

# Jesus Raises Lazarus

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** The Son of God grieves the reality of death and overturns its power.

From the perspective of humanity, death is final. As followers of Jesus, however, we know this is not true. In God's Word we see that Jesus has power over everything, including death. Jesus' raising of Lazarus was the miracle that best exemplified His power over death, and it foreshadowed the greatest miracle of all—His own resurrection.

## Voices from the Church

"Because of who He was, [Jesus] could not but perform miracles."<sup>1</sup>

—Herbert Lockyer

Jesus' miracles always pointed toward a truth He wanted people to know—that He is the Almighty One who brings God's kingdom to earth. In His miracles, we see the extraordinary power of God unleashed in the middle of everyday life.

 Of all the miracles in the New Testament, which one is your favorite, and why?

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In this session, we see how Jesus demonstrated His power over death by raising his friend, Lazarus, from the dead. This miracle story reveals the goodness and sovereignty of God, the curse of death and the power of resurrection, as well as Christ's compassion toward those in pain. As we trust in Jesus—our powerful Friend who conquers death—we bring glory to Him in the midst of terrible circumstances.

## 1. Jesus is the Friend who sometimes delays (John 11:1-7).

*<sup>1</sup> Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." <sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."*

*<sup>5</sup> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. <sup>7</sup> Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."*

In this passage, we see that Lazarus was sick, at the point of death. It's not difficult to understand the feelings his family might have had about him in this situation. They wanted their brother to live! What's more, they knew the person capable of making that happen—Jesus.

Did Lazarus' family want Jesus to know about his sickness and do something about it right now? Absolutely! Wouldn't you? Jesus, however, had a different plan. In verse 4, Jesus says, "This illness does not lead to death," and then, in verse 6, we find out that even after hearing Lazarus was sick, Jesus "stayed two days longer in the place where he was."



Put yourself in Mary and Martha and Lazarus' place. How would you have interpreted Jesus' delay in coming?

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What would you have thought about your friendship?

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Even though Jesus knew how things would turn out, He also wanted His friends to find their trust in God. Trust begins with believing that God knows our situation and cares about us. Through this miracle, Jesus was showing us that God wants us to trust Him no matter the situation.

Trust is an assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of something or someone. It could also be defined as having faith in or being confident about something or someone. And trust was what Martha and Mary needed as they faced this situation.



How would you define *trust* in your own words?

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What are some reasons you would find it difficult to trust God in this kind of circumstance?

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## 2. Jesus is the Friend who is our life (John 11:17-27).

*<sup>17</sup> Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup> Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, <sup>19</sup> and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. <sup>20</sup> So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup> She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."*

Though He sometimes delays, Jesus is the Friend who is, in fact, our life. By the time Jesus arrived on the scene, Lazarus had been deceased for four days. Martha and Mary had the same reaction you or I might have had upon seeing Jesus: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Both of Lazarus’ sisters knew that Jesus had the power to do whatever He wanted. Not only could He give life, but He could renew life as well.

Part of trusting in God means we believe He knows what is best for His children. God knows everything. Thankfully, His knowledge is not limited to our actions and thoughts. He also knows our intentions; He understands why we act the way we do, and He cares about us anyway.

The words Jesus spoke to Martha are true for us today. Jesus is still the resurrection and the life. When you and I trust in what He accomplished on the cross to pay for our sin, we are given everlasting life. No matter how much it seems we are waiting on the Lord here and now, everlasting life already belongs to us. His resurrection life becomes ours. We often say that “Jesus gives life,” but this passage reminds us we can also say that “Jesus *is* life.”



### Voices from Church History

“He leads her to the knowledge of higher truths. Even though she had been inquiring only about the resurrection of Lazarus, he tells her of a resurrection in which both she and those with her would share.”<sup>2</sup>

—John Chrysostom  
(circa 347-407)



What is the difference between seeing Jesus as the giver of life and seeing Jesus as life itself?

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How does Martha’s declaration of faith compare with Peter’s, who said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16)?

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### 3. Jesus is the Friend who grieves the curse of death (John 11:28-37).

*<sup>28</sup> When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”<sup>29</sup> And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.<sup>31</sup> When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.<sup>32</sup> Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.<sup>34</sup> And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.<sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”<sup>37</sup> But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”*

The normal reaction to the loss of a loved one is grief. We all have experienced or will experience this emotion at some point. Jesus was not immune to it either. He loved Lazarus, and He loved Lazarus’ sisters as well. Jesus not only grieved His friend but He wept over His friends’ grief. In Romans 12:15, the Bible exhorts us to “rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” Here we see Jesus living out this principle.



How does Jesus’ expression of grief here communicate God’s compassion for people who suffer?

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What are some practical ways we can grieve with those who grieve?

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Jesus not only grieved over the sadness of the scene. The Creator of humanity feels anger and grief over the consequences of sin and death in our world. We do not experience life the way God originally intended it. And as God's image-bearers, our grief over sin and death reflects His hatred of sin and death. The good news is that grief is not Jesus' last word or action in this passage.

