

## The Grim Reaper vs. The Grave Robber

John 11

I thought a good title for this message on the raising of Lazarus from the dead would be "Hello from the other side." Lazarus experienced it before Adele sang it. Death for all of us is unpredictable and certainly inevitable. We may deny it; we may delay it, but ultimately, we all come face to face with the reality of death.

The story we will read will require a miracle beyond anyone's imagination or comprehension. There is a natural human tendency for us to explain away what we don't understand, but when you do, you lose the mystery, and you lose the miracles. You can try to reduce God to the logical constraints of our brains.

In the words of A.W. Tozer, "What you end up with is a god who can never surprise you, never astonish you, never overwhelm you and never transcend you." - A.W. Tozer

G.K. Chesterton said, "How much happier you would be, how much more of you there would be, if the hammer of a higher God would smash your small cosmos." - G.K. Chesterton

In February of 1804, Thomas Jefferson went to work with a pair of scissors creating an abridged version of the Bible minus all of the miracles. He included the teachings of Jesus, but he excluded the miracles. He deleted the virgin birth, the resurrection, and the 34 distinct miracles that Jesus did in between. In the words of a historian, Edwin Gustad, "If a moral lesson was embedded in a miracle, the lesson survived in Jeffersonian Scripture, but the miracle did not. Even when this took careful cutting with scissors."

*"There are those who have an outward religion but they deny the power thereof."* 2 Timothy 3:5

*"The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power."* 1 Corinthians 4:20

How many of you say it would take a miracle to solve your problem?

All kinds of problems arise in families.

*"Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, 'Lord, the one you love is sick.'"* John 11:1-3

### 2 Truths:

- Jesus loves Lazarus.
- Lazarus is sick.

Both of those things can be true at the same time. A lot of people say, "God, if You really love me, maybe You wouldn't let me go through this pain." The reality is God's love doesn't shield you from pain, but when you are in pain, like Mary and Martha, do you bring it to Jesus?

This was a family that Jesus loved. Jesus loves your family too!!

*"Our God is a refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble."* Psalm 46:1

If you have trouble in your family, get the word to Jesus. This family was loved by Jesus, but that didn't make them immune to trouble. The fact that you are going through suffering does not mean that you are not loved by Jesus. You would expect that Jesus would come rushing right at that very moment to help them. Mary and Martha must have wondered where Jesus was. When the Lord delays, sometimes it means that He has some purpose beyond our understanding. We don't blame God for the bad things that happen to us. We blame Him for not keeping the bad things from happening to us.

*“When he heard this, Jesus said, ‘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

This illness does not lead to death, it leads through death. The purpose is to display God’s glory.

*“So that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”* John 11:4

Some of us can’t shake this question. If God loves me, why in the world would He allow me to go through this?

### **5 Reasons We Go Through Pain:**

- Sometimes It Is A Test From God.

God called Abraham to sacrifice his son. It says, *“And God tested Abraham.”* Genesis 22:1. The essence of the Gospel is that God HAS given you more than you can handle. That’s why you need Jesus.

- Sometimes It Is Because Of Our Own Sin.

Remember the woman caught in adultery? Jesus clearly told her, “Go and sin no more.”

- Sometimes It Is Because Someone Sins Against Us.

He cheated. She left. They lied about you. Joseph’s own brothers threw him in a pit and sold him into slavery.

- Sometimes It Is A Demonic Attack Against Us.

There is a real enemy, and he seeks to steal, kill, and destroy. (John 10:10.)

- Sometimes It Is The Result Of A Broken World.

The man born blind in John 9 was suffering because the world he was born into was broken and fallen and it’s part of that broken world.

No matter the reason, Romans 8:28 says, *“And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”*

That’s what Jesus is about to put on display right now, because the circumstances of our life are not the Lord of our life. The sovereign King of the Universe is the Lord of our life. Jesus says, *“It is for the glory of God.”*

### **The deeper the pain, the greater the potential of glory to God.**

It reminds us that His love for us is not demonstrated for us in our current circumstances, His love is demonstrated at the cross. If you were there that day, you’d be saying, “God, where are you?” God would be saying, “Give me a few days. In the right time, this will make sense.”

*“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he remained in the place where he was for two more days.”* John 11:5

Jesus STAYED 2 DAYS LONGER. Do you ever feel like you cried out to God, and He’s not coming? God’s love and apparent cooperation with our demands are not inter-related. Sometimes in our marriage, our health, our prodigal child, our job, we pray and pray and pray and wonder, “Lord, where are you?” He doesn’t show up until His own timing. That’s what’s happening here.

