," sees this condition as a mitigated rebuke of Jesus for his absence in her time of need and his failure to heal her brother. He says, "It is as if she had said, 'Lord, you should have been here!'"^{vi}

3. Jesus is hearing from one whose theological foundations have been shaken, creating a crisis of faith that must be resolved *and her understanding of Jesus is at the center of the crisis.*

Note: Yet, it appears that Martha's confusion has not diminished her confidence in Jesus, as can be seen in the second part of this initial statement, [ἀλλὰ] καὶ νῦν οἶδα ὅτι ὅσα ἂν αἰτήσῃ τὸν θεὸν δώσει σοι ὁ θεός. *It is unclear if she is making an oblique appeal for Jesus to raise her brother from the dead or a general request for comfort.*^{vii} It may be that Martha has no idea how Jesus might help her at this stage but she knows, despite her confusion, he is her only hope for a resolution to this crisis in which she finds herself – not unlike Peter in John 6:68-69. *It is a crisis, which by this time, is far beyond the grief of loss. It is a weighty crisis of faith which reaches deep within her soul.*

- At the heart of Martha's statement is the awful incompatibility between Jesus' love and His actions (κύριε, ἴδε ὃν φιλεῖς ἀσθενεῖ). *It seems clear from the context that it all begins and ends with the love of God in Christ.* What is the true nature of Jesus' love and how does that look in times like these? *There are two assumptions or expectations of love that are implied in her statement, which must be addressed if the theological tension is to be resolved and the crisis of faith is to lift.*

1. The first assumption has to do with his compassionate presence (κύριε, εἰ ἥς ὥδε οὐκ ἂν ἀπέθανεν ὁ ἀδελφός μου). *Love shows up. It is not absent and it doesn't needlessly delay.*

Surely, since Jesus loved Lazarus he would hasten His coming, and He would be present with him in his time of greatest need.

2. The second assumption is not only is love present (shows up), *love does something!* This really is the point of the spear and has to do with the action love takes to finally and ultimately address suffering and death in the one loved (κύριε, εἰ ἤς ὧδε *οὐκ ἂν ἀπέθανεν ὁ ἀδελφός μου*).

Note: It is in the addressing of these issues that the glory of God's love in Jesus is revealed to the eyes of faith. The exchanges between Martha and Mary, which follow, will resolve the above issues both theologically and existentially and thereby demonstrate the glory of God's love in Jesus.

Jesus' Response to Martha Moved the Dialogue into the Theological Content or Meaning of His Miraculous Sign – 11:23-24 - Jesus' initial response to Martha is to say, ἀναστήσεται ὁ ἀδελφός σου (11:23).

- Jesus makes an overt allusion/reference to the known doctrine of that eschatological resurrection which is clearly the hope of the Jews.

Note: This reference seems to serve the purpose of bringing forth a truth which, as a Jew, Martha would have known. It is a truth which certainly would have been the cornerstone of the encouragement she and Mary received from the Jews who gathered to comfort them.^{viii}

- Sadly, as seen in her response, which appears to be little more than a concession to a truth believed (11:24), the thought of this eschatological resurrection brought her little comfort in her grief.

1. The tangible weight of grief turned this truth into little more than a platitude.

2. Martha, in this way, is representative of the believer whose theology, though technically accurate, is not robust enough to address the harshness of life.

- Jesus was beginning to rightly fix her focus outside of the events of the past four days, **outside of her grief, and onto the transcendent hope of her faith, and more particularly, onto the implications of His presence with her.**

Note: Jesus would take this known truth of the greater resurrection of believers in the last days, and declare to Martha that it is He, who in love, has come, and it is he himself who will destroy death and fulfill this promise of resurrection on behalf of her brother, and on behalf of all who belong to him.^{ix} He is the resurrection and the life.

Jesus Identifies the Eternal Truth at the Center of the Sign Narrative - “The Theological Center” – The Ultimate Meaning of the Raising of Lazarus – 11:25-26 - Jesus’ statement to Martha in 11:25-26 is the theological center of this sign narrative. Jesus is leading Martha to this truth as both the substance of her faith and the heart of her existential hope. This declaration is one of the “I Am” statements with predicate.