#### 4. Jesus is the Friend who resurrects the dead (John 11:38-44).




*<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, deeply moved again, 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 the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." <sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on*

*account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." <sup>43</sup> When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." <sup>44</sup> The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."*

Imagine the scene here. Lazarus had been dead for four days. Those around the tomb probably held their noses. A four-day old body would certainly have smelled from its decomposition. But something very unexpected happened. Jesus asked for the tomb to be opened, and despite the protests, it was. Jesus then prayed out loud and called out, "Lazarus, come out" (v. 43). And sure enough, Lazarus walked out—with the clothes he was buried in still on him.

Jesus is the Friend who resurrects the dead. He has, as we have seen here, the power to resurrect the physically dead, and He also has the power to raise the spiritually dead. Sin has caused a separation between man and God. This separation can only be bridged through what Jesus accomplished on the cross. We are able to live because He died having paid the penalty of our sin for us. In the context of what Jesus has done for us, our only responsibility is to surrender our life to Him so that He can become our life.

 In what ways does “resurrection” language also apply to us spiritually when we are saved?

 Why is it important to hold together the reality of spiritual resurrection and the hope of physical resurrection?

What we see in this incredible story of the resurrection of Lazarus is two things:

- 1) God’s timing isn’t our timing. He has a different perspective about time than we do.
- 2) God’s view of life isn’t our view of life. He has a different perspective about life than we do.

Have you ever wondered why God allows us to go through what we go through in life, or why He allows certain things and staves off other things? In this story, for instance, why would God allow Lazarus and His sisters to go through this ordeal? It was all for His glory. Again, His perspective is different than ours. Why would He allow you to go through things? *For His glory and our good.*

## 99 Essential Christian Doctrines

### 94. Life After Death

The Bible teaches that when a Christian dies, he or she immediately is with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8; Luke 23:43). This is what some people call an intermediate state, given that the final state for believers takes place at the future resurrection (Rev. 6:10-11). For those who are not in Christ, life after death results in being separated from Christ in a state of suffering, even though future judgment remains (Luke 16:19-31).



What difference does the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus make in our lives today?

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How does trusting God in difficult circumstances bring Him glory?

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## Conclusion

Why is it so important to have the correct perspective about time and life? John 11:4 says, “so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” The reason Jesus resurrected Lazarus was to give glory to God and Himself. Jesus did this so that others would know that He is the only One with the power both to give and to take life—no one else has that power.

What in your life do you want fixed? Are you willing to wait? Are you willing for God to fix it if He wants, as He wants, in His time and for His purpose? The reason Jesus allowed this trial for Lazarus and his family was to bring glory to Himself. He wants to bring glory to Himself through you as well. Will you trust Him?

**CHRIST CONNECTION:** When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He showed that He has power over death. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Because Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, we have full assurance that Jesus will one day defeat death forever and resurrect us from the dead.



# HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

**MISSIONAL APPLICATION:** God calls us to glorify Him in sickness and death, trusting in His power to raise us from the dead.

1. How can we point to the glory of Jesus by remaining faithful to the Lord in the midst of pain and loss?

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2. How should we balance grieving with someone in their grief and testifying to Jesus as the resurrection and the life?

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3. What step of faith will you take for the mission of making Jesus known in the world because He is the resurrection and the life for you?

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# WRITERS

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4. James R. Edwards, *Mark, in The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) [WORDsearch].

**SESSION 12**

1. Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology: Volume 1, The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 243.
2. Charles H. Gabriel, "I Stand Amazed in the Presence," in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: LifeWay Worship, 2008), 237.

**SESSION 13**

1. Herbert Lockyer, *All the Miracles of the Bible, in The All Series* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013) [WORDsearch].
2. Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 62.3, quoted in *John 11-21*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, vol. IVb in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007), 13.



## THE GOSPEL PROJECT CHRONOLOGICAL

A Journey Through the Storyline of Scripture

**Fall 2015**

### *The Story Begins*

God the Creator (Genesis 1–11)

God the Covenant-Maker (Genesis 12–50)

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**Winter 2015-16**

### *God Delivers*

God the Redeemer (Exodus)

God the Lawgiver (Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy)

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**Spring 2016**

### *The Promised Land*

God the Savior (Numbers, Joshua)

God the Judge (Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel)

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**Summer 2016**

### *A Kingdom Established*

God the King (1–2 Samuel)

God All Wise (1 Kings, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes)

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**Fall 2016**

### *Prophets and Kings*

God the Revealer (1–2 Kings, Isaiah)

God the Pursuer (Prophets, 2 Chronicles)

**Winter 2016-17**    *Exile and Return*

God the Sustainer (Daniel, Ezra)

God the Provider (Esther, Nehemiah, Malachi)

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**Spring 2017**    *The Rescue Begins*

God the Son (Gospels)

God Among Us (Gospels)

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**Summer 2017**    *Stories and Signs*

Jesus the Storyteller (Synoptic Gospels)

Jesus the Miracle-Worker (Gospels)



**Fall 2017**    *Jesus Saves*

Jesus the Savior (Gospels)

Jesus the Risen King (Gospels, Acts)

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**Winter 2017-18**    *The Church on Mission*

The Spirit Who Empowers (Acts)

The God Who Sends (Acts)

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**Spring 2018**    *Letters to God's People*

The God Who Directs His People (Epistles)

The God Who Changes Us (Epistles)

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**Summer 2018**    *Come, Lord Jesus*

God's Prisoner (Acts, Epistles)

The God Who Makes All Things New (Epistles, Revelation)