



TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

John 11:38-44: The Raising of Lazarus From the Dead

"Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. ^[a] And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴² And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." ⁴³ Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" ⁴⁴ And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

Background Notes

If you go to Bethany today, you will be shown the "Tomb of Lazarus." It may be authentic. It does fit the biblical description, and it does have strong tradition behind it, but we can't be sure it's the actual place.

When the Lord said in verse 39, *"Take away the stone."* *Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."* (Lazarus was not embalmed; some Jewish people do not embalm even today.) How do we get the four days? Well, it took one day for the message that Lazarus was dead to reach Jesus, who was over on the other side of the Jordan River. Then the Lord purposely delayed two days: *"So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was"*(v6). Then there was one day of travel back to Bethany. The Lord purposely let four days pass so that there was no question about Lazarus being dead. This miracle was definitely not a case of resuscitation or artificial respiration. No, Lazarus had really died! *"And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go"*(v44).

How do you visualize Lazarus coming out of the tomb? Do you imagine Lazarus coming forth wrapped like a mummy and walking stiff-legged, or a body encased in paper mache or plaster of Paris – like a body cast -- with his legs so bound that he had to float out and land upright before the Lord? Most likely Lazarus either stumbled out of the tomb, or crawled out with his legs loosely bound. In the first century the Jews would use strips of cloth permeated by spices (not glue) to wrap the body. So Lazarus probably stumbled out, with the strips of cloth beginning to unravel and dangling off him. The face cloth (v44) was not like a mask, but similar to the bandage that people used to put around their jaw when they had a toothache – a cloth wrapped around the jaw and tied up over the head. In the first century, and even today, they used this type of face cloth to keep the mouth closed after death.

It's interesting that the Bible doesn't say anything about what went on during the four days that Lazarus was dead. If I were the Apostle John (and John certainly knew Lazarus), and if I had been able to talk to him after this experience, I certainly would have asked Lazarus about these four days. Was he conscious? Was he in heaven? What did he learn? But the Apostle John stayed right on track! His purpose in giving the account of this miracle in his Gospel was to show the deity of Christ, so that the readers would come to faith in Christ as Savior. Other extra-biblical authors and materials certainly would have gone off on tangents such as describing Lazarus' experience during the four days, but not John – he stayed right on track! This fact puts the stamp of authenticity on the Bible.

Doctrinal / Teaching points

1. Answered prayer is evidence of the truth.

In verse 41-42 the Lord prayed: *"Father, I thank You that You have heard Me, and I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me."* The Lord wanted the people gathered around the tomb to know that the raising of Lazarus was a definite answer to prayer so that they might believe the truth, the truth that Jesus was who He said He was. Answered prayer is evidence of the truth.

Do you remember when Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal? He prayed, and God answered by fire from heaven. It was evidence of the truth. There was no question that was on the side of the truth -- **Elijah was!** God answered Elijah's prayer.

Answered prayer today is evidence of the truth. Many people today can give undeniable testimonies that it was answered prayer that delivered them from drugs or alcohol, or saved their marriage, or brought help in the nick of time! Of course the unbeliever is going to try to avoid this evidence, and say that it was just a coincidence (or some other explanation), but answered prayer definitely is evidence of the truth.

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

Lazarus was not **resurrected** from the dead; he was **raised** from the dead. Now what is the difference? A **raising from the dead** is when a person is brought back to **mortal life**. A person who is raised from the dead, dies again. Lazarus died again. A person who is **resurrected from the dead** has a new body, an **immortal body**, a glorified body, and a body that will not die again. Our Lord was **resurrected** from the dead; Lazarus was **raised** from the dead.

Do you remember the grave clothes of our Lord? They were left right where they were in the tomb when our Lord's body was resurrected. When Lazarus came out of his tomb, the grave clothes were still clinging to his body.

