

**JESUS RAISES LAZARUS**  
(John 11:1-18)

It is now wintertime in Jerusalem. It is the Feast of Dedication. (John 10:22) This was not a biblically mandated feast, but it was a feast instituted by the Jews around 165 BC to commemorate the rebuilding of the temple after it was desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes.

We are three months from the crucifixion and the Jews are now hot in pursuit of Jesus. They are planning to kill him. In fact, it seems that whenever Jesus appears, the Jews surround him in a threatening manner.

*Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.*

John 10:24

Now the Jews were not really disposed to believe that he was the Christ, but they wanted him to clearly state that he was the Christ so that they could accuse him of blasphemy. But Jesus clearly told them that they were not his sheep and that is the reason they would not believe.

*But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep . . .*

John 10:26

There is a fundamental reason why men believe or don't believe. It is because they are sheep or they are not sheep. And if God has chosen them to be sheep, then God works in their hearts in such a way that they are disposed to believe in Christ. And so Jesus says,

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*

John 10:27

Now Jesus has performed hundreds, maybe thousands of miracles during his three years of ministry.

*And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.*

John 21:25

But in the gospel of John there are only seven miracles recorded. And we come this morning to perhaps the greatest and most astonishing of all the miracles of Jesus. Now we have seen in the gospel of John that Jesus turned water into wine. And this

was a nice little miracle and it says that when the disciples saw this they believed on him. It was quite astonishing that Jesus could do such a thing.

And then we have seen that Jesus healed the Nobleman's son from a distance. And then he healed a man who had been lame for 38 years. After this, John records that Jesus fed 5,000 men plus women and children with five loaves and two fishes. And then, Jesus walked on the sea of Galilee and calmed the storm. Then, to illustrate how he is the light of the world, Jesus gave a blind man his sight. And these six miracles are recorded in the Gospel of John to teach us various things about Jesus.

But John saved the greatest of miracles for last. And perhaps this is in fact one of the last healing miracles of Jesus. He would soon be crucified and the day of his earthly work would be over.

When we come to our text for this morning, we find in verse one,

*Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.*

There are several things that we know about Lazarus from our text. He was a man. He was sick. In fact, he was very sick. He was at the point of death. We are not told the nature of the sickness, but in those days, without medical knowledge, any sickness was potentially fatal. And Lazarus was sick unto death.

Lazarus was from the town of Bethany. Now Bethany was about 15 furlongs from Jerusalem. (John 11:18) This would be slightly less than two miles to the north of Jerusalem.

We also learn that Lazarus had two sisters, Mary and Martha. And Mary and Martha apparently loved their brother and they were gravely concerned that he would die.

But there was someone else who loved Lazarus, because Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus and said,

*Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.*

John 11:3

Now I know that Jesus in some way has love for all his creatures. And in a special way, Jesus has love for those whom the Father has given him by election, but Jesus also loved people in a very human way. And Lazarus had a very great distinction. He was the one whom Jesus loved. It seems that Jesus had known Lazarus personally. He had spent time with Lazarus. And he loved him. Oh how blessed was Lazarus, to be known and loved by Jesus during the short time that Jesus was on the earth. And you

wonder, what kind of man was Lazarus, that he would be humanly loved by the One who was perfectly righteous and who hated sin. We don't know much about the character of Lazarus, but we do know that for whatever reason, Jesus loved him in a personal, earthly and very human way.

Now when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, Jesus said,

*This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.*

John 11:4

I want you to notice in this statement the omniscience of Jesus. Jesus was well prepared for this news. He wasn't caught off guard. He wasn't stunned and stricken in heart. In fact, he was well informed as to what was happening. Furthermore, he knew the ultimate outcome of the matter. He knew that Lazarus would yet live. And he so told the messengers that Lazarus' sickness was not unto death.

Now how did Jesus know such things? It is because he has decreed all things. And because he has decreed all things, he knows all things. And he knows them before they happen. And he knows the ultimate purpose behind all things. And he said the ultimate purpose of the sickness of Lazarus was that the Son of God might be glorified.

Now when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he "abode two days still in the place where he was." Now under normal circumstances, a good friend would drop everything and rush to the side of a friend who was dying. But instead, Jesus waited for two days.