- Jesus’ first statement, the ἐγώ εἰμι saying with predicate (ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ), though likely somewhat elusive to Martha, is a concise and dense statement of theology which is filled with all the glory of the incarnation (cf. 1:14).

Note: It is a profound statement of the glory of this perfect, fully actualized and existential love. Hence, this statement, by implication, addresses all the elements of the emotional and cognitive tension which pervades this narrative, as well as Martha’s profound crisis of faith.^x

- As has already been demonstrated, the ἐγώ εἰμι portion of the saying is Jesus’ appeal to the statements of YHWH (“I am he,” or “I am Yahweh”) made in the Old Testament.^{xi}

1. These are formulaic statements by which the Lord declares that He alone is God.^{xii} Beyond being exclusive claims to deity, they are profound declarations of self-existence, “I am He who causes to be, the ever existing One”^{xiii} or as John Durham says, ““I am the Is-ing One.””^{xiv}

2. Thus, As Bauckham says, in Jesus’ announcement to Martha, ἐγώ εἰμι, “he is unambiguously identifying himself with the one and only God, YHWH, the God of Israel.”^{xv} His self-identification as ἐγώ εἰμι carries the full weight of the nature of God as *ipsum esse* (to-be itself) and thus, as *actus purus* (pure act). This is the very thing which John declared of the pre-incarnate Son of God, in his description of Him in 1:1-4, when he referred to Him as “the Word.”

- In practical terms this means that, when Jesus says ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ it addresses Martha’s concern as seen in her initial statement to Jesus - κύριε, εἰ ἦς ὧδε. It is Jesus saying to her, “Martha, I have come and I am here.”

- But He is saying much more. He is declaring that He, the one who stands before her, is God, the one who causes to be, the ever existing one (1:1-3).

1. ***As such He is ontologically distinct from all that He created. Hence, He is wholly transcendent in His relation to His creation, while at the same time being immanent.***^{xvi} ***He is intimately, supremely, and eternally present.***^{xvii}

2. As the Lord stands before Martha and declares, ἐγώ εἰμι, in practical terms he is saying, ***“I who am present, I have come and I have not delayed (Rom. 5:6). My coming is from of old.”*** -

- Jesus stands before her as the incarnate God, the divine Word who became flesh (1:1-2, 14). He came in the most mysterious and glorious way. The Son of God became fully human while at the same time remaining fully God. Weinandy is correct when he writes that , “in saying ‘I am’ Jesus is identifying his human ‘I’ as that of the eternal ‘I am’ of Son of God.”^{xviii} There is a single “I” or person in this one who is Jesus standing before Martha in that moment, and it is the divine Son of God. He came, and indeed was present in the most glorious way.

- His coming for her, her sister and Lazarus pictures his coming for all who are his own. Lazarus’ suffering and death are not isolated, nor is the appeal for help that came to Jesus from Martha and Mary.

1. Their situation, though very personal, is a single event reflective of the collective condition of fallen humanity.

2. Their appeal for the Lord to act in love, to come and to heal, though very personal, is reflective of the unconscious, implicit and corporate need/appeal of fallen humanity, which has gone forth to the Lord, pleading for him to act in love, to come and to heal.

3. Because God is fully in act his love is fully in act, and because He is as He is, He “simply loves himself and all things in himself in the one act which he himself is.”^{xix} Therefore the love of the God is eternally, perfectly, and fully in act *in the eternal sending of his Son as Jesus, before a single moment of grief or loss was ever experienced, before the foundations of the world* (1 Peter 1:18-20).

- As the ἐγὼ εἰμι portion of ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ carries the weight of deity, so the predicate (ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ) carries the weight of this love fully in act.

1. The implication of the predicate is to say that God’s love, which is fully actualized, is directed toward His own and experienced by them in His being the resurrection and the life.

