

## The Resurrection of Lazarus: John 11. 1-45.

### THE BACKGROUND

Having been at Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication,<sup>1</sup> Jesus crossed the Jordan into the region of Perea in the east. It is there that He received a message which, in effect, summoned Him back to Judea – to Bethany, a small town about two miles east of Jerusalem.

The account of the raising of Lazarus stands in marked contrast to the statement made by the crowd at the close of chapter 10; namely, that John the Baptist performed no miraculous sign.<sup>2</sup> For this wasn't only the seventh<sup>3</sup> and last of Jesus' signs which John recorded; I think we can safely say that it was also the greatest of His signs.<sup>4</sup>

And it is fitting that this should be the Lord's greatest and last sign because it established His authority over man's greatest<sup>5</sup> and last enemy, death. I say 'last enemy', because that is how the apostle Paul describes death'.<sup>6</sup>

It is also fitting that the last 'sign'<sup>7</sup> which our Lord performed before His death should be a sign concerned with resurrection. In all likelihood, the death and resurrection of Lazarus took place some two or three months before the Lord's own death and resurrection.<sup>8</sup>

This particular sign had a clearly-stated purpose; namely, to bring glory to God and, as had been the effect of the first sign,<sup>9</sup> to glorify the Lord Jesus.<sup>10</sup> But this miraculous sign not only had a clearly-stated purpose; it also had a particularly violent outcome. For its immediate effect was to stir up the supreme Jewish council into passing a resolution to have Jesus put to death.<sup>11</sup>

And so, the raising of Lazarus not only caused many Jews to believe in Jesus<sup>12</sup> but, humanly speaking, it also played a major part in triggering our Lord's suffering and death. Ironically, therefore, it was in giving life to one who was dead that (in one sense at least) Jesus signed His own death warrant.<sup>13</sup>

The opening verse of John 11 provides us with the first mention of Lazarus in any of the Gospels. But Lazarus's two sisters have earlier featured in the ministry of the Lord Jesus.<sup>14</sup> It is possibly for this reason that John introduces Lazarus as the brother of Mary and Martha.<sup>15</sup>

Although John doesn't record Mary's anointing of Jesus until the beginning of the next chapter,<sup>16</sup> he is able to identify Mary as the woman who performed that anointing because he is confident that his readers would be familiar with the incident. And this because, following His anointing by Mary, Jesus had specifically required that, 'wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her'.<sup>17</sup> And there is no reason for us to doubt that Mary's devotion had been made known widely.

Although Bethany was very close to Jerusalem,<sup>18</sup> it was a considerable distance from the place where Jesus was at the time; namely, 'beyond Jordan'.<sup>19</sup> The river Jordan was seventeen miles away from Bethany at its nearest point, and for Jesus to get to Bethany would have involved Him in an ascent of about 4,000 feet. It was, then, no short or easy walk and we have no way of knowing how long it would take Jesus to make the journey.

### THE MESSAGE FROM BETHANY

Clearly our Lord had a special relationship with Lazarus and his two sisters, and the women are able, therefore, to appeal to Jesus' 'love' ('tender affection'- 'φιλέω') for Lazarus,<sup>20</sup> His 'friend' ('φίλος'),<sup>21</sup> when, without actually saying it,<sup>22</sup> they urge Him to come.

Clearly, too, the sisters entertain no doubts about either the Lord's ability or readiness to heal their brother, as becomes evident in their words (spoken separately) to Him later: 'Lord, *if you had been here, my brother would not have died*'.<sup>23</sup>

But the sisters must also have known how dangerous it would be for Jesus to venture back into their region. Given that Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,<sup>24</sup> the sisters are inviting the Lord to return, not only to Judea in general but also to the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem itself – which was the very seat and centre of Jewish opposition to Him and where, some short time before, the Jews had sought to stone Him.<sup>25</sup>

Sometime later, the Lord will tell His disciples that the greatest expression of a man's love is his willingness to lay down his life for his 'friends',<sup>26</sup> and the sisters clearly believe that the Saviour was willing to do just that.

## THE INITIAL RESPONSE OF JESUS

Although Jesus knew full well that Lazarus's sickness would prove terminal, He asserts that death will not be the final outcome of Lazarus's sickness ... that his illness will not *end* in death.<sup>27</sup>

Before recording the Lord's deliberate two-day delay in crossing the Jordan, John first puts the record straight and dispels any doubt about Jesus' deep and real love for the whole family; 'Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus'.<sup>28</sup>

We know that Lazarus died before Jesus even set out for Bethany: 'Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus *has died*... let us go to him".<sup>29</sup>

At this point, it is important to note:

(i) that there is only a **two**-day delay before Jesus left ('When therefore He heard that he was sick, He stayed two days more in the place where He was'<sup>30</sup>) but

(ii) that, when Jesus later arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had been dead and buried for **four** days ('he had already been in the tomb four days ... he has been dead four days'<sup>31</sup>).

