

Jesus Raises Lazarus

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: Jesus raised His friend Lazarus from the dead, revealing His authority over death and foreshadowing His own resurrection, which would occur soon after.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: John 11

We don't see many graveyards around churches anymore. This may have something to do with zoning restrictions or other legalities, of course, but most churches for the last fifty years or more have not been built with an eye to burying the departed around their grounds as in eras past. Imagine worshipping on Sundays and being able to look out the window to see rows and rows of headstones. How might that change your perspective on what's happening inside?

The truth is people don't like thinking about death too much. We do everything we can to keep it at bay, from cosmetic surgery to health foods and fitness. Of course, modern medicine and technology are doing wonders at lengthening the living age. But death keeps coming. Not a single one of us can avoid it, no matter how much kale you eat.



Since death is so certain, why is it still so jarring to us when it occurs?

Group Time

Point 1: Jesus has authority over the curse of death (John 11:20-27).

 How can believers glorify God and the Son, Jesus, in the way they respond to death?

²⁰ As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Then Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died. ²² Yet even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.”

²³ “Your brother will rise again,” Jesus told her. ²⁴ Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” ²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. ²⁶ Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world.”

Martha knew Jesus had extraordinary power. Perhaps she even grasped His divine identity, but at the least she knew He held the power of healing in His hands. Yet her understanding of His power still fell short, believing He had to be present to heal Lazarus. Furthermore, she could not fathom that Jesus could raise someone who had been dead for so long. But Jesus declared the truth: He is **the resurrection and the life**.

When Jesus refers to Himself as the resurrection and the life, He is speaking of **the resurrection of the physical body**. To be a Christian, you have to believe in Christ’s bodily resurrection from the dead (Rom. 10:9). But we should also understand that the hope of the Christian is not a disembodied experience but receiving a resurrected and glorified body at the second coming of Christ, when He will establish the new heavens and the new earth.

Resurrection: The promise of the resurrection is found in the resurrection of _____ from the dead, and it will take place at the future _____ of Christ. The hope of the future resurrection gives Christians _____ that death has been _____ in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Point 2: Jesus grieves the curse of death (John 11:32-37).

³² As soon as Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and told him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died!”

³³ When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, he was deeply moved in his spirit and troubled. ³⁴ “Where have you put him?” he asked. “Lord,” they told him, “come and see.”

³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷ But some of them said, “Couldn’t he who opened the blind man’s eyes also have kept this man from dying?”

Jesus is invested in our lives. We see an example of this when we read that “Jesus wept.” Jesus saw the grief of His friends and He entered into their suffering with them. These two words also reveal another level to which Jesus entered our suffering. How human was Jesus? The answer is *truly*. He was not and is not disconnected from those He loves but truly like us and therefore able to sympathize with our griefs and weaknesses (Heb. 4:15).

If Jesus didn’t love us, He wouldn’t be moved at all by the reality that we face in death. But the Holy One of God’s outlook on an unholy humanity involves compassion (Matt. 9:36). In fact, the plight of humankind doesn’t just move Jesus to mourn their death, it moved Him to take our plight upon Himself. It was love that brought the Son of God to earth. It was love that brought Him to mourn at the death of Lazarus. And it was love that brought Christ to the cross. He took death head-on, submitting Himself to its terrible darkness—“**See how He loves us!**”



Voices from Church History

“[Mortals] say of some temporal suffering, ‘No future bliss can make up for it,’ not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory.”¹

—C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)



What are some differences between Christians and the world in how they view death?

Point 3: Jesus undoes the curse of death (John 11:41-44).

⁴¹ So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you heard me. ⁴² I know that you always hear me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, so that they may believe you sent me.” ⁴³ After he said this, he shouted with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unwrap him and let him go.”

