

Research: The Raising of Lazarus

John 11:1, 3-7, 11-15, 17, 32-34, 38-39, 41-44

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

“The account of the raising of Lazarus is the climactic sign in the Gospel of John. . . . For this reason it is given a prominent place in the Gospel. It is also extremely significant because it precipitated the decision of Jesus’ enemies to do away with him” (*EBC* 9.115).

“The raising of Lazarus . . . recorded in this Gospel is related with such photographic minuteness of detail, that it is clear that the evangelist [John] was present. Three points about it are specially noteworthy: 1) that it was a physical miracle, which no ingenuity can reduce to a case of faith-healing; 2) that it was definitely worked to produce faith in Christ; 3) that more than any other miracle it was performed under test conditions; -- the object of it was really dead, and hostile witnesses were present” (Dummelow 792-793).

“*Lazarus*. i.e. Eleasar, ‘God is my help,’ a man of good social position, probably a son or near relative of Simon the Leper . . .

“*Bethany*. A village at the mount of Olives, a little less than 2 m. from Jerusalem” (Dummelow 793).

“Lazarus: A friend of Jesus, living at Bethany; brother of Martha and Mary. He was raised from the dead by Jesus, and was present at the supper in their house six days before the Passover, at which his sister Mary anointed Jesus, according to John 12:1-11” (*IDB* 63.103).

“Bethany near Jerusalem is well attested as the place where Jesus resided when visiting Jerusalem (Mark 11:11, 14:3)” (*AYB John i-xii*.422).

“*A certain man was sick*. The resurrection of Lazarus has been recorded only by John. Various reasons have been conjectured why the other evangelists did not mention so signal a miracle. The most probable is, that at the time they wrote Lazarus was still living. The miracle was well known, and yet to have recorded it might have exposed Lazarus to opposition and persecution from the Jews:” (Barnes 318).

3 Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.

“*Therefore his sisters* — Observing his sickness was of a dangerous kind, and therefore being full of concern for him, knowing where Jesus was, thought proper to send him word of it; for they firmly expected that he, who had cured so many strangers, would willingly come and give health to one whom he so tenderly loved.” (Benson Commentary).

4When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

“The event of this sickness will not be death, in the usual sense of the word, a final separation of his soul and body; but a manifestation of the glorious power of God, and a confirmation of the doctrine and mission of his Son.” (Benson Commentary)

“This sickness is not unto death - The word "death" here is equivalent to remaining under death, [Romans 6:23](#). "The wages of sin is death" - permanent or unchanging death, opposed to eternal life. Jesus evidently did not intend to deny that he would die. The words which he immediately adds show that he would expire, and that he would raise him up to show forth the power and glory of God.” (Barnes' Notes).

5Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.

“... here the word, means the love of chosen friendship” (Ellicott's Commentary).

“*Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister, &c.* — That is, he loved them with a peculiar affection, on account of their unfeigned piety toward God, their friendship and affection toward one another, and their faith in him as the Messiah, and had often visited them, and lodged at their house” (Benson Commentary).

6When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.

“He abode two days - Probably Lazarus died soon after the messengers left him. Jesus knew that and did not hasten to Judea, but remained two days longer where he was, that there might not be the possibility of doubt that he was dead, so that when he came there he had been dead four days. This shows, moreover, that he intended to raise him up. If he had not, it could hardly be reconciled with friendship thus to remain, without any reason, away from an afflicted family.

“Where he was - At Bethabara [John 1:28](#); [John 10:40](#), about 30 miles from Bethany. This was about a day's journey, and it renders it probable that Lazarus died soon after the message was sent. One day would be occupied before the message came to him; two days he remained; one day would be occupied by him in going to Bethany; so that Lazarus had been dead four days when he arrived.” (Barnes' Notes)

7Then after that saith he to *his* disciples, Let us go into Judæa again.

“*Let us go into Judea again*] The again refers us back to [John 10:40](#). His using the general term, Judæa, instead of Bethany leads to the disciples’ reply. Judæa was associated with hostility, Bethany with love and friendship” (Cambridge Bible).

11 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.

“Lazarus sleepeth - Is dead. The word "sleep" is applied to death,

“1. Because of the resemblance between them, as sleep is the "kinsman of death." In this sense it is often used by pagan writers.

“2. However, in the Scriptures it is used to intimate that death will not be final: that there will be an awaking out of this sleep, or a resurrection” (Barnes’ Notes).

12 Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.

“*if he sleep*) Often a long sleep is a means of restoration to health. The disciples were supposing that the sleep was sent to Lazarus by Jesus, in order that what He had Himself foretold might come to pass: [John 11:4](#), “This sickness is not unto death, but, etc., that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.”” (Bengel’s Commentary).

13 Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.