John wants us to grasp the simple point that (however long it took Jesus to travel to Bethany), even if He had left immediately He had been informed of Lazarus's illness, He would have arrived two days too late to prevent Lazarus from dying!<sup>32</sup>

Let me say that again: ***even if Jesus had left immediately He had been informed of Lazarus's illness, He would have arrived two days too late to prevent him from dying!***

The distraught sisters must have realised that, even if Jesus had left immediately He received their message, He could not have reached Bethany before their brother's death.

If, therefore, Martha and Mary were voicing recrimination with their words, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died', they must have been directing that recrimination, not at the Lord, but at themselves for not notifying Him earlier! They were certainly not voicing any criticism or rebuke of Jesus, as if they were saying, 'Why ever did you dawdle for those two days!' And, personally, I read their words simply as a general expression of regret and sadness.

The reason for our Lord's delay certainly was not that of apathy or indifference. But rather, by holding back at the other side of Jordan for two days, He ensured that, when He arrived at Bethany, Lazarus would have been already dead for four days.<sup>33</sup>

Apart from anything else, this means, of course, that the raising of Lazarus proved to be a far greater miracle than either (i) the earlier resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain,<sup>34</sup> or (ii) the earlier resurrection of the daughter of Jairus,<sup>35</sup> both youngsters having been raised very soon after they died.<sup>36</sup> As we discover later, our Lord specifically links the unprecedented resurrection of one who had been dead for four days with the display of 'the glory of God'.<sup>37</sup>

## NOW TO BETHANY

Given that the Jews of Jerusalem had recently tried to stone Him,<sup>38</sup> Jesus' declared intention of returning to Judea<sup>39</sup> strikes His disciples as being far too risky.<sup>40</sup>

But, in response, our Lord makes a relatively simple point. In the natural realm, one is able to walk without stumbling while there is light but there is light for only a set period of time. And the same, Jesus teaches His disciples, holds true in the spiritual realm. God had set the bounds of His life-span, and, walking in the path of God's will (as He always did), He is immortal until His work is finished.<sup>41</sup>

Jesus is assuring His well-meaning disciples that, notwithstanding their concern for His safety and regardless of any precautionary measures which they wish Him to take, they are in no

position to lengthen His life ... any more than the Jewish leaders were in a position to shorten it.

### **Lazarus: 'dead on time'**

Jesus then informs them openly that the reason He needs to go to Bethany is because 'Lazarus, *our* friend' (including the disciples in the circle of friendship), has 'fallen asleep' and needs to be woken up.<sup>42</sup>

Interestingly, the disciples express no surprise when the Lord speaks of Lazarus as being asleep; they simply take it for granted that, somehow, He just knows! After all, there was never a dull moment with Jesus! And Jesus' words about Lazarus being asleep are a source of great relief to the disciples. 'Lord', they reply in effect, 'sleep is one of the main symptoms of recovery'. Phew, the perilous journey into Judea isn't necessary after all.

But Jesus isn't referring to literal sleep. As in the earlier case of the daughter of Jairus,<sup>43</sup> He is using a common (and lovely) metaphor for death.

Faced with the disciples' misunderstanding,<sup>44</sup> Jesus 'told them plainly'<sup>45</sup> that Lazarus had died.

I suspect that the Lord's statement about Lazarus having 'died' rather confused Thomas and the others. Had they not earlier heard Jesus say that Lazarus's sickness *wouldn't* end in death: 'this sickness is not unto death'?<sup>46</sup> Yet here He is, now telling them that Lazarus is, in fact, dead!

And then, no doubt to their surprise, He adds that He was glad (that He 'rejoiced', literally) for their sakes that He had not been in Bethany at the time ... with the clear implication (voiced later by the two sisters<sup>47</sup>) that there was no way that Lazarus would have died if He had been there at the time to heal him.

But then the Lord knows that the raising of Lazarus from the dead will lead to greater faith on the part of the disciples than if they had simply witnessed His preventing Lazarus from dying. He, therefore, repeats His proposal, 'let us go',<sup>48</sup> that His disciples might witness the forthcoming miraculous sign and thereby come to believe in Him in a deeper sense than they already did; 'that you may believe'.<sup>49</sup>

Pessimistically, Thomas foresees the outcome of the Lord's return to Judea,<sup>50</sup> not in terms of *Lazarus being raised from the dead* but in terms of *Jesus' ending up as dead as Lazarus!*

In contrast, therefore, with Jesus' words to His disciples about their accompanying Him to Judea *'that you may believe'*, Thomas expresses it to them, *'that we may die with Him'*.

Beyond question, the *faith* of Thomas is *weak* and he, therefore, sees himself and the others as dying 'with Him'. But we must recognise that his *love* for Jesus is correspondingly *strong* and that he is therefore willing to do just that – to die 'with Him'. We can only conclude that the Lord Jesus is more to Thomas than life itself! I, for one, am in no position to censure him for his lack of faith!

## **THE SISTERS**

When, separately, Martha and Mary first meet Jesus, they utter exactly the same sorrowful words, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died'.<sup>51</sup> As I suggested earlier, the sisters must have realised by then that their message would have reached the Lord too late for Him to get to them in time. I can only assume that their brother had taken a turn for the worse and died faster than they had feared.