Lazarus did not pep-talk himself out of that tomb. That would be absurd. He could do nothing to save himself—he was dead! He needed a resurrecting word from the Lord. This very real, historical, life-giving miracle, therefore, is a good metaphor for what happens to each of us when we pass from death to life, from darkness to light. We cannot save ourselves from the curse of death. We need Christ’s intervention. Praise God, then, that He sent Jesus, our resurrected Savior, who stands before the tombs of dead hearts and calls out in His powerful grace, “Come forth!”



What are some ways people try to “save themselves” apart from faith in Jesus Christ?

Jesus prayed that this miracle would solidify in people’s hearts the clear connection between Him and the Father. When Lazarus stepped out from the tomb, who could doubt it? With a word, the shackles of the chains of death fell off Lazarus, just as he was unwrapped from his burial clothes and set free to live again. This provides yet another powerful metaphor: For those who have heard the Word of life and been born again in the Spirit, the chains of sin and death have fallen away—we are truly free (John 8:36).



What will it look like to live free in Christ, free from the chains of sin and death?

Daily Study

Day 1: Read John 11:1-27

Have you ever wondered why Jesus would wait? His disciples raised the issue that some people wanted Jesus dead. We see this as recently as John 10, where people took up stones to kill Him, but Jesus wasn't bothered by that. No, He waited for another reason. It's not entirely clear from the passage, but it seems as though Jesus was waiting so Lazarus would die: "Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was sick, he stayed two more days in the place where he was" (11:5-6).

What kind of sense does this make? Well, it makes sense in the kind of world where Christ is sovereign over our lives and stewards all things toward our faith in Him. In John 9, Jesus' disciples asked Him about a man born blind. Jesus responded that the man's blindness was not due to anyone's sin but for an opportunity to glorify God.

Now, we know that all illnesses and afflictions—and even death itself—are in the world because of sin. But there isn't a neat mathematical equation between a particular sin and a particular affliction. In other words, someone's getting cancer may not be a direct consequence of a specific sin in their lives but simply the consequence of living in a fallen world. For the Christian especially, we see that the Lord ordains difficulty in our lives to draw us closer to Him so we might rely more fully on His strength in our weakness.

Jesus waited for Lazarus to die because He knew a miraculous raising in this instance would bring more glory to Himself than a miraculous healing. And you can reasonably—and biblically—assume that Jesus allows difficult things to come into your life because He will get more glory, and you will become more like Him, than if those difficulties didn't come.



As painful as many of the difficulties we face in life often are, why do they lead us closer to Jesus than do times of ease and comfort?



Voices from Church History

"Jesus could have prevented Lazarus' sickness or even healed it from where he was; but he chose not to. He saw in this sickness an opportunity to glorify the Father. It is not important that we Christians are comfortable, but it is important that we glorify God in all that we do."³

—Warren Wiersbe (1929–2019)

Day 2: Read John 11:28-37

“Jesus wept,” John tells us in verse 35 of this passage. While this is the shortest verse in the Bible, these two words contain depths of wisdom and insight.

To begin with, we see the humanity of Jesus. He has tear ducts that cry. He has a physical body that can be racked by the brokenness of humanity. This certainly adds a profound resonance to our understanding of the incarnation. The Son of God wasn't just willing to put on flesh; He was willing to feel the weight of the human experience. We see the full humanity of Jesus in John 11:35. Jesus, as the ideal image-bearer, presents to us the right human response to death: He wept.

Yet Jesus wasn't just grieving the passing of His friend, Lazarus, in this moment. He was also grieving the reality of death as a whole. This is not the world as He made it to be. Death is a grievous aberration in the creation He called “good.”

 How does Jesus' weeping over Lazarus' death move you to consider the infinite condescension involved in God the Son's becoming incarnate?

Day 3: Read John 11:38-44

The Lord specializes in “hopeless” causes.

When Jesus got to Lazarus' grave, there was already a stench. The Lord, it seemed, was four days late. Lazarus was dead. He was deader than dead. In the hands of anyone else, this case would have been hopeless, impossible. But our God is the God of the “impossible.” He holds the keys to life and death. He can make life out of nothing! Nothing is too difficult for Him (Jer. 32:17).