2. *Jesus’ emphasis is not primarily on describing Himself as He is, rather He is describing who He is in relation to man.*^{xx}

Note: This predicate, as with the other ἐγὼ εἰμί sayings with predicate, has the article. As noted before, the predicate with the article means that Jesus is the quintessence to believers of each of the things He predicates of Himself in these sayings, precisely because He is ἐγὼ εἰμί. *It is only in His full identity as the “I am, who causes to be, the ever existing One”^{xxi} that Jesus is the full embodiment to believers of resurrection and life.*

- Thus, Jesus, in the predicate of this theologically packed statement, is addressing a second element of Martha's concern (κύριε, εἰ ἥς ὧδε οὐκ ἂν ἀπέθανεν ὁ ἀδελφός μου) - *Love's purpose for the incarnation, for his "coming," was to destroy death at its source* - ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωή. The incarnation, his profound coming, this love fully in act, was necessary in order for Jesus to destroy "death" and to be "the resurrection and the life."

Athanasius wrote:

For the Word, realizing that in no other way would the corruption of human beings be undone except, simply, by dying, yet being immortal and the Son of the Father, the Word was not able to die, for this reason he takes to himself a body capable of death, in order that (this body) participating in the Word who is above all, might be sufficient for death on behalf of all, and through the indwelling Word (this body) would remain incorruptible, and so corruption might henceforth cease from all by the grace of the resurrection...For since through human beings death had seized human beings, for this reason, again, through the incarnation of the God Word there occurred the dissolution of death and the resurrection of life.^{xxii}

John Owen wrote similarly of the Lord's mediatorial office:

...there was none in heaven or earth that was qualified to undertake this office...In this state of things the Lord Christ, as the Son of God, said, 'Sacrifice and offerings you did not desire, but a body have you prepared for me; and, behold, I come to do your will, O God' (Heb. 10:5, 9). By the assumption of our nature into union with himself, in his own divine person he became every way fit for the discharge of this office.^{xxiii}

- What it means that Jesus is "the resurrection and the life" is explicated in the final clauses of Jesus statement (ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ κἂν ἀποθάνῃ ζήσεται, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ζῶν καὶ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα - 11:25b-26a). Carson seems to be right when he says, "the two components, 'I am the resurrection' and 'I am the life,' are successively elucidated in the two ensuing clauses."^{xxiv}

1. The resurrection would be the final resurrection of believers (cf. 11:23) as is clear from the phrase κἂν ἀποθάνῃ ("though he should die").^{xxv} Those who are in him through faith, though they will die, they will be raised again with him to life. This is made clear when he calls forth Lazarus from the grave.

2. However, unlike in the case of Lazarus, the life Jesus gives to those who believe in him, whom he resurrects, is an incorruptible and truly undying, immortal, eternal life, (1 Cor. 15:50-58).^{xxvi} Love came, Jesus "came," not to address death at a superficial, symptomatic level, rather at the ultimate level. He came "to destroy death and bring life and immortality to light" (2 Tim. 1:9-10). His love was not delinquent or absent in their time of need. To be sure, he had come in love

and was present in the most unimaginable way, so that he might “be” for them, and all who believe, “the resurrection and the life.”^{xxvii}

- Jesus’ final word to Martha is a call to faith - πιστεύεις τοῦτο. This is a call to faith, an implied invitation to faith, in anticipation of what lay immediately ahead. As Kostenberger said, her confession is somewhat creedal in nature and anticipates John’s purpose stated in 20:30-31.^{xxviii}

Despite her confession we learn, from what Jesus said to her at the tomb of her brother (οὐκ εἶπὸν σοι ὅτι ἐὰν πιστεύσῃς ὄψῃ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ; 11:40), that she had not yet believed to the degree that she could know Jesus as He declared Himself to her in that moment. Jesus was inviting her into the existential blessing and joy of who He is. He is not a truth to be understood but a person who is to be known and experienced in relationship. Weinandy, as noted before, speaks of this truth when he writes,

. . . because all of the facets of God’s love are fully actualized within the love of God, *human persons are able to know in faith, and even experience, that love in accordance with their personal situation at any time.* (emphasis mine)^{xxix}

She stood in the presence of the One who is the source of all life, who Himself is perfect love fully in act, who had come in the tenderness and compassion of love to directly meet her, Mary and Lazarus in their time of need – but more, to ultimately conquer death by love’s most glorious act – the cross – and she could not enter into the profound experience of His love for lack of faith.