In all likelihood, their words echo something they had said to each other many times over the four days following the death of their brother: 'If Jesus had been here, our brother wouldn't have died'.

It is about 85 miles from Bethany (near Jerusalem) to Capernaum (in Galilee). It is by no means impossible, therefore, that neither Martha nor Mary had heard of the earlier occasions when Jesus had performed healing miracles *at a distance* when He was in Galilee (whether in the case of the servant of the centurion<sup>52</sup> or, more so, in the case of the son of the nobleman<sup>53</sup>). They have, therefore, no reason to question that the Lord's physical presence was necessary to effect a life-giving cure.

## **Martha and the claim of Jesus**

From Martha's later misunderstanding that Jesus was speaking of the resurrection at the last day,<sup>54</sup> together with her horrified reaction to His command to remove the stone from the entrance to the tomb,<sup>55</sup> it is clear that the raising of her brother at that time was the last thing Martha expected.

I, therefore, understand her words, 'even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you'<sup>56</sup> as simply reaffirming her continued confidence in the Lord Jesus. Evidently, although she is unable to understand the Saviour's earlier words about Lazarus's sickness not ending in death, the loss of her brother has not shattered her faith in Jesus.

Martha interprets Jesus' words, 'Your brother shall rise again', as no more than the conventional words of comfort and consolation offered by the Jews in cases of bereavement. So, 'Yes', she responds, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day',<sup>57</sup> asserting her faith in a general resurrection of the just<sup>58</sup> in the end times.

But Martha is soon to learn that Jesus is in fact saying something far more profound than that. She is to discover that He is speaking, *not* as *the comforter of the sad and bereaved* (though He had indeed been sent to 'bind up the broken hearted')<sup>59</sup> *but* as *the raiser of the dead* – and that, not on some far-off occasion, but there and then.

The Lord's claim, 'I am the resurrection and the life ... shall never die'<sup>60</sup> (the fifth of the seven 'I am' statements recorded of Jesus in John's gospel<sup>61</sup>), is simply mind-bending! Because, in these words, Jesus asserts that the life which is received through believing in Him can be neither (i) interrupted by physical death, nor (ii) terminated in eternal death!<sup>62</sup>

(i) He Himself, He says, is '***the resurrection***' and all who believe in Him (even if, *like Lazarus*, they should die physically) will continue to live spiritually, to be raised by Him one day and so to live for ever. For them, physical death is not the end, for it utterly fails to extinguish the life which they enjoy in Him. Theirs is a life which death cannot destroy.

(ii) And He is, Jesus adds, also '***the life***' and all who are now alive and believe in Him, *like Martha*, will never die. They will 'never' ('by no means for ever', literally<sup>63</sup>) experience spiritual and eternal death. In His own words in the Book of Revelation, they shall 'not be hurt by the second death'.<sup>64</sup>

The Lord Jesus doesn't promise His people that they will be kept outside the reach and range of the *first* death. What He does promise His people is that they will be kept forever outside the reach and range of the *second* death.

Not that, in any case, the first death has any real power to 'hurt' or injure His people,<sup>65</sup> because, for the believer, physical death is simply the Lord's appointed escort to usher him or her into His presence and to glory everlasting.<sup>66</sup>

Some time ago, I read of the martyrdom of John Hooper, the sixteenth century Bishop of Gloucester and Worcester, in England. Bishop Hooper was burnt alive in February 1555 before an estimated crowd of 7,000.

'Sir Anthony Kingston, at one time Dr Hooper's good friend, was appointed by the queen's letters<sup>67</sup> to attend at his execution ... With tender entreaties he exhorted him to live. "True it is", said the bishop, "that death is bitter, and life is sweet; but ... [speaking of the difference between the second death and eternal life] consider that *the death to come is more bitter, and the life to come is more sweet*".'<sup>68</sup>

For the Lord Jesus to tell Martha, 'I am the resurrection and the life' was to make a staggering double-claim. But the forthcoming resurrection of Lazarus was to provide firm and tangible evidence to back up the truth of His claim.

## **Mary and the tears of Jesus**

It is at this point that Martha, at Jesus' request, calls her sister Mary, who, on arrival, immediately falls at Jesus' feet.<sup>69</sup>

Mary's weeping<sup>70</sup> and wailing (the meaning of the word used<sup>71</sup>), together with that of the family friends who had come from Jerusalem to console Mary and Martha during the period of

mourning, provoke a strong emotional reaction on the part of Jesus; 'He groaned ('was deeply moved') in the spirit, and was troubled'.<sup>72</sup>

'Where have you laid him?' Jesus asks.<sup>73</sup> Quite likely, those around think that He wants to go to the burial site simply to mourn and weep and wail, in the same way that the Jews had earlier thought Mary was going there to do just that.<sup>74</sup> But how wrong they were!

