

John 11:38-44

Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. 39 “Roll the stone aside,” Jesus told them.

But Martha, the dead man’s sister, protested, “Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible.”

40 Jesus responded, “Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believe?” 41 So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me. 42 You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.” 43 Then Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” 44 And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him go!”

Background

Today in Bethany, you can visit the “Tomb of Lazarus.” While it fits the biblical description and is backed by strong tradition, its authenticity remains uncertain.

Lazarus had been dead four days: one day for the message to reach Jesus, two days where Jesus delayed, and one day to travel to Bethany. This left no doubt about Lazarus’s death; he wasn’t merely unconscious or resuscitated.

When Jesus raised Lazarus, he came out wrapped loosely in burial cloths typical of Jewish customs, likely staggering as the cloths unraveled. The “headcloth” was tied around the jaw to keep the mouth closed. John’s Gospel doesn’t mention Lazarus’s experience during those four days, focusing instead on Jesus’ deity to inspire faith. This focus strengthens the Bible’s authenticity by avoiding unnecessary speculation.

Teaching Points

1. Answered prayer is evidence of the truth.

In verses 41-42, Jesus prayed to show that raising Lazarus was a clear answer to prayer. It was meant to strengthen the faith of those watching, as answered prayer serves as evidence of God’s truth. Remember, Elijah’s prayer in 1 Kings 18 was confirmed by fire from Heaven. Today, many believers testify to answered prayers, even if some skeptics dismiss it as coincidence.

2. There is a difference between a *resurrection* from the dead and a *raising* from the dead.

Lazarus was raised from the dead. He was brought back to mortal life, but he died again. In contrast, “resurrection” means receiving a glorified, immortal body that never dies again. Jesus was resurrected from the dead. Unlike Jesus, whose grave clothes were left behind at His resurrection, Lazarus emerged from the tomb still wrapped in his burial cloths.

Lazarus’s raising was temporary, but it foreshadowed the future resurrection at Christ’s return. In John 5:28–29, Jesus said all in the graves will rise—believers to life, and unbelievers to condemnation. Both will be raised with eternal bodies: one for glory, one for judgment.

3. The Lord’s authority over death proved His deity.

The raising of Lazarus, the seventh and climactic “Sign Miracle” in John’s Gospel, proved Jesus’ deity and authority over death. Unlike Old Testament prophets who prayed for God to raise the dead, Jesus commanded Lazarus to come forth Himself, showing His divine power. This miracle was chosen to emphasize that Jesus is the Son of God, confirming His identity and authority over life and death.

Application

1. It is our privilege to remove stones.

This miracle symbolizes salvation: Lazarus moved from physical death to life, just as we move from spiritual death to life. Though Jesus performed the miracle, He asked others to remove the stone blocking the tomb. In the same way, we can’t save others, but we can help *remove barriers* that hinder them from coming to Christ.

Christian apologetics, for example, involves removing these “stones” by addressing doubts and questions, helping open the way for people to accept the gospel.

2. It is our privilege to remove grave clothes.

When Lazarus came out of the tomb, Jesus said, “Unwrap him and let him go,” asking others to remove his grave clothes instead of doing it Himself. These grave clothes symbolize the old habits, false beliefs, and worldly ties that cling to new believers and hinder their growth. Just as first-century Jewish Christians had to shed their old religious legalism, today new believers may struggle with man-made religions or secular ideas. It’s our privilege to help them remove these “grave clothes” and experience true freedom in Christ.