

Death is a dead end. “How was the night?” asked the nurse. The young man’s weary eyes answered the question before his lips could. It had been long and hard. Vigils always are. But even more when they are with your own father. “He didn’t wake up.”

The son sat by the bed and held the bony hand that had so often held his own. He was afraid to release it for fear that doing so might allow the man he so dearly loved to tumble over the brink. He had held it all night as the two stood on the canyon’s edge, aware of the final step that was only hours away. He summarized the fears that had been his companions during the darkness. “I know it has to happen,” the son said, looking at his father’s ashen face; “I just don’t know why?”

The canyon of death. It is a desolate canyon. The dry ground is cracked and lifeless. The other side unreachable. You can’t help but wonder what is hidden in the darkness. And you can’t help but leave.

Have you been there? Have you been called to stand at the thin line that separates the living from the dead? Have you watched sickness corrode and atrophy the body of a dear one? Have you lingered behind at the cemetery long after the others left, gazing in disbelief at the casket that contains the body that contained the soul of the one you can’t believe is gone?

Probably I am addressing someone who is walking the canyon wall. Someone you love dearly has been called into the unknown and you are alone. Alone with your fears and alone with your doubts. If this is the case, please read the rest of this piece very carefully. Look carefully at the scene described in John 11.

In this scene there are two people. Martha and Jesus. And for all practical purposes they are the only two people in the universe.

Her words were full of despair. **“If you had been here ...”** she stares into the master’s face with confused eyes. She had been strong long enough; now it hurts too badly. Lazarus was dead. Her brother was gone. And the one man who could have made a difference didn’t. He hadn’t even made it for the burial. Something about death makes accuse God of betrayal. “If God were here there would be no death!” we claim.

If God is God anywhere, He has to be God in the face of death. Pop psychology can deal with depression. Pep talks can deal with pessimism. Prosperity can handle hunger. But only God can deal with our ultimate dilemma—death. And only the God of the Bible has dared to stand on the canyon’s edge and offer an answer. He has to be God in the face of death. If not, he is not God anywhere.

Jesus wasn't angry at Martha. Perhaps it was his patience that caused her to change her tone from frustration to earnestness. **"Even now God will give you whatever you ask."**

Jesus then made one of those claims that place him either on the throne or in the asylum: **"Your brother will rise again."**

Martha misunderstood. (Who wouldn't have?) **"I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."**

That wasn't what Jesus meant. Don't miss the context of the next words. Imagine the setting: Jesus had intruded on the enemy's turf. He's standing in Satan's territory, Death canyon. His stomach turns as he smells the sulfuric stench of the ex-angel. And he winces as he hears the oppressed wails of those trapped in his prison. Satan has been here. He has violated one of God's creations.

With his foot planted on the serpent's head, Jesus speaks loudly enough that his words echo off the canyon walls.

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25).

It is a hinge point in history. A chink has been found in death's armor. The keys to hells of hell have been claimed. The buzzards scatter and the scorpions scurry as Life confronts death—and wins! The wind stops.

A stage has been set for confrontation at Calvary.

But Jesus isn't with Martha. With eyes looked on hers he asks the greatest question found in scripture. A question meant as much as for you and me as for Martha. **"Do you believe this?"**

There it is. The bottom line. The dimension that separates Jesus from a thousand gurus and prophets who have come down the pike. The question that drives any responsible listener to absolute obedience to or total rejection of the Christian faith.

"Do you believe this?" This is a canyon question. A question which makes sense during an all-night vigils, or in the stillness of the waiting rooms. A question that makes sense when all of our crutches and costumes are taken away. For then we must face ourselves as we really are, helplessly tail spinning toward disaster. And we are forced to see him for what he claims to be our only hope.

As much out of desperation as inspiration, Martha said **"Yes! I believe."** So she gave him her hand and let him lead her away from the canyon wall.

"I am the resurrection and the life ... Do you believe this?"