As noted in the shortest verse in the English Bible,<sup>75</sup> Jesus 'wept'.<sup>76</sup> But He doesn't weep and wail as Mary and the Jews. Rather (as the word means<sup>77</sup>), He 'shed tears' and His quiet tears stand in contrast to their loud wailing and lamentation. Wonderful, sympathetic Saviour! Knowing full well that He stands poised at that very moment to raise Lazarus from the dead, still He weeps!

## **THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS**

### **The tomb of Lazarus**

And so, Jesus 'came to the tomb'.<sup>78</sup>

'Take away the stone', He commands.<sup>79</sup> Our Lord was never one to waste His power; *only He can raise the dead but men can move the stone*. In the same way, as John had noted earlier in the Gospel:

- (i) only Jesus could turn water into wine but the servants could draw the water and bear it to the governor of the wedding feast<sup>80</sup> and
- (ii) only Jesus could multiply five barley loaves and two fish to feed a multitude in excess of 5,000 people but the disciples could make the multitude sit down, distribute the food portions and gather up the left-over fragments.<sup>81</sup>

Initially, Martha balks at having the tomb opened, but her objection about the stench ('Lord, by now he stinks'<sup>82</sup>) only serves to highlight the magnitude of the miracle/sign which follows. For this day, Jesus is seen to raise someone whose body is known to have begun to decompose.<sup>83</sup>

### **Heaven hears the voice of Jesus**

I guess that, at the moment the stone is removed from the entrance to the burial chamber, the eyes of all around are riveted on Jesus ... to see what He will do. But *His* eyes are 'lifted' towards heaven,<sup>84</sup> a gesture recognising God's heavenly majesty and transcendence.<sup>85</sup>

And Jesus couples His *look of reverence* with *His word of intimacy*, 'Father', as He expresses audibly His thanks that the Father had heard Him. We know that our Lord lived constantly in an atmosphere of unbroken communion with His Father and, at this time, He is simply letting others overhear His prayer that they might understand His total dependence on the Father for all that He did and said.<sup>86</sup>

### **Lazarus hears the voice of Jesus**

Listen now to the 'loud voice' of Death's<sup>87</sup> Conqueror: '**Lazarus, come out!**'<sup>88</sup>

You and I know that the Saviour could have responded immediately to the plea of Lazarus's sisters at the beginning of the chapter<sup>89</sup> ... that He could have spoken a word then and healed their brother across the miles, just as He had once done for the royal official and his son in Galilee.<sup>90</sup>

But, at this moment, Jesus' powerful word reached far, far further ... all the way from *the world of the living* to *the world of the dead*. And 'he who had died'<sup>91</sup> heard the voice of the Son of God. And he lived and 'came forth', just as Jesus had said in chapter 5 will happen on a far larger scale at the end of the age: 'the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice (the voice of the Son of God) and will *come forth*'.<sup>92</sup>

### **Notice is served!**

And, as I see it, in calling His friend Lazarus out of his tomb, Jesus is not only plundering Death's spoils by unshackling and setting free one of Death's most recent captives but, in a very real sense, He is also servicing notice on the great tyrant Death that He would be coming back ... then, to put Death to rout – to break his power – to defeat utterly and overcome him.

For, some two months or so later, 'the Living One' would Himself 'become dead'. He would, that is, Himself enter Death's dark domain, a realm and a province altogether foreign and alien to Him – but He would be paying only a short visit! He would not be staying long!<sup>93</sup>

At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus puts the mighty despot, Death, on warning that He would be back, but not then to snatch just one of Death's victims from his clutches. Oh no! Next time, He wouldn't settle for just one of Death's prisoners! Next time, He would forever lay Death low ... and Death would never be the same again!

From then on, He, the Risen Lord, would hold Death's key<sup>94</sup> until that grand and glorious day when Death, along with all other of our Lord's enemies, will be finally subdued and destroyed.<sup>95</sup>

## THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS AND THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Make no mistake, our Lord's own resurrection was very different to that of Lazarus:

**1.** Lazarus's return to life was only temporary. Lazarus would die again.<sup>96</sup> He was, if you like, only out on parole, required to report back to the grave in due course.

But the Lord Jesus didn't leave His tomb on short-term release! The apostle Paul expresses it clearly: 'Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, *dies no more*. Death no longer has dominion over Him'.<sup>97</sup>

Since man's fall, Death had exercised undisputed sway over the human race<sup>98</sup> and, through the fear of death, held men in lifelong bondage.<sup>99</sup> But, in the tomb of Jesus, the 'King of Terrors'<sup>100</sup> was compelled to lay his sceptre at His feet.

**2.** Lazarus rose with the same kind of natural and mortal body he had before. It was a body which, as the Gospel account makes clear, didn't (and, indeed, couldn't) pass through his graveclothes. Hence, the Lord's command to those who stood around, 'Loose him, and let him go'. Lazarus couldn't pass through his graveclothes, let alone through the walls of his rock tomb,<sup>101</sup> and, when he emerged from his tomb, he still had the napkin (the kerchief) wrapped either over or around his face.<sup>102</sup>

But the Lord Jesus burst forth into an altogether different dimension, leaving His graveclothes behind Him. They were left lying unneeded and unwanted in the otherwise empty tomb, with the napkin/face-cloth neatly rolled and wrapped up in a place by itself - a detail which spoke volumes to John as he stood and pondered it.<sup>103</sup>

In and of itself, the empty tomb would never have brought John to belief in Jesus' resurrection. But, when John saw the long linen wrappings, which had been wound tightly around the body, lying there, with the napkin/face-cloth neatly folded in its own place, suddenly everything clicked into place.