ⁱThere is debate as to the significance of John’s note that Lazarus was in the tomb for four days. Cf. Kim, “The Significance of Jesus’ raising Lazarus from the dead in John 11,” 58; Also Kostenberger, *John*, 333.

ⁱⁱKostenberger, *John*, 333; cf. Keener, *John*, 842.

ⁱⁱⁱὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἔρχεται employs the present tense indicative in indirect discourse following the verb of “hearing.” cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 454ff.

^{iv}Some see Martha’s actions as a sign of respect for Jesus. Kostenberger, *John*, 334; cf. also Keener, *John*, Volume 2, 843, note 80.

^vcf. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 184-186; also Ridderbos, *John*, 394, note 41.

^{vi}“Martha’s statement to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died,’ although *formally* a second class condition, is intended as a *rebuke*. It is as if she had said, ‘Lord, you should have been here!’” Sometimes the protasis “is a mitigator or politeness marker.” cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 703.

^{vii}cf. Keener, *John*, 843-844; contra, Beasley-Murray, *John*, 190.

^{viii}Kostenberger, *John*, 334. Also Kim, “The Significance of Jesus’ raising Lazarus from the dead in John 11,” 58. “Resurrection of the dead in the last days is clearly taught in the Old Testament (Ps. 16:8-11; Isa. 26:14; Dan 12:1-4). In the first century the Sadducees denied the resurrection, but the Pharisees affirmed it. The common people usually shared the beliefs of the Pharisees.”

^{ix}As noted before, the problem facing Martha, Mary, and all who find themselves in such a place, is how does one understand the brutal, existential reality of death in the light of the love of God for His own? Cf. Schneiders, “Death in the Community of Eternal Life,” 48.

^xIt is clear from Jesus’ interaction with Martha at the tomb (11:39-40), that she could not understand the implications of His declaration nor benefit from it until after the raising of Lazarus, perhaps even after His own resurrection.

^{xi}See chapter on Relevant Themes for fuller discussion.

^{xii}Brown, *John I-XII*, 536. Brown says that the Lord is declaring, “the unicity of God: I am Yahweh and there is no other.”

^{xiii}*Ibid.*, 536.

^{xiv}Durham, *Exodus*, 39.

^{xv}Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 247.

^{xvi}Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 137-138.

^{xvii}Weinandy later writes, “The persons of the Trinity, in the act of creation, immediately, dynamically, intimately, and enduringly relate creation to themselves and in so doing creation comes to be and continues to exist. . . . In the act of creation the trinity of persons (the logical term) are actually related to creatures (the real term) for the creatures only come to be and continue to exist by being related to the persons of the trinity as they are.” Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 207.

^{xviii}*Ibid.*, 210, note 66. “While the ‘I am’ reveals Jesus’ divine identity, that ‘I am’ was conceived within a human mind and formed with human words and so was spoken from within a human self-consciousness, within the parameters of a human ‘I.’ Jesus is revealing the identity of his human ‘I.’ The ‘I’ of the ‘I am’ is a human ‘I,’ but in saying ‘I am’ Jesus is identifying his human ‘I’ as that of the eternal ‘I am’ of Son of God.” Though this statement is filled with implications some of which I may reject, it captures the mysterious union of the human and divine in Jesus, affirming the single subject of this union as the divine Son of God who is the subject of every experience, action and emotion.

^{xix}*Ibid.*, 127.

^{xx}Brown, *John I-XII*, 534.

^{xxi}*Ibid.*, 536.

^{xxii}Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation: Translated by John Behr*, (Yonkers, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), Books 9-10.

^{xxiii}John Owen, *Meditations on the Glory of Christ*, (Geanies House, Scotland: Christian Heritage, 2004), 94.

^{xxiv}Carson, *John*, 413.

^{xxv}*Ibid.*

^{xxvi}*Ibid.*; Also Ridderbos, *John*, 396f, for differing views.

^{xxvii}Kim, “The Significance of Jesus’ raising Lazarus from the dead in John 11,” 59. He makes the point that his life is present now in him and, by virtue of union with him through faith; it is the present experience of every Christian.

^{xxviii}Kostenberger, *John*, 336.

^{xxix}Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 163.