Although the raising of Lazarus was a temporary raising from the dead, it is a **picture** of the resurrection of the believer which will take place when the Lord returns. In John 5:28-29 the Lord said, *"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice²⁹ and come forth—those who have done good,*

to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

Now some of you might be wondering about a "resurrection of the damned" or "resurrection to condemnation" in John 5:28-29. I don't want to go off on a long tangent here, but the Bible very definitely indicates that not only will the believer be raised in resurrection, but the unbelievers also will have some kind of body in which they will live forever -- in hell. In any case, there is a difference between a resurrection from the dead and a raising from the dead.

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

The Lord's authority over death proved His deity. We mentioned that this miracle was the seventh sign miracle in the Gospel of John. Once again, let me read John 20:30-31, where we have the purpose of John. *"And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."* **All seven of the sign miracles were selected to show the deity of Christ** -- to emphasize His deity, that He is truly the Son of God. But this miracle is the climax of the seven sign miracles -- the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

Think of it! A man who had been dead for four days, his body already in a state of corruption -- but at the command of Christ, Lazarus came forth from his grave! He came back to life! The Lord's authority over death proved His deity.

Another point to keep in mind. When the Lord raised someone back to life -- whether it was the widow of Nain's son, or Jairus' daughter, or Lazarus -- the Lord raised these people simply by His command! This is not the same as Elijah raising the widow of Zarepath's son, or Elisha raising the widow of Zarepath's son or the Shunmite woman's son, or Peter bringing Dorcas back to life. In those cases, the men of God prayed, and **God** answered prayer -- **God** raised the people back to life. What a striking difference we have here. The Lord, at His own command, raised people from the dead. He raised the dead -- He is God! The Lord's authority over death proved His deity.

It has often been pointed out that if the Lord had not been specific when He said "Lazarus, come forth!" but had only said "Come forth!" -- **all** the dead would have come out of their graves! In any case, the Lord's authority over death proved His deity.

Practical Applications

1. It is our privilege to remove stones.

In this miracle, not only do we have a picture of the believer's resurrection, we also have a picture of salvation. After all, Lazarus went from physical death to physical life. In salvation, we go from spiritual death to spiritual life. Now notice, the Lord did the miracle, but He asked for the stone to be taken away from the opening of the tomb (v39). The Lord could have removed the stone as part of the miracle, but he asked the people around Him to do it.

In the same way, we can't save a person -- only the Lord can do that. But we can certainly help "remove the stone." The stones that block the entrance to tombs represents the barriers, the hang-ups, the questions, the things that hinder a person from coming to Christ. It is our privilege to remove stones. That is what Christian Evidences or apologetics is all about, for example. 1 Peter 3:15 tells us to *"always be*

ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you..” We should always be ready to give a defense of our faith or be ready answer questions to anyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that is in us. It’s not only our **privilege** to remove stones -- it’s our **responsibility**!

Do you know how to remove stones if a non-Christian seems to be open to the gospel, but they can’t quite seem to understand the problem of suffering, for example? Or maybe a non-Christian is hung up on the problem of the heathen – “What about the people who have never heard?” Can you remove that stone to further open up the way for that person to be open to the gospel? It is our **privilege** to remove stones.

2. It is our privilege to remove grave clothes.

When Lazarus came out of the tomb, the Lord said, *“Loose him, and let him go”*(v44). Again, the Lord could have removed the grave clothes as part of the miracle, but He didn’t. He brought Lazarus back to life, but He asked the people who were gathered around Him at the tomb to remove the grave clothes. You see, the grave clothes represent those things of the new believer’s former life that continue to cling on and can trip us up after we become Christians – sinful habits, bad theology, worldly connections.

Many new Christians have a very hard time shedding the “old grave clothes” of their former life. We need to help them. It is our **privilege** to remove the grave clothes!

In the first century, many of the Jews who became Christians were hung up with the grave clothes of Judaism. Those clinging grave clothes had to go. Today a new believer may still entangled in the “religious” grave clothes of man-made religion, or secular humanism, or New Age thinking. The grave clothes of just about any man-made substitute for the one true God may be clinging to the new believer and hindering his or her growth as a Christian. It’s our privilege to help the new believer “remove the grave clothes”!