

# Three Resurrections

## John 11

Happy Easter!

I hope you are happy.

I truly hope that knowing Jesus, risen from the grave, gives you true happiness.

The resurrection so encapsulates both the character and work of Jesus Christ that He has no problem declaring of himself, “I am the resurrection!” Think about that for a moment. He does not simply say, “I raise people from the dead.” Or, “I have or will be raised from the dead.” But, “I am the resurrection!” There is something about the resurrection that is forever joined to Jesus’ being.

To know Jesus rightly is to know him as “The Resurrection!”

Do you know Jesus as “the resurrection”?

What exactly does that even mean?

Today, we will answer these questions through another resurrection – the resurrection of Lazarus. This resurrection occurred only days before Jesus’ own resurrection. And the Apostle John uses the resurrection of Lazarus to help us better understand Jesus as “the resurrection.”

For the sake of time, we are going to pick up the story mid-stream. But you will need some idea of how we get to this point.

Lazarus was the brother of Mary, who had previously anointed Jesus feet with oil, and Martha. In verse 5 of this chapter, the writer “John” comments that Jesus loved “Martha and her sister and Lazarus”. Lazarus was not one of the Twelve, but in verse 11, Jesus refers to Lazarus as “our friend.” In verse 3, the Twelve refer to Lazarus as “the one whom you love.” In verse 35, after having conversations with both Mary and Martha in their grief, Jesus does something that he does not often do in Scripture. He weeps.

Why is this important?

Because it makes very clear that Jesus’ actions towards Lazarus are motivated by a deep personal love for him. Of course, Jesus loves each one of his children who belong to him. But the affection that he had for Lazarus helps us to better understand that love.

At the very core of the message of the Resurrection is the love of Jesus towards all who place their trust in Him.

It is also important that you understand the timeline of the events leading up to the moment when Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb.

#### Timeline:

- Jesus and his disciples are located in Batanea (almost 100 miles from Bethany)
- A long journey for one day was approximately 25 miles.
- The journey would likely have taken 4 days.
- Day 1 – a messenger is sent to Jesus.
- Day 4 – Messenger arrives in Batanea where Jesus is with his disciples.
  - Presumably, the messenger immediately returns with Jesus' message of hope.
  - Jesus waits two days before departing!
- Day 6 – Jesus leaves the region of Batanea for Bethany.
- Day 8 – The messenger returns to Mary and Martha with Jesus' words of hope.
- Day 10 – Jesus arrives in Bethany.
  - Lazarus has been in tomb 4 days, meaning he died on Day 6 or maybe even day 5.

Even had Jesus left immediately, he would not have arrived in Bethany before Lazarus died. But still, Jesus' waiting for two days was very purposeful.

Jesus was intent to arrive only after Lazarus had been in the tomb for several days.

It was Jewish superstition that the soul of the dead would hover around the body for 3 days before moving on to the afterlife. I think this helps us to see that raising someone who had been buried for 4 days and was decomposing was a big deal. Jesus had raised people from the dead throughout his ministry, but as far as we know, none of them had been in the tomb for as long as Lazarus.

It is also important to see that Jesus had other options.

He could have prevented Lazarus from getting sick.

Or he could have healed him from a distance.

Jesus intended for Lazarus to die. He intended for Mary and Martha to endure the grief of watching their brother die. It is difficult to understand how Jesus could want for these things to happen to people whom he loved.

But we all wrestle with how a Sovereign God can allow his people whom he loves to experience pain, and suffering and death.

Jesus is more concerned that his people embrace him as the Resurrection, than he is in keeping them from experiencing pain, and suffering, and death.

Now, we are ready to read the text for today.

Read John 11:38-44.

In the resurrection of Lazarus, John instructs us in three distinct yet related resurrections. First we will look at how Lazarus anticipates Jesus' own resurrection.

Second, we will consider how Jesus' calling Lazarus out of the tomb foreshadows that Final Day when Jesus will call us out of our tombs: The final bodily resurrection.

And third, we will take considerable time to show how the raising of Lazarus helps us to better understand spiritual resurrection.

Jesus' own resurrection.

The final bodily resurrection.

And spiritual resurrection.

38      Then Jesus,  
   deeply moved again,  
   came to the tomb.

**evmbrima,omai** (1) *sternly warn, admonish strictly* (2) as expressing intense agitation *be deeply moved, groan* (3) as expressing anger or displeasure

Jesus is angry. But at what is he angry. He is not angry at Lazarus or Mary or Martha. He might be angry at the crowds for their unbelief. But I think it is best to see Jesus as being angry that one he loves so deeply is under the hold of death itself.

Death is the wages of our sin. It is the just sentence upon our sin. It is what we deserve for loving ourselves more than God.

But even though it is God's justice that demands our death, his love for his children also moves him to anger in the face of it.

Jesus is angry at sin and its consequences.

Remember, this is occurring only days before Jesus would endure his own death. Jesus knows that in order to truly deal with the punishment that Lazarus deserves, he will have to die.

In the cross, justice and mercy meet.

John purposely includes details that are designed to prepare us for Jesus' own resurrection.

