

Lazarus

Welcome to week two of our study! I hope last week's study engendered a hunger for this week. For me, the more time I put into studying the Word, the hungrier I get! I find it at once nourishing and satisfying, but before I know it, I'm ready for another serving! I hope you are too, because I have some wonderful passages planned for us this week.

This week we will be studying the events surrounding the death of Jesus' dear friend Lazarus. We know that this family held a special place in Jesus' heart. Mary and Martha make other appearances in the Gospels. Most familiar is the story of Mary and Martha found in Luke 10:39-42 which tells of Jesus coming to their home to stay and teach. We also come to know Mary through the story of her anointing Jesus feet with perfume, which John alludes to in our first passage of study this week.

Martha, Mary, and Lazarus would have been very familiar with Jesus' teachings and miracles. Because of their personal knowledge of Jesus, and their faith in him to heal their beloved brother, the two sisters hurriedly dispatched a letter to Jesus desiring him to come quickly to them. This whole story is rife with intense emotion and examples of deep abiding faith in Jesus. In fact, they address him as *Lord* in the opening verses. In this context *Lord*, (Greek, *kyrios*) carries the connotation of being supreme in authority, the one in control: God¹. They recognize and believe him to be who he claims to be – the Son of God (John 11:27).

Lazarus Becomes Sick and Dies

"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." (John 11:4)

Before we begin let's take a moment to come before the Lord. *Heavenly Father, we are grateful for the opportunity to study your Word. We are thankful to be able to read and study about your love for us and the gift of your Son. Lord, bless us with understanding and insight into your word today -Amen.*



I can't wait to get started, so let's jump in with both feet into the story of Lazarus! Open your Bible to John 11 and read verses 1-16. Answer the following questions.

According to v. 5, how did Jesus feel about Mary, Martha and Lazarus?

¹Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary
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When Jesus heard that his friend was gravely ill, what was Jesus' response, both verbal and physical? (v. 4, 6)

Why did the disciples not want to return to Judea? What events recently transpired there that might make the reluctant to return? (See John 10: 22-39.)

- For what offense did the Religious Leaders claim Jesus committed justifying their desire to stone him?
- How did Jesus respond to their charge?
- What were the true motives of the Religious Leaders behind their desire to kill Jesus?

Do you think the disciples were justified in their concerns over returning to Jerusalem?

What do you think Thomas' words in v. 16 reveal about the attitude and understanding of the disciples?

 What do you think Jesus' response in v. 9 means? To what does daylight and night refer?

Jesus employs a metaphor to illuminate the spiritual truth that he is the Light of the World among them. Jesus explains that during daylight one can easily travel from one place to another without fear of stumbling over obstacles because daylight makes them visible. Traveling at night, in darkness, obscures obstacles and easily one can stumble over them. Daylight and darkness

become a metaphor for spiritual understanding versus lack of understanding. Jesus, who is the Light of the World, illumines the way to a life pleasing to God and avoiding the stumbling blocks of sin. Those who believe in Jesus have the Light of the World and will not stumble as they follow Jesus. Conversely, those who do not have faith in Jesus do not have the Light shining within and are in danger of stumbling, falling into sin and away from God.

Taking verses 15 and 4 together. What is Jesus going to reveal through the events of Lazarus' death?

- How will this benefit the disciples and the mourners in Bethany?

- What can God do with any and all trials we face in our own lives? (See Genesis 50:20, Matthew 19:26, Romans 8:28)

- What does this story reveal about God's timing, particularly his delays? (see Philippians 4:19)

By not returning to Bethany until after Lazarus has died, Jesus uses the occasion to remind his followers that he, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord of Life, has authority over both life and death, the living and the dead. All things fall under his dominion. Nothing can happen outside his will, which is the same as the Father's. Even the trials in our life that seem the most horrendous can be redeemed to reveal God's glory. This miracle will glorify the Father, as the power to alter and reverse death can only come from him. It will glorify the Son as it points forward to the resurrection power that resides in him and will alter the events of the crucifixion. This event will strengthen the faith of all who observe it. It will bolster their belief that this Jesus of Nazareth is truly the Son of God as he has claimed, and to which his miracles have attested.

Jesus Comforts Mary and Martha

I am the resurrection and the life.
(John 11:25)

As we continue with the story of the death of Lazarus, let's take a few minutes to pray that the Lord will help us to truly understand the lesson illustrated in these events. Even for Mary and Martha, present with Jesus for his teaching and experiencing his miracles, they too had difficulty

fully understanding who he was. Ask the Lord to help you fully internalize his claim to be *the resurrection* and *the life*. We will be splitting today's scripture passage into two portions to better emphasize the significance of what Jesus is revealing about himself.