## **It's Not Over Until God Says It Is Over.**

“Never put a period where God puts a comma, and never put a comma where God puts a period.” Charles Crabtree

“Sometimes it looks like God is missing the mark because we are too short-sighted to see what He is aiming for.”  
Oswald Chambers

### **1. The Problem of Death**

*After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.” His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” John 11:11-15*

Lazarus is a friend of Jesus, a good friend. Jesus spent a lot of time with this man and his sisters, Mary and Martha. His friend has died. He was in the grave four days before Jesus arrived at the funeral service. It reminds us that generation after generation after generation has come and gone, and each generation has buried its dead. There is no escaping death. Death does not discriminate! We all die. We all participate. From generation to generation, from decade to decade, from life to life, we have this problem, and it's a problem that medical science can't solve.

We can improve life, but we can't change the fact of death. It's an issue that psychology can't settle, and philosophy can't solve. The ultimate problem is the problem of sin. The Bible says death is linked to sin. Because of sin, death comes, and with death comes sorrow and suffering. Had there been no sin, there would have been no death.

*"The wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23*

The consequences of sin is death, and because of that we all die. And not just physically, but we are spiritually dead in our trespasses and sin. We're all born separated from God. We all are disconnected from God, and ultimately this leads to physical death.

Jesus understands our pain and our sorrow. When Jesus arrives at the little village of Bethany outside of Jerusalem, the Bible says, “Jesus wept.” Tears welled up in our Savior's eyes and began to trickle down His face. He wept openly. He didn't try to hide His tears. He unashamedly, openly wept because He was brokenhearted by the reality of death. It wasn't supposed to be this way. People that He loved were suffering, and He wept with them. Still today He weeps with us, He grieves with us! He shows up in our pain and in our suffering.

If your marriage is dead, invite Jesus into your marriage, and it will come alive again. If your dreams, your career, or your future seems dead, invite Jesus into your life and into your world!

If a dead church will welcome Jesus in, that church will come alive! What we are sharing together as a church is the presence of the living God, Jesus Christ! He is alive! We are alive in Him!

*“On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.” John 11:17*

Jesus isn't a day late and a dollar short or four days late. Why does He wait? The answer is, it was time for Jesus to reveal His resurrection power. Sometimes things go from bad to worse because God wants to reveal more of His grace, more of His love, more of His power, more than we have ever known. Aren't we all a little passive aggressive with God?

### **2. The Presence Of Pain**

*“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” John 11:22*

Martha says “even now” because she’s holding out hope. She’s still believing. Faith is our sixth sense, and you must have faith to keep going and keep trusting and believing. Most miracles take longer than we expect, but that makes us appreciate them more. At some point in most of our lives, we will end up with a dream that is six feet under. That’s when you need resurrection faith. At what point do you give up? Day one? Day two? Day three? Day four?

True faith persists even when circumstances seem impossible or dead. This story teaches us to trust God when He seems late. We sometimes may want a quick fix, but God may have a greater purpose in mind (like showing resurrection power). This gives us confidence and builds our faith during dark times, trusting that God is good even when life is not.

The sentence should end after Martha says, “*If you had been here, my brother would not have died.*” But Martha doesn’t put a period there, she puts a comma. Do you have an “even now” faith?

### 3. The Promise Of Life

“*Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”* John 11:25-26

I AM is a name. It is the name of Almighty God, the Great I AM! It is the personal name that God revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). Jesus often took that name to Himself.

When He says, “I am the resurrection and the life,” it reminds us to say that Easter is more than an experience, certainly more than an emotion. The resurrection is a fact, but before it is a fact, the primary truth of the resurrection is that the resurrection is a Person. He is the resurrection and the life. He is the one who lives! His name is Jesus. The hope of the resurrection is not a dream. It is not a fantasy or wishful thinking. It is the reality of a living Savior who says, “I’m making all things new.”

I AM means that He is eternally past, present, and future. It means because He is the resurrection and the life, He is not the I was; He is the I AM! Because of that, our past can be forgiven. This is good news because we all have a past! Do you ever want a do-over? We often look back, and we see all the mistakes and regrets, defeats and choices that we have made that have not honored God. When we look at our lives, sometimes we are just covered with guilt and shame. One person said, “I just feel like I’m going to spend the rest of my life in the penalty box.”

