

Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead

(John 11:1-44)

John selected seven miraculous signs to include in his record of Jesus' life, signs that would convince people that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God (John 20:30-31). The raising of Lazarus from the dead is the final and most spectacular of these seven signs. By Jesus' spoken command, life returned to the lifeless body of Lazarus. The decaying cellular structure of this man's body was instantly reanimated, restored to full function. His inactive heart and brain instantly came back into action. Everything that distinguishes life from death was restored by a word from Jesus. Jesus proved that He has the power to create life. He is the resurrection and the life. We have real life now and resurrection life in the future because of Jesus Christ alone.

Sickness and death may be a means of bringing glory to Jesus Christ (11:1-16).

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead He also demonstrated a number of spiritual truths. For example, we learn that sickness and death itself may be a means of bringing glory to Him.

Lazarus, a friend of Jesus, fell sick and his sisters, Mary and Martha, sent to Jesus for help (11:1-3).

John introduces Lazarus to his readers as a man who lived in Bethany outside Jerusalem. Lazarus had two sisters, Mary and Martha. John would later describe Mary's humble act of anointing Jesus with perfume and washing His feet with her hair (John 12:1-3). Mary showed great gratitude for what Jesus had done in her life including, no doubt, the raising of her brother from the dead.

While Jesus was residing on the east side of the Jordan River, out of the reach of the increasingly hostile religious authorities in Jerusalem, His friend Lazarus became sick. His condition was critical. Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus, describing Lazarus as someone Jesus loved (the Greek term here means to love like a brother). Surely, Jesus would do something to relieve Lazarus and comfort these dear sisters.

Jesus said that Lazarus' sickness would result in God's glory and then delayed going to help Lazarus (11:4-6).

When Jesus received the message about Lazarus He gave a response, likely directed toward the messengers to take back to the family and certainly to encourage His disciples. He stated that Lazarus' sickness would not end in death. Instead, it would result in glorifying God.

Lazarus' situation would also mean that the Son of God, Jesus Himself, would be glorified. Sickness, and even death, can bring glory to our Savior when we trust Him and His resurrection power. John states that Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (this time using a Greek term for unconditional, sacrificial love). Nevertheless, Jesus waited two full days before beginning His journey back to Jerusalem. What may seem as an insensitive delay on Jesus' part was actually His perfect understanding of the timing of this need. Jesus would bring glory to the Father, not by healing Lazarus, but by raising him from the dead.

Jesus eventually told His disciples that He would return to Judea in spite of threats against His life (11:7-10).

After two days Jesus said to His disciples that they should all return together to Judea. The disciples objected. They reminded Jesus, their "Rabbi" or "Teacher," that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem had recently tried to stone Him to death because of His claim to be one with God the Father (John 10:30-31). Jesus replied in language reminiscent of what He said when He healed the blind man (John 9:4-5). Daylight was limited—just twelve hours each day. Those who walk about while the sun is up won't stumble because they have light, the "light of this world," a reference to physical daylight. Those who walk at night, without light, stumble because of the darkness. By implication, Jesus, who is the spiritual light of the world (John 8:12), protects and guides His people. But His time on earth was limited, so He needed to take every opportunity to help those who loved Him. Jesus was willing to risk the opposition of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem to help His friends Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.

Jesus informed His disciples that Lazarus had died (11:11-15).

Jesus then told His disciples that Lazarus, their mutual friend, had fallen asleep. Jesus needed to go and wake him up. The disciples assumed that Jesus meant the restful physical sleep that indicates progress toward recovery from an illness. But Jesus was referring to death. Sleep is a common euphemism for death, and need not imply soul sleep. Those who die are instantly and consciously present in eternity (compare Luke 16:22-23; 2 Corinthians 5:6-9). Jesus stated plainly to His disciples, "Lazarus is dead." He then said that He was glad not to have been present with Lazarus at the time because what was about to take place would bolster the disciples' faith. It was time to go to Lazarus. It was time to display God's glory. It was time to foster a new level of faith.

Thomas expressed his willingness to go with Jesus even if it meant death (11:16).

Thomas (whose Aramaic name means "twin," as did his Greek name "Didymus"), spoke up and said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Thomas' words carry a hint of defeat, but really display great devotion. Thomas was willing to die with Jesus.

This attitude is the mark of a committed disciple. Thomas and the others, while cautious, were willing to follow Jesus wherever He went. As it would turn out, they would see the glory of the Father and the Son in a way they never imagined. Jesus can be glorified even in the midst of sickness and death.

**Eternal life is available to all who
place their faith in Jesus Christ (11:17-27).**

Jesus took the opportunity of Lazarus' death to emphasize once again that He offers us eternal life through faith in Him.

Lazarus' body had been in the tomb for four days by the time Jesus arrived (11:17-19).

By the time Jesus and His disciples arrived near Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days. He must have died shortly after the messengers left to tell Jesus about his illness. The fact that Lazarus had been dead for four days intensifies the sense of amazement around this miracle. Had Jesus raised Lazarus at the moment of death, skeptics might claim that Lazarus hadn't really died but been merely revived from near death. The fact that Lazarus was dead for a period of four days and that physical decay would have occurred highlights the power of Jesus' miracle. John indicates that the village of Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and its proximity made it possible for a number of Jewish leaders to participate in the mourning process with Martha and Mary. Lazarus must have been well known in the region.

