

### The Raising of Lazarus From the Dead

#### John 11:38-44

John 11:38-44 - "Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, 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 him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

<sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"<sup>41</sup> Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying.<sup>[a]</sup> And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me."<sup>42</sup> 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."<sup>43</sup> Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"<sup>44</sup> 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.

In verse 39 the Lord 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." Lazarus was not embalmed. Many Jewish people do not embalm even today.

How do we calculate the four days? It took one day for the message about Lazarus's illness to reach Jesus, who was staying 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 it would have taken a day to travel up to Bethany.

The Lord purposely allowed four days to pass so that there would be no question that Lazarus was actually dead, so it would be clear that his 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, walking stiff-legged? Or do you think of Lazarus' body encased in a plaster cast - with his legs so immobile that he had to

float out and land upright before the Lord? In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the Jews used strips of cloth permeated by spices (not glue) to loosely wrap the body. So most likely Lazarus either staggered out of the tomb, with his legs loosely bound, and the strips of cloth beginning to unravel and dangling.

The “face cloth” (v44) was not like a mask, but similar to old practice of people tying up their lower jaw with a bandana when they had a toothache. The face cloth was wrapped around the jaw and tied up over the head. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and even today, this type of face cloth was used 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. John certainly knew Lazarus – he was with the Lord when He visited in Bethany. If I were the Apostle John, I certainly would have asked Lazarus about what he experienced during those four days! Was he conscious? Was he in Heaven? What did he see? What did he learn?

But the Apostle John stayed right on track! His purpose in including 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 non-inspired authors or authors of extra-biblical materials certainly would surely have gone off on tangents, such as describing Lazarus’ experiences 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 verses 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 with fire from heaven. It was evidence of the truth. There was no question who was on the side of the truth! **Elijah was!** God answered Elijah’s prayer.

Answered prayer today is evidence of the truth. Many people 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 the “answer to prayer” was just a coincidence, or imagination, 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. 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** 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 our Lord’s grave clothes? They were left behind, 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.

The raising of Lazarus was a temporary raising from the dead, but it **pictures** the resurrection that 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 voice 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 believers be raised in resurrection, but unbelievers also will have some kind of body in which they will live forever - in hell. 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. The miracle of the raising of Lazarus was the seventh Sign Miracle in the Gospel of John. Once again, John 20:30-31 that reveals John’s purpose for writing his Gospel: *“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;”<sup>31</sup> 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.** They were specifically chosen 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.

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 was not the same as Elijah raising the widow of Zarepath’s son, or Elisha raising the Shunamite woman’s son, or Peter bringing Dorcas back to life. In those cases, the men of God prayed, and **God** answered their prayer. **God** raised those people back to life!

What a striking difference we have with Lazarus. The Lord, at His own command, raised him from the dead. Think of it! A man who had been dead for four days, his body already in a state of decay and corruption - but at the command of Jesus Christ, Lazarus came forth from his grave! He came back to life! 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. He raised the dead – He is God! His authority over death proved His deity.

## Practical Applications

### 1. It is our privilege to remove stones.

In this miracle we 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 people to move the stone away from the entrance 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 blocked the entrance to the tomb picture the barriers, the hang-ups, the questions - anything that hinders a person from coming to Christ. And it is our privilege to move those stones away.

That's 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 - ready to answer questions from anyone who asks 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 the barrier 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 "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 illustrate those things of the new believer's former life that continue to cling on. The grave clothes represent things that can trip us up after we become Christians, like 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 1<sup>st</sup> century, many of the Jews who became Christians were bound up with the "grave clothes" of Judaism. Those clinging grave clothes had to go so they could experience freedom in Christ. 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 man-made substitutes for the one true God may cling to the new believer and hinder his or her growth as a Christian. It's our privilege to help the new believer by helping to remove the "grave clothes"!