He has this power over your life too. No matter what you are facing right now, the Lord is sovereign over it. No, He may not directly deliver you from your present trouble, but He will secure you to Himself in the midst of it, and He will never let you go. As the saying goes, “Sometimes He calms the storm; sometimes He calms the sailor.”

 What is the most significant lesson the Lord has taught you in the midst of suffering or other difficulties?

Day 4: Read John 11:45-57

Once again we see how polarizing the teaching and ministry of Jesus Christ was in His own day. For one thing, notice how the most offended at Christ's raising of Lazarus happened to be the religious elite. Why do you think that was? Shouldn't they be celebrating that the Messiah had come? It turns out that their passion was not exactly channeled for messianic expectation—at least, not for *this kind* of Messiah.

From a gospel perspective, Jesus was turning things right-side up by subverting the expectations and standards of the religious elite of His day. Jesus does the same thing today with our self-righteousness. We, as did the Jewish religious leaders of this era, use religion to make ourselves look good, to exalt ourselves in the eyes of others, and to wield a kind of leverage over others who are not as theologically rigorous or spiritually adept as we are. Thankfully, for our sake, Jesus comes along with His radical grace for sinners and tears down the whole scaffolding of our pride.



Why is self-righteousness such an affront to God?

Day 5: Read John 12:9-11

Assuming Lazarus had passed into paradise, into the fullness of God's presence, when he died, he was enjoying the comforts of heaven in the presence of glory. And then Jesus "yanked" him right back out of there. But Lazarus was resurrected (or perhaps resuscitated) back into his mortal body. He was going to have to die again! His resurrection was not like Jesus' later resurrection, or like ours will be at the second coming of Christ. Then, we will put on immortality, just as Christ did at His rising.

In John 12:9-11 we see that Jesus' enemies wanted to make sure Lazarus died again sooner rather than later. You and I may not face the same kind of threat that Lazarus did (nor even the same kind of threat that our brothers and sisters in the persecuted church around the world do). But to align with Christ—to receive His death and His life as our own—is to make yourself a target of those who hate God. Christ promised this kind of trouble to His followers, but He also promised the victory over the trouble (John 16:33). We cannot have the latter without the former.



Have you ever suffered for being a follower of Jesus? If so, how did you find encouragement in the midst of your trouble?

UNIT 25

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3. David Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1989), 101.

SESSION 3

1. Amanda Bible Williams, in *She Reads Truth*, by Raechel Myers and Amanda Bible Williams (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2016), 6–7.
2. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 107.
3. Quoted in “Only one life, ‘twil soon be past...” by Thomas and Elizabeth West, *The West London Life*, December 31, 2018, www.thewestlondonlife.com/single-post/2018/12/31/Only-one-life-twil-soon-be-past.
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SESSION 4

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2. Athanasius, “Homily on the Resurrection of Lazarus,” quoted in *John 11–21*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, vol. IVb in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 13.
3. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, vol. 1 (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2001), 334.

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SESSION 2

1. Andrew Wilson, *Unbreakable: What the Son of God Said About the Word of God* (IOPublishing, 2014) [eBook].
2. Kim Huat Tan, *Mark*, in *New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015) [Wordsearch].
3. Augustine, *Tractate on John* 40.9.13, quoted in *Mark*, eds. Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, vol. II in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].

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3. Anne Askew, *The Latter Examination of Anne Askew (1547)*, ed. John Bale; quoted in *Luke*, ed. Beth Kreitzer, vol. 3 in *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015) [Wordsearch].
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1. See “Diamonds Unearthed,” by Cate Lineberry, *Smithsonian Magazine* (December 2006), www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/diamonds-uneearthed-141629226.
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SESSION 5

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SESSION 3

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