There are people who could be transformed by the resurrection, but they think they are forever stuck in their past. Spinning your wheels in mud, you just can’t get away from your past. You wonder why you’re not happy. The good news is that we can have a new life because of Jesus and His resurrection!

Jesus said, “*I’ve come that you might have life, and more abundantly.*” John 10:10

If you believe, you can be forgiven of your past. You can be free of the chains, the addictions, and the habits that hold you back. We need a power greater than ourselves. It’s not more willpower. Willpower works for a while, a few days, a few weeks, maybe a few months. Then we find ourselves back doing the same things that we were doing before.

Trying to change your own life is impossible. If you could change yourself, it would have already happened. You can’t, so it won’t happen. We look to self-help: reading books, talking with a friend, taking pills, but no amount of that will enable you to experience genuine change in your life.

There are some good things that help us to make better decisions, but ultimately only Jesus Christ can change the human heart. Jesus alone can change us when we have a living faith in Him, when you build your life on the solid rock of the resurrection. Because the stone was rolled away, and the tomb is empty, and Jesus is now alive!

That’s the promise of the New Testament! That’s the promise of the Bible! The same power (heads up!) that raised Jesus from the dead is alive in us! Resurrection power! No wonder the Apostle Paul said, Philippians 3:10, “*That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.*”

We are going to have problems. We're going to face difficulty. We're going to have trials and even tragedies in our lives. Philippians 4:13, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" Paul said, "I'm ready for anything that comes my way because of the power of Jesus Christ in my life!"

- Our past is forgiven.
- Our present is empowered.
- Our future is full of hope.

Do you think much about the afterlife?

Among the Millennial generation, 18 to 25 year olds, fewer and fewer of these say they believe in God. But more and more of them say they believe in an afterlife. To say "I don't believe in God, but I believe in an afterlife" is confusing.

Jesus said that Lazarus was sleeping. Sleep is good for your health, good for your heart, good for your well-being. You wake up and feel refreshed. Jesus was giving us a picture. Don't be afraid of death. It's like a wonderful rest for your soul. You will wake up in His presence in heaven. Heaven is a real place. It is not a state of mind, not somewhere out there, but very real.

You wonder what heaven is like? What is this earth like? Think of all the good things you enjoy in this life. The pleasures, your family, your friends, the beauty of nature, creation, enjoying a great meal, laughing, talking, exercising, whatever you enjoy: think of that. Then multiply that times eternity. Heaven is not going to be something way off in the distance. In fact, at the end of time when Jesus comes again, the new heavens and the new earth will be one! He's bringing heaven to earth! We will enjoy life as God always planned it. Paradise forever!

Heaven is very real. It is a perfect place where there are no more tears and no more terrorists. There will be no more suffering, no more crying, no more pain, and no more death!

*She replied, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who comes into the world."* John 11:26

You can't rightly love God without right thoughts about him. Doctrine Matters. Theology matters. Part of the reason we study the Bible is because if you put your faith in your feelings, circumstances, etc, then your faith will be all over the place. What you need to do is anchor your faith in the truth—the person and work of Jesus Christ. So when you look around and can't understand why this is happening to you, you can always look to Him and still understand He's got the whole world in His hands and He loves you.

"*Do you believe this?*" Jesus asked it then, and He is asking it today. Do you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? To believe in Him is to never, ever die, but to live forever.

*"And when she had said this, Martha went and called her sister Mary, saying privately, 'The Teacher is here and is asking for you.' So when Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. (Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still in the place where Martha had come out to meet him.) Then the people who were with Mary in the house consoling her saw her get up quickly and go out. They followed her, because they thought she was going to the tomb to weep there. Now when Mary came to the place where Jesus was and saw him, **she fell at his feet** and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'" John 11:28-32*

Mary and Martha say the same thing, with a different tone. They wondered, "What are you doing? Why aren't you moving?" Jesus meets them right where they are. He doesn't correct them, demean them, or make them feel like they can't question Him.

Just a few verses ago, he asked her, "Do you believe?" and she said, "Yes!" Now they're taking action on the belief, and it's uncomfortable. It's always uncomfortable to take action on the things you say you believe. Examples: you know you're supposed to forgive someone and reconcile, but you pick up that phone to make that call. You know in your heart you're supposed to do something radically generous and you sit down with your accountant

to talk it out and suddenly it just doesn't make sense you know the first step of surrendering fully to Jesus is to be baptized but when it comes to signing up or taking that step it's just...easier to put it off.