“If the sleep, he shall do well - Sleep was regarded by the Jews, in sickness, as a favorable symptom; hence it was said among them, "Sleep in sickness is a sign of recovery, because it shows that the violence of the disease has abated" (Lightfoot). This seems to have been the meaning of the disciples. They intimated that if he had this symptom, there was no need of his going into Judea to restore him” (Barnes’ Notes).

14 Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

“**Lazarus is dead.**—The words of deeper truth, “Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep,” have conveyed no true meaning to their minds. He uses words, therefore, which fall short of that truth, but are the only words which they can understand” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

15 And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.

“I am glad ... - The meaning of this verse may be thus expressed: "If I had been there during his sickness, the entreaties of his sisters and friends would have prevailed with me to restore him to

health. I could not have refused them without appearing to be unkind. Though a restoration to health would have been a miracle, and sufficient to convince you, yet the miracle of raising him after being four days dead will be far more impressive, and on that account I rejoice that an opportunity is thus given so strikingly to confirm your faith."

"To the intent - To furnish you evidence on which you might be established in the belief that I am the Messiah (Barnes' Notes).

17 Then when Jesus came, he found that he had *lain* in the grave four days already.

"*The grave.* 'the tomb.' In Palestine burial took place on the day of death. The possession of a private tomb by the family of Lazarus is an indication of wealth. The poor were buried in cemeteries" (Dummelow 793).

"*Four days.* This shows that there could be no deception in this case. It could not have been a case of suspended animation. All these circumstances are mentioned to show that there was no imposture. Impostors do not mention minute circumstances like these. They deal in generals only. Every part of this narrative bears the marks of truth" (Barnes 321).

"In that sultry climate burial followed immediately on death, and it sometimes happened that a swoon was mistaken for death, and the buried man came to life again. The Jewish belief was that the soul hovered about the sepulcher for three days, fain to re-animate its clay. On the fourth day decomposition set in, and hope was then abandoned. Jesus arrived on the fourth day, and there was no doubt of the reality of Lazarus' death and of the ensuing miracle. It was not a recovery from a trance, but a veritable resurrection" (Hastings 548, cited in Shotwell 295).

21 Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

"Then said Martha ... Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died—As Mary afterwards said the same thing (Joh 11:32), it is plain they had made this very natural remark to each other, perhaps many times during these four sad days, and not without having their confidence in His love at times overclouded. Such trials of faith, however, are not peculiar to them" (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown).

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

"Whatsoever thou wilt ask of God - Whatever is necessary to our consolation that thou wilt ask, thou canst obtain. It is possible that she meant gently to intimate that he could raise him up and restore him again to them" (Barnes' Notes).

23 Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

“Jesus saith unto her, thy brother shall rise again. Christ knew what she meant, and accordingly gave her an answer, and yet in such general terms, that she could not tell whether his meaning was, that he should rise now, or at the general resurrection” (Gill’s Exposition of the Bible).

32 Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

“**Lord, if thou hadst been here.**—The words are precisely the same as those which Martha had uttered ([John 11:21](#)). She adds no more. It may be that she was prevented doing so by the presence of the Jews; but the next verse suggests rather that her emotion was too powerful for words, and that the only possible language was that of a suppliant lying at His feet and weeping” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

33 When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled,

“The original meaning of the word is “to snort, as of horses.” Passing to the moral sense, it expresses disturbance of the mind—vehement agitation. This may express itself in sharp admonition, in words of anger against a person, or in a physical shudder, answering to the intensity of the emotion” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

“He groaned in the spirit - The word rendered "groaned," here, commonly denotes to be angry or indignant, or to reprove severely, denoting violent agitation of mind. Here it also evidently denotes violent agitation - not from anger, but from grief. He saw the sorrow of others, and he was also moved with sympathy and love. The word "groan" usually, with us, denotes an expression of internal sorrow by a special sound. The word here, however, does not mean that utterance was given to the internal emotion, but that it was deep and agitating, though internal” (Barnes’ Notes).

34 And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see.

“**Where have ye laid him?**—The question is directed, of course, to the sisters. This is further shown by the answer, “Lord, come and see.” Both question and answer are expressed in the shortest form. Grief speaks in the fewest possible words” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

35 Jesus wept.

“*Jesus wept*] Or, **shed tears**. The word occurs nowhere else in N.T.; it expresses less loud lamentation than the word used in [John 11:31](#); [John 11:33](#). He sheds tears on His way to their brother’s grave, not because He is ignorant or doubtful of what is coming, but because He cannot but sympathize with the intensity of His friends’ grief” (Cambridge Bible).

36 Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!

“Then said the Jews, behold, how he loved him! Lazarus; for they supposed that these tears were shed purely on his account; and by all circumstances they could not but judge, that they proceeded from an hearty and sincere affection to him; and it was amazing to them, that his love to him should be so strong, when he was no relation, only, as they imagined, a common friend” (Gill’s Exposition).

