

## I AM THE RESURRECTION

John 11:32-46

In the first half of his gospel account John recorded seven miracles Jesus did that attested to the fact that Jesus was not just an ordinary preacher or teacher. An eighth miracle happened after the resurrection and was the incident when Christ found the disciples fishing and advised them to let down their nets on the right side of the boat. Most Christians are familiar with these accounts and have heard sermons related to these. It may just be coincidence, but one might make a case that John chose this particular order in his presentation to have an increasing impact in the significance of these miracles as the ministry of Jesus unfolded during the three and a half years between His baptism and the crucifixion.

1. Water into Wine: John 2
2. Nobleman's Son Healed: John 4
3. Healed Invalid Man at the Pool: John 5
4. Fed Five Thousand: John 6
5. Walked on the Water: John 6
6. Blind Man Healed: John 9
7. Raised Lazarus: John 11

This seventh miracle was so significant (or high profile) that it was what ultimately convinced the Jewish leaders that Jesus needed to be eliminated. Lazarus was not the first person whom Jesus had restored to life, but the event was certainly the most dramatic and was convincing proof that something really significant had happened. We find the background and setting for this final miracle before Jesus was arrested and crucified in the first part of John 11.

Jesus and His disciples were about twenty miles outside of Jerusalem because of the threat of arrest by the Jewish leaders. The family of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus who lived in Bethany had opened their home to Jesus in the past and they were aware of the miracles and familiar with the teachings of Jesus. It is not surprising that when Lazarus became seriously ill that they sent a messenger to ask Jesus to come to Bethany so that Lazarus would be healed. It turned out that Lazarus expired about the time the messenger left Bethany. By the time he found Jesus and the disciples it was too late for a "mere healing." Although Lazarus had died, the final outcome was not going to end in death.

If Lazarus had just (merely) been healed, the impact on the people and the Jewish leaders would have been marginal or close to no effect at all. However, we see in the background passage that Jesus waited two days before going to Bethany. This was a deliberate delay so that the people and their leaders would be confronted with a situation which they could not ignore.

When Jesus first arrived He found Martha and after a brief conversation regarding Jesus' assurance that Lazarus would "rise again," she went to their home to get her sister Mary.

### Wept – 11:32-37

<sup>32</sup> Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." <sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. <sup>34</sup> And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." <sup>35</sup> Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?" John 11:32-37 (ESV)

Mary's first words were essentially the same as those spoken by Martha. I would imagine that they had said those same words many, many times to each other over the past four days since Lazarus had died. It was then quite natural that this would be the first thing they would say as soon as they saw Him. It is likely that they had also talked about what would

happen in the “last day” when there would be a resurrection of the dead. In fact, Martha had mentioned that to Jesus when He told her that her brother would rise again. That led to the “I AM” proclamation when Jesus said “I AM the Resurrection.” It is very likely that she did not anticipate what was going to happen in the next hour.

The fact that Jesus was there was very important to Mary as seen by the fact that she immediately got up to go see Him. Being able to say the “right thing” at such a time is a challenge for both the family members and for those who are there to “pay their respects” as we typically say.

In this passage leading up to these verses we see several levels of the way we respond to one another in times of loss and grief. Most of us realize that just “showing up” or “putting in an appearance” has benefit for those who are experiencing the deep hurt of the loss of a loved one. This is why we go to an event that we commonly call “receiving friends” that occurs before a funeral or memorial service. This is why we show up at the grave side service. It does little good to go to such events if you do not make your presence known to the surviving family members whom you know. Mary needed to know that Jesus was there.

In the Jewish community of that day the presence of many mourners coming to “comfort” the family was an important tradition. We see a continuation of this tradition in most of the Middle Eastern countries even today. There are many mourners and they are loud in their expressions of grief. To some extent much of this display is contrived in that they think that the loudness of their wailing shows the depth of their grief. In our culture, we have “evolved” into a quieter expression of our grief at the loss of someone close to us. If there is weeping, then it is usually subdued and we almost seem apologetic for showing our emotions.

The Jewish friends who were following Mary did not have the inhibitions that we have today. They were openly weeping. How do such emotional displays affect us when we see it? It depends on whether we believe that it is sincere or contrived. In recent months, there have been some well publicized tragedies involving the loss of young children in senseless killings. The television cameras are there and the parents are interviewed and the sense of deep loss is evident in their voice and the choking back of tears and we find ourselves having tears in our eyes as we empathize with them in their grief. It is not surprising to see that Jesus was touched by the grieving of His friends over the death of Lazarus. Many commentators have tried to figure out “why Jesus wept” and have suggested many different reasons that won’t be discussed here. Most of us are satisfied to say that this was a tender expression of His humanity.

Often in our grief, especially over the loss of a loved one, the tears will subside and we gain composure. However, when someone else comes to provide comfort, their kindness and compassion will trigger another wave of release of our emotions. Because of our empathy for those we care about, their grief resonates in us and we feel the same emotions they do though it is not felt as deeply. Jesus experienced the same passions as all humanity and He too was touched deep down inside.