He tells us that tomb is a cave and there is a stone in front of the entrance. (v. 38)

In verse 44, we are told that there are linen strips wrapped around Lazarus and that there is a separate cloth for his face.

These are details that are common to burial practices at that time, but John seems to draw them out for a purpose.

John wants us to connect Lazarus to Jesus' own resurrection. There are similarities between them. But there are also significant differences.

When it comes to Jesus' resurrection:

No human moves the stone.

No human takes the linens off.

No human unwraps the face cloth.

Lazarus' resurrection was still a miracle of the "old creation".

His body was still a corruptible body that would eventually wear out and die again.

Lazarus' body could not pass through his grave clothes.

Lazarus was resurrected, but he was not given a "new creation" body.

Jesus' resurrection was a miracle of the "New Creation".

When Jesus rose he rose with an incorruptible body that would never wear out and could never again die.

Jesus' body could pass through his grave clothes. His body was still physical, but new and improved physical.

If you think of the entirety of the New Heavens and the New Earth and what that New Creation might be like, Jesus is the first installment of it. He is called in Scripture: the Firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18).

Jesus' new body was the old body transformed. His new resurrection body is called "spiritual" in I Cor. 15, but only because it is distinguished from our current corruptible bodies.

When we get to Jesus' resurrection, John wants us to reflect upon these things. These details are not there accidentally. John is very purposeful. We are not to see the raising of Lazarus simply as an incredible miracle. We are supposed to use it to help us to better understand Jesus' own resurrection from the dead.

And when it comes to Jesus' resurrection, there is no visible person to "call him to life". John wants us to ask, "Who calls Jesus out of the grave?"

The answer is complex and moves us to a deeper understanding of the Trinity.

Jesus raises himself.

**John 10:17-18** <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

The Father raises Jesus.

**Galatians 1:1** Paul, an apostle- not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead-

The Spirit raises Jesus.

**Romans 8:11** <sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

As Christians, we are Trinitarian. That means that we not only believe in the Trinity, but also that we believe the entire Trinity is at work in our redemption. In the work of salvation, all three persons of the Trinity are active. Our salvation depends on the work of the entire Trinity and not just one of the persons.

So, the raising of Lazarus directly helps us to understand the raising of Jesus. And it is because of the resurrection of Jesus that is the foundation of all our hopes for true life.

We can also use the resurrection of Lazarus to help us understand the final resurrection.

In particular, it is the voice of Jesus that will call men out of their tombs.

**John 5:28-29** <sup>28</sup> Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice <sup>29</sup> and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Reading of Jesus calling forth Lazarus from the grave makes a bit more tangible our hope for when he will call us out of our graves on that final day.

Jesus' call is full of authority.

Jesus' call possessed such authority that if he had not specified "Lazarus", every tomb would have opened and all the dead would have been raised.

Jesus' call carried the power to give life.

It is very important to recognize that Lazarus was dead. Dead men do not respond to commands. They just remain dead.

Before Lazarus could respond to the call, he had to have:

His heart start beating.

His lungs start working.

His brain begin to function, fixing all the damage of having no oxygen for four days.

His muscles to begin working.

Lazarus is absolutely passive in all of this working of the power of Jesus upon him.

Jesus is active.

Lazarus is as passive as you can possibly be.

But Jesus' activity will result in Lazarus being active.

Jesus' call was a command that would be obeyed.

Can you possibly imagine Lazarus saying, "Nah, I don't think so, Jesus. I think I would rather just stay here in the tomb.?"

Lazarus IS coming out. There really is no question about it.

And can you imagine Lazarus taking the credit for being able to come out of the tomb?

"Look Mary and Martha how I made it out of there! I bet not many people could have done that!"

All of the credit for his being raised goes to Jesus.

There is no doubt in my mind that these are the sorts of things that we are to be meditating upon.

Think for a moment about what John does not tell us.

There is no mention of the response of Lazarus, or Mary or Martha? There is no mention of their joy, although I am sure they were filled with it.

These things were not insignificant, but John's determined goal is to provide the information that will enable men to believe in Jesus Christ.

Repeatedly, in the book of Acts, we find that those who first preached the Gospel included in their preaching this truth of the future and final resurrection. When your body is lying in the grave, Jesus will one day utter a great call and that call will itself be full of life, and the dead will be brought to life again. This belief in the Coming Resurrection is absolutely fundamental to our faith. Paul says clearly that if we hope only for this world, then we are to be pitied most among all men. Our hope is in the resurrection.

Do you believe in Jesus as the One who will one day call you out of the grave? Jesus is the resurrection. He is declaring to you, "I am the resurrection."

Do you hear his voice?

This brings us to the third resurrection: the resurrection of our souls.

This is a resurrection that occurs in this life. This is a resurrection that we cannot see visibly, but is just as real. And just as necessary if you are to know true life.

**Ezekiel 36:26** <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

What exactly is a heart of stone?

It is a heart - a soul - that pursues sin and self above God.

A dead soul, a stony soul, is not dead in every way. A dead soul continues to have a conscious existence. But that existence is lived out in rebellion or indifference to God.