No grave robbers, whether friends or foes, would have taken the time to tidy the tomb nor hung around to roll up the face-cloth so carefully. And, even if – for some obscure reason – some tomb-raider had stripped the body and discarded the expensive cloths with which Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had prepared Jesus' body for burial, these cloths would have been left in some crumbled heap.

To John, there was only one logical explanation for the orderly appearance of Joseph's tomb. Contrary to Mary's theory that the body had been taken by person or persons unknown, in a flash the realisation dawned on John ... Jesus' body hadn't been taken by anybody! He had risen from the dead! To John, the linen wrappings and the neatly wrapped napkin/face-cloth were, in effect, the unmistakable clues left behind by the Risen Lord when He stepped into the other world.

Unlike Lazarus (who couldn't pass through *his* graveclothes), the Lord Jesus didn't need anyone to 'loose Him and let Him go!' His body simply passed out of His graveclothes. And Joseph's rock-hewn tomb could no more hold Him captive than could His graveclothes!

**3.** It was men who, in response to our Lord's express command, rolled away the stone from the tomb of Lazarus.<sup>104</sup>

But it wasn't men who moved the large stone from the tomb of Jesus; it was an angel from heaven!<sup>105</sup>

Men shifted the stone from the tomb of Lazarus to let him out, although whether he walked or shuffled out, I can't say. But, as has often been pointed out, *the angel didn't open the tomb of Jesus to let Him out*; the angel opened His tomb to let others in, that they might see for themselves that the tomb was well and truly empty. Its triumphant and all-glorious Tenant had already vacated it.

**4.** After the removal of the stone and our Lord's quickening word, Lazarus came out of his tomb by the very same door through which, several days before, he had been carried in.

But, when His time came, the Lord Jesus didn't emerge by the door through which, several days before, He had been carried in. For, when the angel rolled back the stone from His tomb, Jesus didn't come out. He had already left.

The angel's role was simply to park himself on the stone while he waited for the devout women to come (bringing with them the spices with which they planned to do a proper job of anointing the Lord's body<sup>106</sup>), and then to greet them with the earth-shattering announcement, 'He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay'.<sup>107</sup>

**5.** As we have seen, in *John 11*, the Saviour claimed to be 'the resurrection and the life'. The resurrection of Lazarus from the dead demonstrated the truth of His claim.

But, previously, in *John 10*, He had claimed to have the authority. not only to lay down His life of His own accord, but also to take it again. And this time, His own resurrection from the dead demonstrated the truth of His claim!

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

But our Lord's resurrection was different *not only from that of Lazarus*. It came in an altogether different category from every other instance of 'resurrection' recorded in Scripture.<sup>108</sup>

I close with the words of H. C. Hewlett:

'The Lord's pre-eminence in resurrection is set forth in three aspects in the Word.

To King Agrippa, Paul declared Christ to be the first that should rise from the dead (Acts 26. 23<sup>109</sup>). Here was priority in **time** ...

Writing to the Colossians, the apostle proclaimed Christ as the firstborn<sup>110</sup> from the dead (Col. 1. 18). Here was priority also in **rank** ...

Again, Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15. 20). Here was priority also of **fruitfulness**'.<sup>111</sup>

**Praise His name!**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> John 10. 22. The Jewish 'Feast of Dedication' (Hanukkah, the Jewish 'Festival of Lights') commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple at the beginning of the Maccabean revolt in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. The Feast is observed for eight nights and days, beginning on the 25th day of Kislev according to the Hebrew calendar, which may occur at any time from late November to late December.

<sup>2</sup> John 10. 41.

<sup>3</sup> In order, the seven signs are:

- Transforming water into wine (John 2. 1-11)
- Healing the son at Cana (John 4. 46-54)
- Healing the paralytic at Bethesda (John 5. 1-9)
- Multiplying fish and loaves (John 6. 1-15)
- Walking upon the Sea of Galilee (John 6. 16-21)
- Healing the blind man in Jerusalem (John 9. 1-7)
- Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11. 1-45).

<sup>4</sup> It is also, by far, the longest account of any miracle/sign in any of the Gospels.

<sup>5</sup> If Jesus 'can do nothing about death, then whatever else He can do amounts to nothing', Warren Wiersbe, *'Be Alive'*, page 131.

<sup>6</sup> 'The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death'. 1 Cor. 15. 26.

<sup>7</sup> Not that it was the Lord's last miracle before the Cross; ask Malchus about his ear!

<sup>8</sup> Which latter events took place at Passover time in early April – either in AD 30 or (more likely) in AD 33.

<sup>9</sup> John 2. 11.