Jesus was on the verge of demonstrating His power over death and yet He asked where Lazarus’ body was. He did not dilute the focus of the message He was going to leave with the people that day. He could have demonstrated His omniscience by telling them where the body was but people could have argued that He knew where the family grave site was because He had been told in previous visits with the family. Such a demonstration would have added little to His purpose of providing evidential proof of His divinity.

Believe – 11:38-40

<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, “Take

away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.”<sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” John 11:38–40 (ESV)

It appears that we see a transition in the demeanor of Jesus between verse 38 and verse 39. Initially, Jesus was “troubled and deeply moved in His Spirit.” What we see here is the human emotion that all of us experience and shows us that Jesus was “fully human.” However, when faced with the critical situation of initiating a miraculous resurrection, He was fully in control of the situation as He issued instructions to the people and gave assurance to Martha that something glorious was about to happen. Here we see that Jesus was not only fully human, He was also fully divine.

Jesus knew what He was going to do even before Lazarus died. He then proceeded to the work at hand. Martha had faith, but she also had a practical side to her. Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days and, consequently, there would be no doubt that he was really dead.

John was careful to include significant time-line details that would reinforce the point that Lazarus had actually died and that a significant miracle was about to occur. Several decades ago we did not have medical technology that could provide proof-positive evidence that a person was dead. Most of us can remember times when a family member passed away that people would sit up all night with the body. The term used for this practice was a “wake.” This practice was a carry over from times before embalming became the general procedure in preparing a body for burial. It was not unheard of that a person who was thought to be dead would revive from what was a deep coma rather than death. That possibility led to the practice of holding a “wake” for a deceased family member – just in case they revived.

In the time of Lazarus, the general practice was that someone would be near the tomb of a deceased person for up to three days since there was no evidence that anyone ever revived after three days. With Lazarus having been buried (in the tomb) for four days, this “proved” that he was dead.

In His words to Martha, Jesus once again restated His mission which was to bring glory to the Father by all that He did.

#### Returned – 11:41-46

<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” <sup>43</sup> When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” <sup>44</sup> The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” <sup>45</sup> Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, <sup>46</sup> but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. John 11:41–46 (ESV)

Jesus prayed and, in His prayer, told the reason why He was doing this: so that people could see the glory of God. He prayed so that the people would know that He was relying on His power of being God Incarnate. Then Jesus called Lazarus from the realm of the dead. Lazarus walked out of the tomb bound with the clothes of death. Jesus commanded them to “loose him, and let him go.” That is God’s desire for each of us who have been born again of the Spirit of God. Once He has given us new life in Christ, then He does not want us bound with the graveclothes of the old life. We are to cast those off and put on the garment of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness. We are to replace the darkness with the light and walk in the power and glory of the resurrection.

How can we use the truths of what happened in this account of the death and resurrection of Lazarus in applications to our own situations as we encounter the reality of death? What are

the “life lessons” that we should keep in mind as such losses impact us?

One of the most obvious lessons is that death happens to everyone (unless we are alive at the time of the rapture) so we need to do reasonable preparations. We could enumerate a long list of “things” that should be addressed before death happens. The family of Lazarus already had a family burial plot. Today we need to think about wills, living wills, funeral arrangements, internment, paying all the expenses, etc.

An even more important part of the preparation for the inevitability of death is making arrangements for the part of us that does not die when the body can no longer sustain life. In other words, where will we spend eternity? This is a major focus of most “religions.”

We can learn several lessons related to how we view death from the account of Lazarus’ death. Is it possible that a person’s death can be used to bring glory to God? Is it possible that what happens following a person’s death can have an even greater impact for good than was accomplished during his life? Even Jesus told His disciples that it was better that He should “go away” and that they would do even greater works than He did.

With all the emphasis on the concern regarding resurrection of the body and the hope centered around that eventuality, we might want to view death in terms of the euphemistic description of “sleep” that Jesus used about Lazarus’ situation. A good night’s sleep will help our bodies to recover or experience partial rejuvenation, and we wake up refreshed and ready for a new day. Death and resurrection are the ultimate “sleep and rejuvenation.” That “new day” will really be new and beyond our wildest dreams of what is good.

The Jews who were observing the events were mixed in their reaction to Jesus. Most of us have seen two people who will witness the same series of events and one will be drawn to God and the other will take a negative approach and do something detrimental to the work of God. Arrogance and pride prevent people from being open to the truth of what God is doing. Some only saw the obvious and noted that He loved Lazarus and was mourning over the loss. However, others were openly critical in their skepticism. Some may have thought the previous miracles were staged and that Jesus did not show up before Lazarus died because He would have been embarrassed when Lazarus died. It is certainly encouraging to read that “many believed in Jesus.” However, some were just there to be able to report back to the Jewish leaders. We know that their conclusion was that Jesus must die.

For the born-again child of God, death can be viewed from an entirely different perspective from the way it is viewed by those whose only hope is hanging onto physical life. Truly death has lost its sting and the fear of death is not something that controls our lives.