39 Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days.

“To Jesus the raising of Lazarus was no problem. The chief difficulty was to remove the uncertainty and hesitancy from Martha’s attitude that the glory of God might be revealed to her and all present. When Martha met his condition, which was the last step of faith she could take, Jesus took the next step” (EBC 9.120).

41 Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up *his* eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.

“Before he speaks, Jesus looks upward, a gesture which is a prelude to prayer. Jesus’ first word is ‘Father,’ a translation of the Aramaic – *abba*, which was Jesus’ characteristic but unusual way of addressing God in prayer [it means daddy]” (AYB John i-xii.436).

“He did not ask God to raise Lazarus; he thanked him for having already answered. So great was Jesus’ faith in the Father that he assumed this miracle that was necessary to his mission to be as good as done. Only raising Lazarus would complete the expectations Jesus had aroused in the disciples and in Mary and Martha. He said in his prayer that the transaction was already complete, but he asked for the raising of Lazarus as a convincing sign to the assembled people that he had been sent by the Father” (EBC 9.121).

“*looked upward*. The gesture of looking up to heaven is a natural prelude to prayer, as seen in Luke xviii 13, where the publican does not feel worthy to make this gesture. The Synoptics mention that Jesus looked up to heaven before multiplying the loaves . . .” (AYB John i-xii.427).

“This prayer of Jesus is remarkable, for he thanks God beforehand for the miracle, as if it had already been performed (Dummelow 794).

“Jesus restored Lazarus by the understanding that Lazarus had never died, not by an admission that his body had died and then lived again. Had Jesus believed that Lazarus had lived or died in his body, the Master would have stood on the same plane of belief as those who buried the body, and he could not have resuscitated it” (S&H 75:13-20)

“If Jesus awakened Lazarus from the dream, illusion, of death, this proved that the Christ could

improve on a false sense” (S&H 493:28-30).

42And 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 I know*. ‘as for me, so far as I am concerned. I had no anxiety, no doubt as to myself, that I should always be heard’; but the particular ground of gratitude is the benefit that will result to those who are witnesses. Jesus never prayed in vain” (Barnes 321).

“The life of the Johannine Jesus is a perpetual ‘Your will be done,’ because Jesus does nothing on his own. His very food is to do the will of the Father. It is this prayerful attitude that is summed up in John 11:42: ‘I knew that you always hear me.’ His is a supreme confidence in the Father because he always does what is pleasing to the Father. He knows that whatever he asks is according to the Father’s will and that, therefore he is heard. He demands this same confidence in the prayer of his followers” (AYB John i-xii.436).

43And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

“*Shouted*. The verb *kraugazein* occurs only eight times in the whole Greek Bible, six of which are in John. In chs. xviii-xix it is used four times for the shouts of the crowd to crucify Jesus. Thus, a contrast might be drawn between the crowd’s shout that brings death to Jesus and Jesus’ shout that brings life to Lazarus” (AYB John i-xii.427).

“Having uttered this prayer, Jesus addressed the dead man. . . . The words spoken were brief, direct, and imperative and can be paraphrased, ‘Lazarus! This way out!’ as if Jesus were directing someone lost in a gloomy dungeon. The creative power of God reversed the process of corruption and quickened the corpse into life. The effect was startling. The dead man appeared at the entrance to the tomb, still bound by the grave clothes that had been wound around him. Jesus then ordered that he be released from the wrappings and returned to normal life. It was a supreme demonstration of the power of eternal life that

44And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

“*Came forth*. doubtless with difficulty, his legs being bound together by graveclothes. Hence the command ‘Loose him’ (Dummelow 794).

“*linen strips*. This is a rare Greek word, used for bedcovering in Prov. 7:16; presumably we are to think of a type of bandage. There may be a theological reason for mentioning the burial garments. [Remember, Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes when he was born, perhaps the swaddling clothes of material birth are burst apart with this resurrection when Lazarus walks out

of the tomb]. Jesus' burial garments remained in the tomb, perhaps with the connotation that he would have no more use for them since he was never to die again" (*AYB John i-xii.427*).

"Loose him. Remove the bandages, so that he may walk freely. The effect of this miracle is said to have been, that many believed on him. It may be remarked in regard to it, that there could not be a more striking proof of the Divine mission and power of Jesus. There could be, here, no possibility of deception" (Barnes 322).

[Isa. 58:6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?](#)

"There's another part of the healing that's necessary. 'Jesus turns to those around him,' the environment, holding him in this grave, 'and says, "Loose him, and let him go" '. There is a sense of freedom which is so important. Remember what he says to a woman in another gospel, Luke 13:12, 'Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity' "(Crisler, *Gospels* 4.61).