You see, God is never caught by surprise. God is never in a hurry. Circumstances never compel God to act, but God dictates the circumstances. And in order to accomplish the will of God, it was necessary for Jesus to wait a little while before he came to Bethany.

Now after two days had passed, Jesus told his disciples,

*Let us go into Judea again.*

John 11:7

And I want you to see first,

### The weak faith of the disciples

You would think that of all the people in the world, the disciples would have the strongest faith. They were personally chosen by Christ himself. They were with Christ every day for three years. They saw all of his miracles. They were taught personally by him. And yet we see throughout the gospels that their faith was not as big as a mustard

seed. At times their faith was almost no faith at all. At their best, their faith was full of doubt. And this is the nature of human faith. It is weak and faltering. It is slow to trust in God. And the same was true of the disciples.

Jesus said, "Let's go to Jerusalem." And the disciples said, "Wait a minute. They are waiting for you there. They have stones in their hands and they are itching to kill you." And so we see the strong confidence of Jesus compared to the weak faith of the disciples. Jesus is not concerned about personal safety at all, but is concerned wholeheartedly in doing the will of the Father. This is true and perfect faith. It is faith in the will of God. It is a determination to do his will at all cost. And Jesus had such confidence in the Father that he would walk into the face of death itself.

Not so the disciples. They preferred to stay out of Jerusalem. Like most of us, they preferred safety to peril. They preferred ease to hardship. They preferred their way to God's way.

#### There is a time appointed to do the will of God

Every human being has a limited amount of time to do the will of God. God has given us one lifetime, one opportunity to serve him. And even Jesus had an appointed time to do the will of God on earth. Jesus put it this way,

*Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if any man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.*

John 11:9, 10

The most obvious truth here is that there are only so many hours in a day. Now back then there were no street lights that would come on at dusk. When the sun went down, it was dark indeed. And so, all work ended at sundown. If you were going to get your work done, you had to work tirelessly during the day.

And in this passage, Jesus equates the time of his own life to the day. And Jesus tirelessly worked during the day of his life to accomplish all of his work. When he was born in Bethlehem, the sun was just rising in the east. And now, as he prepares to go to Jerusalem for the last time, the sun is going down on his life. And it will soon be night for Jesus when the time for earthly work has passed.

Now in these words spoken by Jesus, there is sort of a double meaning. The words applied to his own life and they also applied to the lives of his disciples. Even the disciples had work to do. Even the disciples had a limited time to do the work of God. Because the night cometh when no man can work.

Now while Jesus and the disciples were still waiting and after he instructed them about working while it was day, Jesus made an announcement to them. He told them that Lazarus was dead.

*These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.*

John 11:11-14

There are so many proofs of the deity of Christ in the Scriptures and this is just one of many. No one called Jesus on a cell phone and told him the news. There was no radio and television; no telegraphs. And yet, Jesus knew the moment that Lazarus passed away. And he told the disciples that his friend Lazarus was dead. And so we see again that Jesus was God on earth, knowing things otherwise unknowable.

### The Two Purposes of the Raising of Lazarus

The primary purpose of the raising of Lazarus from the dead is found in John 11:4.

*This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.*

John 11:4

This is ultimately the purpose of all things in life. Life is not designed primarily for the happiness or glory of man, but for the glory of God. Why is there sin in the world? That God might be glorified in the just punishment of it. Why is there suffering in the world? That God might be glorified in some way. God has designed all things for his own glory whether those things be good or evil, whether they be pleasure or suffering. And Lazarus was sick first and foremost that Jesus might be glorified.

But there was another secondary purpose in the sickness of Lazarus and that is that the faith of the disciples might be strengthened.

*And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe.*

John 11:15

Jesus wanted the disciples to see Lazarus come out of the tomb. He wanted the disciples to be amazed and astonished one more time. He wanted the disciples to know for a certainty that he, Jesus of Nazareth, was God himself. And so, Jesus waited until Lazarus was good and dead before he took his disciples to Bethany.