Martha went to meet Jesus and expressed her faith in His healing power (11:20-22).

Word reached Martha and Mary that Jesus was nearing the village. Martha went out to meet Jesus, while Mary remained behind, presumably overwhelmed with grief. When Martha saw Jesus she expressed her faith in His power, saying, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." She also stated, "But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." It doesn't seem likely that Martha anticipated an immediate resurrection. She may have had in mind the kind of comfort and healing of the heart that so many in mourning need.

Jesus assured Martha that He is the resurrection and the life (11:23-26).

Jesus reminded Martha that Lazarus would rise again, and Martha acknowledged her belief in a future, physical resurrection in the last days. Jesus then declared, "I am the resurrection and the life." Resurrection is the prerogative of Jesus. He raises the dead to life. Furthermore, Jesus claimed that those who believe in Him will live. Even in this life, those who

believe in Him will experience eternal life. We will “never die.” Eternal life begins the moment we believe in Jesus. Jesus asked Martha if she believed what He said.

Martha expressed her faith in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God (11:27).

Martha didn’t hesitate to express her faith in Jesus. She replied, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.” The tense of the verb “believe” indicates that Martha’s faith had already been established earlier and it still guided her heart. Jesus is the promised Messiah. He is the Son of God, God in the flesh. Through faith in Him we enter into eternal life, with the certainty of resurrection life in the future.

Our deepest hurts find comfort and understanding in Jesus Christ (11:28-37).

Jesus not only offers resurrection life, He also understands and enters into our deepest hurts. He grieves with us in our grief. He Himself grieves over the impact of sin on His creation.

Martha went to bring Mary to see Jesus, and Mary expressed her faith in His healing power (11:28-32).

Martha went back to the house and told Mary that Jesus wanted to see her. Mary quickly composed herself and went to Jesus. Jesus had apparently stayed outside the village in order not to draw attention prematurely. When Mary left the house, the mourners who were with her followed her. They assumed that Mary, in her grief, was returning to Lazarus’ tomb. When Mary saw Jesus, she fell at His feet. In words similar to those of her sister, Mary expressed her faith in Jesus, saying, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” There was no accusation in her voice, merely an expression of faith.

Jesus was deeply moved by Mary’s grief and wept openly over Lazarus’ death (11:33-35).

Seeing Mary’s grief, coupled with the mourning of those who had come with her, Jesus was deeply moved in His innermost spirit. The term John employs for this emotional reaction carries the connotation of snorting with a sense of indignation. Jesus saw the pain that sin had inflicted on His creation and was deeply disturbed at its destructive power. It “troubled” Him, that is, it made Him shake in agitation over the situation. Jesus asked to see Lazarus’ tomb, and the people led Him to the site. Upon arriving at Lazarus’ tomb, “Jesus wept.” The verb tense implies that Jesus burst into tears, but the word itself indicates quiet weeping rather than the

boisterous weeping of Mary and the other mourners (verse 33). Jesus was grief stricken in this moment of death and loss in spite of the fact that He knew He would soon raise Lazarus to life.

Some of the Jews who were present observed Jesus' love for Lazarus while others wondered why Jesus hadn't prevented Lazarus' death (11:36-37).

The Jewish leaders who had accompanied Mary to the tomb observed Jesus' reaction. They recognized in Jesus a deep love for Lazarus. Some of them also wondered why Jesus, who had healed a blind man, couldn't have intervened in Lazarus' case and prevented his death. Jesus had a different plan in mind. However, in the moment, Jesus shared in the grief of His friends at the death of Lazarus. He knows our hurts, and comforts us in those hurts.

**Power and authority over death
are found only in Jesus Christ (11:38-44).**

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He has power over death. He offers life—eternal life, resurrection life, real life.

Jesus instructed the people to remove the stone from the entrance to Lazarus' tomb and assured Martha that she would see the glory of God (11:38-40).

Jesus was about to perform a great miracle. He told the people gathered around Lazarus' tomb to remove the stone that blocked the tomb entrance. Martha objected, pointing out that Lazarus had been dead for four days. His body, though wrapped and covered with fragrant oils according to the burial customs of the day, would have developed the stench of death. But Jesus assured her and those around the tomb that they were about to see the glory of God. She needed only to believe. Faith would reveal life.

Jesus prayed and then commanded Lazarus to come out of the tomb (11:41-43).

When the people had removed the stone from Lazarus' tomb, Jesus spoke to the Father in heaven. He thanked the Father for hearing His prayer, commenting that He always knew that the Father listened to Him. However, Jesus prayed so that those who were present would understand that He had come from the Father. Jesus then cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

Lazarus came out of the tomb and Jesus instructed the people to release him from his grave clothes—Lazarus was alive! (11:44).

Immediately Lazarus came to life. He emerged from the tomb, still wrapped in the burial cloths. His hands and feet were wrapped in strips of linen, and his face was covered with a separate burial cloth. Movement must have been difficult, but Lazarus was able to find his way out of the tomb into the light of day, into the light of Jesus. Jesus then told the people to release Lazarus from his burial cloths. After all, Lazarus was alive! Jesus gives life to the dead. He gives spiritual life to those who believe in Him. He likewise guarantees us a future, physical resurrection. We have real life now and resurrection life in the future because of Jesus Christ alone.