<sup>10</sup> John 11. 4.

<sup>11</sup> John 11. 46-57. This is a critical turning point in Jesus' ministry. In the Synoptics the same crucial moment comes at the cleansing of the Temple.

<sup>12</sup> John 11. 45.

<sup>13</sup> The Council were the unwitting instruments in the fulfilment of God's eternal purpose. Interestingly, two of the key players in our Lord's passion, Caiaphas and Pilate, were deposed within a few months of each other a few years later (in AD 36).

<sup>14</sup> Luke 10. 38-42.

<sup>15</sup> John 11. 1-2. 'The three names (Mary, Martha, Lazarus) were found in 1873 in ossuary inscriptions in one tomb near Bethany ... The bearing of these inscriptions on the Gospel narrative is simply that these were very common names at that period', F. F. Bruce, *'The Gospel of John'*, pages 240, 253.

<sup>16</sup> John 12. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Matt. 26. 13; Mark 14. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, John 11. 18.

<sup>19</sup> John 10. 40.

<sup>20</sup> John 11. 3.

<sup>21</sup> John 11. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Compare John 2. 3. The simple statement was, in effect, a request that He intervene.

<sup>23</sup> John 11. 21, 32.

<sup>24</sup> John 11. 18.

<sup>25</sup> John 10. 31, 39.



<sup>26</sup> John 15. 13, the same word as in John 11. 11.

<sup>27</sup> John 11. 4.

<sup>28</sup> John 11. 5.

The NIV suggests that the Lord's delay was *in spite* of His love for the family: 'Jesus loved ... yet when He heard ... He stayed', John 11. 5-6. But John's point is that Jesus delayed *because* of His love for the family: 'Jesus loved ... therefore ('ouv') when He heard ... He stayed'.

'It wasn't Jesus' lack of concern that caused His delay. The Bible reveals that the exact opposite is true. He waited because of His love for the sisters and for Lazarus', Wayne Stiles, *'Why Jesus waits to answer your prayer'*.

The Lord's 'behaviour *seems* to contradict this love', but then, 'God's love for His own is not a pampering love; it is a perfecting love. The fact that He loves us ... is no guarantee that we will be sheltered from the problems and pains of life. After all, the Father loves His Son: and yet the Father permitted His beloved Son to drink the cup of sorrow and experience the shame and pain of the Cross', Warren Wiersbe, *op. cit.*, page 133.

<sup>29</sup> John 11. 14.

<sup>30</sup> John 11. 6.

<sup>31</sup> John 11. 17, 39

<sup>32</sup> If (i) it took one day for the messenger(s) to get from Bethany to 'across the Jordan, where John baptised at first' and (ii) it took the same length of time for our Lord to travel the same distance to Bethany and (iii) if Lazarus had died soon after the messenger(s) left, then, given that Jesus remained where He was for two days, Lazarus would have been dead for four days when the Lord saw the two sisters.

Had, therefore, our Lord left immediately the messenger(s) arrived, Lazarus would have been dead for two days by the time He reached Bethany.

But the same would have been true however long Lazarus lingered before he died. It is simply that the longer Lazarus lingered, the longer the journeys must have taken. The time taken for the two journeys combined must have equalled the time that Lazarus lingered plus two days.

<sup>33</sup> This 'four days dead' feature provides an even greater contrast with the daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow of Nain (and the cases in the days of Elijah and Elisha) than if Lazarus had been dead for two days. This case was altogether unprecedented and hopeless.

<sup>34</sup> Luke 7. 11-16.

<sup>35</sup> Luke 8. 41-55.

<sup>36</sup> The same was true, also, of the cases of resurrection in the days of Elijah and Elisha: 1 Kings 17. 17-24; 2 Kings 4. 37; Heb. 11. 35.

There are many similarities between the story of the raising of the daughter of Jairus and the story of the raising of Lazarus. In both accounts:

- A close family member asks Jesus to come to help a sick person before it's too late.
- Jesus arrives after the sick person has died.
- Jesus speaks of the person as 'sleeping' (a euphemism for having died).
- Jesus goes to where the dead person is and commands him or her back to life.
- Jesus commands those looking on to take care of the physical needs of the raised person.

Yet there are also several striking differences between the stories. For example:

- Jesus left to go to the house of Jairus as soon as He was summoned, Mark 5. 23-24. In the case of Lazarus, Jesus remained where He was for two further days, John 11. 6.
- The daughter of Jairus was raised in the privacy of Jairus's house, with very few witnesses, Mark 5. 40, and Jesus subsequently 'strictly charged' the spectators to tell nobody what they had seen, Mark 5. 43. In the case of Lazarus, Jesus made no attempt to exclude anybody present at the time and enjoined secrecy on no one, John 11. 45-46.

<sup>37</sup> John 11. 39-40; cf. John 11. 4-6.

<sup>38</sup> John 10. 31.

<sup>39</sup> John 11. 7.

<sup>40</sup> John 11. 8.

<sup>41</sup> John 11. 9.

<sup>42</sup> John 11. 11.