## The commitment of doubting Thomas

*Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.*

John 11:16

You know old doubting Thomas. He is the one who would not believe in the resurrection of Jesus until he saw it for himself. He is one of those, "I will believe it when I see it, Christians." Thomas was rational. He was sensible. He was probably very intelligent. And he was very weak in faith.

You will notice here that Thomas is convinced that if they go to Jerusalem they will all die. Jesus will die and the disciples will die with him. Of course, this was not the will of God just yet for Jesus' hour had not yet come. But Thomas was convinced that they would all die if they went to Jerusalem.

But here is the wonderful thing about Thomas. Though he was a man of little faith, though he was a man of weak faith, nevertheless he was a man of some faith. And though he feared for his life, though he wasn't sure that he trusted Jesus entirely, notice that he was willing to go and die. This is saving faith.

God doesn't demand that we have perfect faith. But he demands that we have some faith, enough to make a commitment.

**Example: Two men got on an airliner to travel to a distant city. One man sat easily in his seat and he was very confident. He read his newspaper as the jet roared down the runway and lifted into the air. But the other man was terrified. Sweat ran down his forehead as he sat trembling in his seat. When the jet lifted off the runway he clutched the side of his seat with white knuckles and he could barely breathe for fear of his life.**

Thomas reminds me of this man. Thomas walked through his Christian life in fear and doubting every turn. He thought he was going to die. His faith was so weak it could barely be detected. But one thing I want you to notice about Thomas. He was willing to get on the plane. Though he feared, he boarded the Jesus Jet. And he was willing to die if necessary to follow Jesus.

This is saving faith. It is not perfect faith. It is not always exemplary faith. But it is saving faith. It is the kind of faith that boards the plane. It is the kind of faith that says, "I may go down, but I am going down with Jesus."

Now when Jesus and the disciples finally got to Bethany, Lazarus had been in the grave for four days. He was buried in a cave and there was a stone covering the opening. And Lazarus was dead.

## The Faith of Martha

Now Martha went out to meet Jesus as he was coming and she met him at some place outside the city. (John 11:20) And I want you to notice the weakness of Martha's faith. She tells Jesus,

*Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*

John 11:21

Even though Martha was a believer, even though she believed that Jesus was the Christ, she came to Jesus almost accusing him of delaying too long.

Isn't that the way we are many times too? When things don't go our way, we lift up our prayers and ask God why! Why Lord? Why did you allow this to happen? If you had just been here Lord, then you could have prevented this. And Martha's faith was every bit as weak as our faith. And she wanted to know why Jesus had not come earlier.

But there is another weakness in the faith of Martha. Apparently she believed that Jesus was fully capable of healing as long as Lazarus was alive, but she at first never contemplated that Jesus could bring him back to life! "If you had just been here, my brother would not have died!"

How often do we also limit God in our thinking? We think that our circumstances are too far gone. We think it is too late. We think that God has delayed too long and all hope is gone.

But hope is never gone when Jesus is our God. Jesus can accomplish the impossible! And many times when we have problems, Jesus delays his coming intentionally until our problems are impossible problems, and then by his sovereign power, he delivers us.

Ah, but Martha's faith was not so weak after all. After she scolded Jesus for not coming soon enough, she corrected herself.

*But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.*

John 11:22

There is the faith that we are looking for. Even though Lazarus is in the grave, Martha says, "even now" there is hope. Let me just say that whatever your circumstances may be this morning, there is hope in Jesus Christ. He is able to undo your misery. He is able to restore your losses. He is able to make you walk where before you were lame. He is able to make you see where before you were blind. He is able to give life where before you were dead in trespasses and sins.

Now Jesus told Martha that her brother would rise again. (John 11:23) And Martha thought he was talking only about the final resurrection at the last day. (John 11:24) But in this case, Jesus was talking about an immediate resurrection. What he meant was that he would bring Lazarus out of the tomb to live again on this earth.

### The Faith of Mary

When Jesus had told Martha this, he told her to go into town and tell Mary to come to him. (John 11:28) So Martha told Mary that Jesus was calling for her. And look what Mary did.