*“When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ‘Where have you laid him?’ he asked. ‘Come and see, Lord,’ they replied. Jesus wept.”* John 11:32-35

The word for wept is *“embrimasthai”* it is used to describe a horse snorting. Here it must mean that such deep emotion seized Jesus that an involuntary groan was wrung from his heart.” (William Barclay)

What is He so emotional about? He knows what's about to happen and what He is capable of! Jesus is angry with death. He was there at creation — He was there when Adam received his first breath of life —and He knows that death is NOT what we are created for.

Emotions are a gift from God to navigate life. Emotions are terrible decision makers, but emotions are helpful for navigating life. The Bible says, *“Weep with those who weep.”* (Romans 12:15)

Next time a “thing” happens in our society that significantly impacts a group of people within the body of Christ, weep. Jesus didn't just sit back and say, “How did Lazarus die? Was it his fault? What political policies need to change as a result of his death?” No, He just wept. In a world full of fact checkers and real life crime enthusiasts, we are called to just weep with people. Stop trying to find answers and arrive at conclusions so fast and just weep. You cannot simultaneously empathize and be defensive.

*“Thus the people who had come to mourn said, ‘Look how much he loved him!’ But some of them said, ‘This is the man who caused the blind man to see! Couldn't he have done something to keep Lazarus from dying?’”* John 11:36-37

There's always a critic. If you're a leader, get used to criticism.

*“Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ‘Take away the stone,’ he said. ‘But, Lord,’ said Martha, the sister of the dead man, ‘by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.’ Then Jesus said, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?’”* John 11:38-40

#### **4. The Power Of A Miracle.**

*“Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out.”* John 11:43-44

This is a prophetic image of Jesus' own resurrection This is a picture of our salvation. Ephesians 2:5 says, *“We were DEAD in our sins, but he made us ALIVE in Christ.”*

If you've ever put your faith in Jesus Christ, it's because Jesus called you out of the grave. TODAY Jesus is calling you by name and telling you to come out of your grave.

*“The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, ‘Take off the grave clothes and let him go.’”* John 11:44

Why is it that His first command is to take off the grave clothes? Because living people don't wear dead people clothes. The reason Jesus calls us to repent of our sin is because, for those in Christ, we aren't the same person anymore! You don't have to do the things you used to do because you are not the person you used to be! The old you is dead, and the new you is alive in Christ.

The enemy wants to define you by your past scars. You are that addiction. You are that affair. You are the substances you take. You are the mistakes. You are the sins. You are the biggest pain point of your past.

Jesus comes along and tells us that HE is the only one who gets to tell us who we are. The moment you surrender your life to Jesus Christ, you just experienced the biggest thing that has ever happened in your life.

YOUR RESURRECTION. You can start new today. Start a fresh relationship with Jesus.

Do you believe??

- Lazarus Lived Two Lives.

God intends for us to live two lives. There comes a moment when we put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The best guess seems to be about 30 years Lazarus lived after he died. Church tradition offers two versions of what happened to Lazarus after his resurrection. One tradition holds that he and his sisters made their way to the island of Cypress where Lazarus was the First Bishop of Kition. The Church of Saint Lazarus in the modern city of Larnaca is believed by some to be built here over his second tomb. Isn't it fun saying "second tomb"? His second tomb in which he was buried some 30 years after his first death. A second church tradition holds that Lazarus and his sisters ended up in Marseille, France, where Lazarus was hiding in a tomb and eventually died by beheading during the persecution ordered by Emperor Domitian.

## 5. The Potential Of Freedom

*"The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.'" John 11:44*

This miracle doesn't just foreshadow the resurrection of Christ, it foreshadows yours! In Jewish burial customs, Lazarus would have had about 100 pounds of graves clothes on. Jesus turned a tragedy into a comedy. Can you imagine seeing a dead person, and he didn't walk out. He was hopping out like a bunny. God turns sorrow into laughing. You know what, when we sin, our soul is wrapped in grave clothes. Sin buries us alive. Sin makes a mummy out of us, and if you keep sinning, it will weigh you down like 100 pounds of grave clothes. But Jesus is calling you out!

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25-26*

*"Yes, Lord." John 11:27*

One little "yes" can change your life.

One little "yes" can change your eternity.