<sup>43</sup> Luke 8. 52.

<sup>44</sup> There are at least eight misunderstood sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John:

- (i) 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' (John 2. 19-21).
- (ii) 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born from above (ἄνωθεν), he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3. 3-8). [The Greek word, ἄνωθεν, can mean either 'again' or 'from above'. Although Nicodemus understood it to mean 'again', leading him to conclude that the Lord was speaking of a second physical birth, the Lord's reply in verses 6-8 suggests strongly that He referred to the need for a spiritual birth, a birth 'from above'. I note that John uses it elsewhere only with the meaning, 'from above' (John 3. 31; 19. 11, 23).]
- (iii) 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water' (John 4. 10-11).
- (iv) 'Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again'. (John 4. 13-15).
- (v) 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about' (John 4. 31-34).
- (vi) 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh' (John 6. 51-53).
- (vii) 'Where I am going, you cannot come'? (John 7. 34-36; 8. 21-22, 51-53).
- (viii) 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him' (John 11. 11-14).

<sup>45</sup> 'Told them openly'; cf. the use of the word in John 7. 13.

<sup>46</sup> John 11. 4.

<sup>47</sup> John 11. 21, 32.

<sup>48</sup> 'Let us go', John 11. 15; cf. 'let us go', John 11. 7.

<sup>49</sup> John 11. 15.

<sup>50</sup> Later, Thomas will express his concern that he and the other disciples *did not know* where Jesus was going: 'Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going"', John 14. 5. Now, his concern arises from the fact that they *do* know where He is going!

<sup>51</sup> John 11. 21, 32.

<sup>52</sup> Matt. 8. 5-13.

<sup>53</sup> John 4. 46-53. Cana was 'some twenty miles away' from Capernaum, Bruce Milne, *John (The Bible Speaks Today)*, page 91.

<sup>54</sup> John 11. 24.

<sup>55</sup> John 11. 39.

<sup>56</sup> John 11. 22.

<sup>57</sup> John 11. 24.

<sup>58</sup> Luke 14. 14; cf. Rev. 20. 5-6.

<sup>59</sup> Isa. 61. 1-2.

<sup>60</sup> John 11. 25-26.

<sup>61</sup> The seven 'I am' statements made by Jesus in the Gospel according to John:

- 'I am the bread of life' (John 6. 35, 48)
- 'I am the light of the world' (John 8. 12; 9. 5)
- 'I am the door' (John 10. 7, 9)
- 'I am the good shepherd' (John 10. 11, 14)
- 'I am the resurrection, and the life' (John 11. 25)
- 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14. 6)
- 'I am the true vine' (John 15. 1; cf. v. 5).

- <sup>62</sup> 'He means rather that believers will not die in the sense in which death has eternal significance', Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John (New International Commentary on the New Testament)*, on John 11. 26.  
 'This does not mean that Jesus' followers will not die a physical death (11:25b), but that life will be theirs beyond the grave; they will not suffer death in eternity', Gary M. Burge, *John (The NIV Application Commentary)* on John 11. 26.
- <sup>63</sup> A double negative followed by 'to the ages': 'εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ ... εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα'.
- <sup>64</sup> Rev. 2. 11; in the imagery of the Book of Revelation, 'the second death' is one and the same as 'the lake of fire', Rev. 20. 14; 21. 8.
- <sup>65</sup> cf. 1 Pet. 3. 13.
- <sup>66</sup> Phil. 1. 21; 2 Cor. 5. 8.
- <sup>67</sup> The queen at the time was Mary the First of England, known as 'Bloody Mary'.
- <sup>68</sup> Source: *Foxe's Book of Martyrs: Chapter 16, Part 1: The History, Imprisonment, and Examination of Mr John Hooper, Bishop of Worcester and Gloucester*'.
- <sup>69</sup> John 11. 28-32. As has often been pointed out, we meet Mary only three times in the Gospels and each time she is at the feet of Jesus, Luke 10. 39; John 11. 32; 12. 3.
- <sup>70</sup> Later, another Mary is heard weeping at another tomb, John 20. 11, 13, 15. Then Jesus dries the tears, now he shares them!
- <sup>71</sup> 'Any loud expression of grief, especially in mourning for the dead', W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, article 'Weep, Weeping, A. 1 - κλαίω'.
- <sup>72</sup> John 11. 33.
- <sup>73</sup> John 11. 34.
- <sup>74</sup> John 11. 31.
- <sup>75</sup> The shortest verse in the Greek New Testament ('Πάντοτε χαίρετε' [14 letters], 1 Thess. 5. 16), is slightly shorter than John 11. 35 ('ἔδακρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς' [16 letters]).
- <sup>76</sup> John 11. 35. The verb is in the aorist, suggesting the translation, 'Jesus burst into tears'.
- <sup>77</sup> 'To shed tears', W. E. Vine, *ibid.*, article 'Weep, Weeping, A. 2 - δακρύω'.
- <sup>78</sup> John 11. 38.
- <sup>79</sup> John 11. 39.
- <sup>80</sup> John 2. 8.
- <sup>81</sup> John 6. 10-12.
- <sup>82</sup> John 11. 39. 'Interestingly, Martha did not appeal to Jesus on the basis of the ritual uncleanness that contact with a dead body would create for the Jews. Perhaps she had learned that ritual uncleanness was not something that bothered Jesus', Thomas Constable, *Expository Notes*'.
- <sup>83</sup> 'In the absence of embalming or relatively rapid cremation, the body putrefies. The first sign of putrefaction is a greenish skin discoloration appearing on the right lower abdomen about the second or third day after death. This coloration then spreads over the abdomen, chest, and upper thighs and is usually accompanied by a putrid odor. Sulphur-containing intestinal gas and a breakdown product of red blood cells produce both the color and smell', <http://www.deathreference.com/Py-Se/Rigor-Mortis-and-Other-Postmortem-Changes.html>
- <sup>84</sup> John 11. 41.
- <sup>85</sup> Cf. John 17. 1; Psa. 123. 1.

