

Lazarus Slept While Jesus Wept
John 11: 1-45

Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again? Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died. Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying? The nearer Jesus came to His destination at the cross, it is reasonable to conclude that His patience may have been tried by such comments. He was like a frazzled parent telling an unruly child “you are getting on my last good nerve”. That may sound like a strange observation, but there is Biblical evidence that it is accurate. John 14:9 comes to mind. As we learned a few weeks ago, because Jesus performed such amazing miracles, signs and wonders we tend to overlook the fact that the Son of God is also fully human—truly human as the Nicene Creed puts it. Jesus experienced every emotion, feeling and sensation that we do, but to a fuller degree. Lesser men may have given up on the disciples, but not Jesus. Up to the moment He breathed His last breath on the cross, Jesus used every opportunity to teach them and others about God and have them grow in their faith.

The raising of Lazarus was one of those opportunities, and once again the disciples displayed they still had some things to learn about following Jesus. They had now been with Jesus for three years, and countless numbers of miracles later they still failed to grasp the significance of His words the apostle John recorded for us in verse 4: This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.

When Jesus told the disciples that they would be travelling to Judea, seeing God’s glory was the furthest thing from their mind. It was there that Jesus miraculously healed the blind man on the Sabbath, and a short time later miraculously escaped an angry mob of religious leaders who had tried to stone Him to death for doing so. Fearing for the safety of Jesus and perhaps even their own they attempted to reason with Him. Rabbi, are you crazy? The last time we were there you barely escaped with your life and now you want to go back? Let’s just shake the dust from our sandals and move on. Besides, you just said that Lazarus is only sleeping. He will be just fine.

Can you imagine the look on their faces when they heard Jesus say, "Lazarus is dead"? To add to their bewilderment, Jesus told them He was glad He wasn't there when Lazarus died. To say they were confused would be an understatement. Two days earlier when they got word that Lazarus was sick Jesus seemed unconcerned about the whole situation. If Lazarus was really that sick, why didn't they head for Judea then? It seemed to them that there was little Jesus could do now other than console the grieving family. In their minds, that was something not worth risking their lives over. Then one of them spoke up. Notice who it was. It wasn't the boisterous Peter but Thomas, or doubting Thomas as he is better known. Verse 16- Let us also go that we may die with him.

We don't know whether Thomas spoke in sarcasm or out of love for Jesus, but nonetheless they set out together for Judea. It seems **they had no clue at the time that resurrection is part of God's plan to have us overcome our fear of death.** The drama began before they even reached the city gates. They encountered Lazarus sister Martha, and she confirms what Jesus told them earlier. Lazarus was dead. Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died. A short time later Lazarus other sister Mary tells Jesus the same thing. Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died. Like the words of Thomas, we are not certain whether they were uttered in grief or made as a statement of faith. We do know how Jesus responded. It is found in what is known as the shortest verse in the Bible: "Jesus wept". **When we grieve, God grieves with us.** Isaiah 53:3 Psalm 34:18

There were a mix of emotions among those who witnessed His graphic display of grief, something that obviously affects both human and divine. Some were simply confused. Why didn't Jesus come earlier? We have seen His divine power so why didn't he use it? I wonder what Lazarus did to make God angry. Others were far more cynical. Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying? Perhaps Jesus was even experiencing mixed emotions Himself. John records in verse 33 that He was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. The NKJ renders it this way: When he saw them weeping, "Jesus groaned in the spirit and was troubled". They were not crocodile tears.

Was He grieving because his friend Lazarus was dead? Was He troubled because those around Him were not overcome with grief but with despair, believing there was no hope of seeing Lazarus again? Or was His spirit disturbed because that Satan was ultimately responsible for the pain and heartache and some were laying the blame with God? **Genesis 6:5-6**. We will not know until we have an opportunity to ask Him ourselves someday in eternity and by then it will not matter. What we do know is that once again Jesus did something to change minds and hearts. He revealed He was whom He claimed to be, God in human flesh. He did that by demonstrating His power over death and commanding Lazarus to rise and walk from the tomb. **God alone has power over death**. Try as we may, humans continue to seek control over physical death, yet the reality is that we only have power over life, and sadly that power is growing like an evil beast every day. By the way this was the third occasion that Jesus brought life back to one who was dead. Unlike the first two people, Lazarus was 4 days dead, which helps to explain why Jesus didn't come earlier. There would be no lies or false explanations that Lazarus was just asleep.

Verse 40 reveals that **Jesus is not just a miracle worker but the God of truth**. Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God? Many did. Yet for some there that day, seeing God's glory still wasn't enough to overcome their unbelief. They ran to the Pharisees, and a short time later they would help kill the only One with power to give life to the dead. For the sake of those who still refused to believe, Jesus would demonstrate His glory once again a few weeks later by dying on the on the cross for their sins- and for ours. It is one thing to raise someone from the dead, but quite another to raise oneself from the dead. There can be no greater work or sign of God. Lesser men and lesser gods would have said I am done with you. Because you did not believe I am leaving you to wallow in your grief. It is finished-good luck trying to make yourself better on your own.

It's not that way with the God of Glory and Truth. Jesus is different. Jesus is the God of life and the God of grace, the God of second chances and missed opportunities. He does say it is finished. God's plan to make men holy is complete. I have borne your punishment. The God of Glory says that I have come so that you may have life- and have it more abundantly. Just ask me for it and you will receive it.

In some ways, all of us are like Lazarus, asleep and oblivious to the weeping going on just outside our tomb, wherever or whatever that might be. Matthew 23:37-39. Like Lazarus we need Jesus to bring back life to that which was dead. Jesus is calling us to that new life so that we need not fear death. He doesn't promise us an earthly life free of pain and suffering. He does promise that an earthly life abundant with faith, assurance, and love leads to an eternal life where all is perfect, good, and true. It can be ours if we are willing to listen for and obey His voice while the day is still bright, before darkness falls. Let's continue to praise His name for that promise. Amen.