**Ephesians 2:1-3** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience- <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

A dead soul is very much alive. It is alive to sin.  
But it is not alive to God, and to his righteousness.

A dead soul lives in this world, but ultimately does not truly love God in his righteousness. The Bible calls this condition “dead” for a reason. The soul is not simply “sick”. It is not in the process of “dying”. It is not partially dead, like a tree that has some dead branches.

If this were the case then the soul could simply be repaired. Maybe through some fixing, maybe through its own reparative powers, maybe after applying some ointments, or some combination of all of these, the soul might be able to “get better”.

It is certainly true that our bodies have an amazing capacity to fix themselves. Most of the advances of modern medicine work with the body’s own abilities to heal itself. But these abilities of the body to conduct self-repairs, even aided by medicine, are no longer present – once death has occurred.

Has Jesus spiritually raised you from death?  
Has Jesus awakened within you a new heart that is alive to God?

Do you possess within you a deep hungering and thirsting for God and his righteousness?

If not, I must tell you that your condition is worse than you might think. You are not just sick. You are dead. And even though you may not feel entirely dead, that is the way the Bible describes the condition of your soul. This is important because it changes significantly what you need God to do in your life.

You do not need him to repair you.  
You need God to create a new you.  
You are utterly helpless to bring about the new life that you need.

The soul, apart from Christ, is “dead”. Dead like Lazarus was dead, decomposing dead. The only hope for a dead soul is for it to be reborn. One must be given a new heart entirely. The old heart is not fixed up. New life must be given.

Spiritual resurrection alters your inmost desires. It begins to re-orient what you believe will provide true life. The dead soul looks only to this world to provide life. The spiritually resurrected soul looks to God for his deepest longings. His or her hope is fixed upon heaven, and the final resurrection and the New Creation.

Without God’s working, we will not recognize our own deadness. But to those who begin to see how helpless they are to ever love God more than themselves, God gives this promise:

**Ezekiel 36:26** <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

For those who cry out to Jesus in faith, God promises to create life where there was no life before.

God calls all men to repent of their sin and believe in Jesus as the resurrection.

But Jesus also calls us personally, by name, like he called Lazarus, by name.

John tells us in John 10:3 that the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

When Jesus calls an individual out of their spiritual deadness, he is spiritually raising them from the dead. Without the power of Jesus to impart new life, no one would ever respond to the call to love God more than themselves.

Now, to be entirely honest, the work of God is not yet complete. Even those who have been spiritually reborn do not yet fully love God as they ought.

But something has changed. There is a love for God, and a yearning for a more complete love for God, that exists in those who are spiritually alive.

Those having been given new life enter into a life long struggle with the old nature that continues to love sin.



But, this new life, because it flows from the power of Christ's resurrection, must and will win the victory over the old nature, which has been crucified with Christ.

Those who are spiritually alive, live by faith.

Faith can help you with things in this world. But the faith I am talking about is a lifelong commitment to look to God for life.

It is an acknowledgment that the source of our love for God does not originate with us. Faith continually looks to God to supply life.

Faith knows that because of sin, we only deserve death and judgment from God. But faith looks at our sin through the lens of the cross. Faith believes that deserving God's anger, in Christ, we may receive his blessing. And having received forgiveness, faith continues to cling to Christ every day for power to love God and overcome sin.

Jesus declares to you this day: I am the Resurrection and the Life.

Are you alive today?

When you choose sin, does it make you grieve?

I don't mean, do you want to avoid the negative consequences of sin.

I mean, do you grieve for and despise the sin itself?

Would you rather die than continue on sinning?

This is one sign of having been given true life.

Do you hunger and thirst for God?

I know that there is a part of you who does not want God. This old nature will remain within you until you die physically.

But is there a new desire within your heart that is desperate for God?

Is there something within you that would rather lose every other thing in this world than lose God?

Is there a joy that fills your soul when God comes near to you, and an emptiness when he remains aloof?

This is a sign that you have been given new life.

Is there a new found desire to submit to and obey God's law?

Rather than a supreme desire to exert your own will and live life as you please, do you now have a living desire to discover and carry out those things that please God?

This is a sign that you have been given new life.

Have you given up trying to earn God's favor by your own goodness?

Have you been convinced that the only possible way you will ever have the favor of God, is if the goodness of Christ is declared to be yours?

Have you looked within your soul and despaired that you will ever be righteous, and then cast yourself upon the mercy of God in Christ alone?

This is a sign that you have been given new life.

Only those who embrace Jesus Christ with a living faith will be eternally saved.

And so I ask again, "Do you know Jesus as the resurrection? As your resurrection?"

Finally, for those who are believing in Jesus Christ, remember who you are. Even though you still must feel the effects of sin every day, you are no longer dead. You belong to the resurrection.

You are alive. The old has gone and the new has come. You are a walking expression of the glory of God.

40 Jesus said to her,

"Did I not tell you

that if you believed

you would see the glory of God?"

Go forth this day with joy.

Hear and believe Jesus' words: I am the resurrection and the life! Amen.