- <sup>86</sup> John 11. 42. Thanksgiving rose up naturally and gladly from His heart:
- Before He broke loaves and fish for the multitudes, John 6. 11; Matt. 15. 36,
  - When the 72 returned and the cities around refused to respond to His message, Matt. 11. 25; Luke 10. 17-21,
  - When Lazarus came to life, John 11. 41, and
  - For both the bread and a cup at the Last Supper, Luke 22. 19; Mark 14. 23 – even though the bread represented His body to be given and the cup represented His blood to be shed.
- <sup>87</sup> I personify ‘Death’, as does the apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 15. 54-55 and the apostle John in Rev. 20. 13-14.
- <sup>88</sup> John 11. 43.
- <sup>89</sup> John 11. 3.
- <sup>90</sup> John 4. 46-53. See note 53 above.
- <sup>91</sup> ‘Ὁ τεθνηκώς’, John 11. 44.
- <sup>92</sup> John 5. 28-29.
- <sup>93</sup> ‘I am ... the Living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore’, Rev. 1. 17-18.
- <sup>94</sup> Rev. 1. 18.
- <sup>95</sup> 1 Cor. 15. 26.
- <sup>96</sup> ‘I’d like to find the tombstone of Lazarus. It would say “Died 29 AD” and then below that it would say, “Died 42 AD”. This would confuse some people. You see, Lazarus died again’, Ben Witherington III, ‘*Easter and the Resurrection*’, accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIPlz8J8dVk&index=53&list=PL1CBE0DD656B9BC0F> – 3.58 to 4.13 minutes.
- <sup>97</sup> Rom. 6. 9.
- <sup>98</sup> Rom. 5. 12-14, 17; ‘Through the first four thousand years of the history of our fallen race, death reigned with undisputed sway ... Forever vanquished, Death laid its sceptre at the Victor’s feet ... Here was victory such as Caesar’s legions never gained’, H. C. Hewlett, ‘*The Glories of Our Lord*’, page 92.
- <sup>99</sup> Heb. 2. 15.
- <sup>100</sup> Job 18. 14.
- <sup>101</sup> Matt. 27. 60; Mark 15. 46.
- <sup>102</sup> John 11. 44.
- <sup>103</sup> John 20. 6-8.
- <sup>104</sup> John 11. 41.
- <sup>105</sup> Matt. 28. 2.
- <sup>106</sup> Luke 23. 56.
- <sup>107</sup> Matt. 28. 2, 6.
- <sup>108</sup> See 1 Kings 17. 17-24; 2 Kings 4. 18-37; 13. 20; Heb. 11. 35; Luke 7. 11-16; Matt. 9. 18-26//Mark 5. 22-34//Luke 8. 41-56; Matt. 11. 5; 27. 53-53; John 11. 1-45; Acts 9. 36-42; 20. 9-12.

<sup>109</sup> I leave to the side the question of how Acts 26. 23 should be translated. Some translators (and commentators) attach the word 'first' to the Lord's proclamation of light rather than to His resurrection; for example, 'He first, through resurrection of the dead, should announce light', J.N.D.(\*) – so, in substance, RV, NASB, ASV and Kelly. The KJV rendering is followed, in substance, by RSV, ESV, NEB, NIV, NRSV, NJB, F. F. Bruce, D. L. Bock and I. H. Marshall. (\*) Mr Darby explains his interpretation of the verse: 'The translation in English cannot be sustained. I suppose it is "He first, through resurrection (of the dead) should shew light to the people, and to the nations". That is, the doctrine of resurrection was the starting point of this light to them. Hence we must have it general', *Collected Writings, Volume 11*, page 366. For what it is worth, I don't agree.

<sup>110</sup> The Lord Jesus is the 'firstborn' in four realms:

- (i) Creation, Col. 1. 15;
- (ii) Resurrection, Col. 1. 18; Rev. 1. 5;
- (iii) Salvation, Rom. 8. 29;
- (iv) Dominion, Psa. 89. 27; Heb. 1. 6.

<sup>111</sup> H. C. Hewlett, *ibid.*, pages 95-96.