*As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him.*

John 11:29

This is the proper response if you are ever so blessed to have Jesus call for you. It is to your great advantage if you will drop what you are doing and go quickly to him. Don't waste a moment. But go to him. Contrary to popular opinion, Jesus is under no obligation to call on you. He does not owe you a call. You have done nothing to merit a call from Jesus. If he ever calls on you it is the greatest act of grace ever given to a human being. And if he is so merciful ever to call on you, then leave everything behind and go out to meet him. And this is what Mary did. It says that she rose up hastily and went out. (John 11:31)

Now even Mary's faith was not complete, and when she found Jesus she also scolded Jesus for waiting too long.

*Lord if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*

John 11:32

And many of the Jews had followed Mary to where Jesus was and they also were weeping over the loss of Lazarus. It seems by this that Lazarus was a man of some renown in the city, because there was quite a stir among the people.

When good men die, it is a great loss isn't it? There are not that many good and righteous men and when they pass away, there is a great stir in the city. And so there was much weeping over the death of Lazarus.

And we find here that there was one more person who joined in the weeping.

*When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They say unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept.*

John 11:33-35

When it says, “Jesus wept,” it is the shortest verse in the Bible. But it speaks volumes, doesn’t it? This little verse says more about Jesus than we could say in many books. Jesus was a true human being with feelings and emotions. And he had compassion on those who were weeping. And tears came to his eyes and they rolled down his cheeks. And that is the kind of Savior that we have. We have the kind of Savior that cares for all our sorrow. He cares for our suffering. And he shares in our tears. And when they saw Jesus weeping, they said,

*Behold, how he loved him.*

John 11:36

### The Resurrection of Lazarus

When they got to the grave site, Jesus told them to roll away the stone. And after some objection, because the body of Lazarus was surely beginning to decompose, they rolled away the stone.

*And Jesus lift up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.*

John 11:41-43

This is an illustration of the effective call of Jesus. Jesus, standing before a dead, decaying body, issued an order, “Come forth.” And let me say that nothing that is dead will ever come forth, until Jesus issues that effective and powerful command.

Now when Jesus shouted to Lazarus and said, “Come forth,” Lazarus immediately got up and came forth. Isn’t this a mighty illustration of the power of Christ. There is no force in the universe which can oppose his commands.

*And he that was dead came forth . . .*

John 11:44

Now what does all this mean? What does the raising of Lazarus teach us about the power of Christ?

It teaches us first that Christ has the power to bring dead bodies out of the graves and to make them live again. He gave us an example with Lazarus and he will do it again at the last day.

The Scriptures say that Jesus will descend from heaven with a shout and the trumpet will sound and the dead in Christ shall rise first. That is, dead bodies will rise. Decayed bodies will rise. Just as Jesus reversed the decay in the body of Lazarus, he

will reverse the decay in bodies which have lain in the ground for hundreds and thousands of years. And these dead bodies will come out. What a glorious sight that will be on that day, when real, human bodies will come out of graves in cemeteries all over the world. Jesus will shout, "Come forth," and they will come forth.

My, my, what a day that will be! Millions just like Lazarus will come forth. And Jesus will say, "Loose them and let them go."

But the raising of Lazarus also illustrates the power of Christ in the spiritual realm. You see, the Bible describes man's natural spiritual condition as being dead – dead in trespasses and sins. (Ephesians 2:1) And it takes a miracle of grace to bring a dead man to life. Just as there was no hope for Lazarus, lying lifeless in a tomb, there is no hope for lost sinners, except that Jesus would come to the tomb where lies the dead heart, and cry "Come forth."

This is why Jesus told Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again." Jesus was telling Nicodemus that in order for a man to see the kingdom of God Jesus must come to the grave where his heart is buried in spiritual death and cry "Come forth."

There was a woman named Lydia in Acts 16. And it says that she heard Paul preach and the Lord opened her heart so that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul. (Acts 16:14) And this shows that the Lord must stand before a dead heart and issue a command to come forth.

Spiritual life is an absolute gift of God. It is a miracle of the power of Christ. It is every bit as much a miracle as raising Lazarus from a physical grave. If you are a Christian; if you believe in Christ unto salvation; if you love him; if you love the brethren; if you have eyes to see and ears to hear; then Christ himself has stood at your gravesite and issued the command, "Come forth."