Before we get going in our scripture passage for today, let's take a few minutes to explore the timeline of this story. According to John 10:40, we are told that Jesus departed Jerusalem and crossed the Jordan River to the area where John the Baptist had ministered. John 1:28 tells us that John the Baptist ministered on the other side (eastern side) of the Jordan from Bethany, but close enough to the Jordan to baptize there. Likely Jesus was not too far distant from Bethany. We must also give time for a messenger to come with the message to Jesus, perhaps one day. John 11:6 tells us that Jesus stayed where he was two more days. If we give Jesus another day for travel to Bethany, we arrive at four days. It is likely then that Lazarus may have even died before Jesus received the message from Mary and Martha. As we proceed with our study today, we will see a significance to these four days.



Read John 11:17-27 and answer the following questions.

How long had Lazarus been in the tomb when Jesus arrived in the vicinity of Bethany?

What do you think is the significance of the distance to Jerusalem, and the fact that "many Jews" came to comfort them?

Read Ruth 1:1-22. What does the story of Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth reveal about the fate of a family who has lost its' sole provider? What understanding might this impart to the situation of Mary and Martha?

Returning to our scripture passage in John, what does verse 24 reveal of Martha's belief system?

✂ In your own words, what is it that Jesus is asking about Martha's faith in verses 25-26?

- Martha's response reveals three things about Jesus. What does she say and what does it mean?

- To what extent do you think she understands her claim?

Jesus’ question bears a two-fold, or two level, meaning. The first refers to the eternal spiritual realm, and the second to the present physical realm. Jesus has dominion over both realms. Jesus is asking Martha if she believes that he not only has the power, but *is the power*. This is a profound moment in scripture where Jesus proclaims that he is that power. He doesn’t handle or use a divine power, he *is* the origin of that power of life over death.

Martha responds with the right words, but as we will see in verse 39, she has yet to fully grasp that just as Jesus is that authority in the spiritual realm, he is also in the immediate physical realm as well. His power of life and resurrection is not limited to a future spiritual event. Its reality exists in the present physical realm. She is about to experience first- hand the reality of what she claims to believe.

Jesus will follow up this revelation with a miracle in order to allow Mary, Martha, his disciples, the mourners, and even Lazarus to experience what Jesus claims about himself: *He is the resurrection and the life*. Let’s continue on with our scripture passage today.



Read John 11:28-37 and answer the following questions.

What does Mary reveal about her understanding of Jesus in verse 32?

What was Jesus’ response to the mourning and weeping around him? (v.33)

Mark 6: 34 mentions another time when Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. What emotion was he feeling at that time, and what was the result?

In verse 33 Jesus’ emotional response is described with the Greek words *tarassō*² meaning to be “stirred up, agitated and troubled.” His emotions were churned up and he was deeply troubled. The second word used to describe his response is *embrimaomai*³, meaning to have indignation, to blame, to sigh, to groan. What could this response mean? I think it points to the

² Strong’s Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

³ Ibid

fact that he was angered and frustrated over the pain and suffering caused by Death. Verse 38 uses that same *embrimaomai*, translated “groan inwardly” or “to be deeply affected, deeply moved.” That intense emotion stirring anger and frustration also stirs up his compassion. Jesus’ emotions stir the very core of his spirit such that it *requires* a response from him to do something to ease the burden of his sheep. His emotion compels him to action. That action is a miracle that reveals not only his divinity, but also his deep love for his creation. In the gospel of Mark at the Feeding of the 5000, he sees the crowd as “sheep without a shepherd” and “taught them many things”. He fed them miraculous bread to teach them that he is their *provision*, he is *the Bread of Life*. In our passage today, Jesus looks out over a crowd in the throws of mourning the death of Lazarus. Jesus himself is deeply moved and troubled. Verse 35 says, “*Jesus wept.*” Because of his humanity he feels that same sense of loss and grief. His empathy is intense because his love is intense.

✠ What does Jesus’ emotional response reveal about who Jesus is? How does this impact your relationship with him?

Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead

“I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” (John 11:42)

I hope you are finding the story of Lazarus as powerful and emotional as I have. I have to admit that this fresh look at a familiar story has revealed something new to me. Jesus’ intense emotional response to death and the grief and mourning of his friends has touched my heart in a way I’d never experienced before. We are twice told that he was “deeply troubled” by the devastating mourning surrounding him. Our Lord wept over their heart-rending loss. He knows that this event doesn’t end in Lazarus’ death, he told his disciples so at the beginning of the story. Yet, despite knowing what will happen, it appears that the intense emotional outpouring of mourning strikes his heart deeply and compels him to do *something*. *Lord Jesus, we all are so grateful that your word is open to us, available to us, and drawing us in to know you better. Lord, open this dear lady’s heart to feel the depth of your love and friendship through studying these scriptures. Bless her with your Word today and everyday – Amen.*

In our last passage of scripture this week we will finish the story of Lazarus. If you have been working on your homework over a few days, take a few minutes to reread the story beginning at John 11: 1. This will also remind you of details concerning the time transpiring

between Jesus receiving the message of Lazarus' illness (and death) and his return to Bethany. As I mentioned previously, it is possible that Lazarus had died even before Jesus received the message of his friend's illness (see John 11:14).




Our focus today will be on John 11: 38-45. Read the passage if you haven't already, and answer the following questions.

Fill in the blanks from verse 38: "*Jesus, once more _____, came to the tomb.*"

How long had Lazarus been in the tomb?

What does Martha's response to Jesus request to open the tomb imply?

 In Jesus' prayer to the Father, what was the benefit the observers were to receive through this miracle?

- In what state was Lazarus when he came out of the tomb?

- Read Ephesians 2:1-10. In what way does the story of Lazarus illustrate the Ephesians passage?

What were the two reactions of those who saw and experienced this miracle? (v.45)

The fact that Lazarus was dead for four days was highly significant to this Jewish society. It was believed that the spirit of the dead would linger around the body for three days, hoping for a way to re-enter and re-animate that body. By the fourth day the body had been dead for too long had begun to decompose beyond any hope of returning to life. Jesus' arrival on the fourth day, the day which Jews believed that there was no hope for Lazarus to return to life is significant in that it allowed him to show that he truly is life and resurrection beyond doubt. No one could claim that it wasn't Jesus who brought Lazarus back to life.

Jesus' command that the tomb be opened is met with Martha's point that her brother had been dead for four days and there would be, as the NIV phrases it in polite translation, "*a bad*

*odor*⁴. The Greek describes the odor a bit more along the lines of “putrid, rancid, rank, and fetid.” Martha, despite her words of faith in verse 27, believes her brother too far gone to be helped at the present time (in the physical realm). Jesus reminds her to believe and that she would see the glory of God. This moment is the whole point of the story. It is exactly what Jesus had set out to accomplish with his words in verses 14-15: “...for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.” His compassion and grief compel him to resurrect Lazarus now, after he’s been dead four days, but *not* because of an emotional response. This is the opportunity to teach his disciples and followers that *he* is the originator and sustainer of life. Death has no hold against him. The point of the passage is that all who would observe this miracle (those present, as well as us reading about these events 2,000 years later) would experience a taste of the Almighty’s inimitable power and grace. It is his final public miracle and it points forward to the reality of his own future resurrection and ours.

Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb. He restores life *fully* to Lazarus. He is not just wakened from a healing slumber. He is a fully dead man who had begun the decomposition process, but now is completely restored in body. He is fully alive, fully healthy, fully healed, the effects of death are completely reversed and completely gone. Lazarus probably came out of that tomb healthier than ever!

The last point I want to make in regards to this story is that while this sign points to the truth of the resurrection, it also points the way to a spiritual resurrection bringing the sinner to life in Christ. Just as Lazarus is called out of the tomb, the realm of the dead, each of us has been called out of the world of sin into the Kingdom of God. It is a resurrection, a transformation that only Jesus can do for each one of us. We cannot resurrect ourselves. Only he is the one who has the power to forgive sin and restore us to life in him.

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.... But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.” Eph 2:1, 4-5 (NIV)

Personal Reflection:

What fresh new insight have you received in studying these scriptures this week? Have you seen a side of Jesus you hadn’t before? Do you believe that Jesus loves you as intensely as he does Mary, Martha, and Lazarus? Just as he brought Lazarus back to life, fully healed, he has brought you out of the death of sin, and restored you to life in Him. Take a few minutes to write a prayer to Jesus thanking him for what he has shown you this week.

⁴ John 11:39 Or, as the King James Version translates: “Lord, by this time he stinketh”.