

**Tomb Raider** John 11:38-57 [www.bible-sermons.org](http://www.bible-sermons.org) January 25, 2009

We'll pick back up the story of the raising of Lazarus with Jesus on His way to the tomb. Tears were streaming down His face as He entered into the pain of his dear friends Martha and Mary. The guests saw the tears and commented on Jesus' love for Lazarus. Jesus wasn't crying for Lazarus. He was about to raise Lazarus. Their total lack of understanding and distortion of the enormity of what was taking place angered Jesus. <sup>38</sup> *Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb.* This is a confrontation of Life with death. This is proof that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, but the crowd sees Jesus defeated by death. No wonder He snorted in indignation. Sin so distorts what is happening that reality appears upside down.

*It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.* I told you last week that this actual tomb was discovered in the 1870s. It was a cave that had been excavated further to make burial chambers. The ossuaries (limestone boxes) of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were discovered inside. Today the natural cave entrance side has been sealed. In front of that cave is the Church of St. Lazarus. Another entrance was hewn from above with a stairwell that goes down into the burial chamber. You have to pay the Palestinian Authority to enter.

This was a common type of burial for wealthier Jews of the early first century. The vertical walls of limestone, often found in abandoned quarries, were carved into a main hall, a smaller vestibule with horizontal shelves in the wall. A pit in the hall served as a place for the body to decompose. After a year, the bones were placed in an ossuary and put on the shelf. Lazarus' body would have been in the pit covered with spices to cover the smell of decomposition. The stone kept out predators and thieves, but also kept the stench within the tomb.

<sup>39</sup> *"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."* The lady that confessed that even now she believed that God would give Jesus whatever He asked was now voicing some doubt. (John 11:22) The reason the Jews believed the dead could not be revived after three days was that the spirit of the dead person, seeing the decomposition of their body, would not want to reenter it. Did Martha really believe?

Sometimes we say that God can do anything and then when someone challenges us to walk away from some sin in our life, we just don't think God is strong enough to help us do that. We say we believe God can do anything, but then we expect things to continue as they have been. Do we really believe? Most of the time we hedge our bets. We say He can, but if He doesn't... We are being completely honest that at times we don't know God's will, yet we know He can do miracles. Other times we have heard from the Holy Spirit and we can say with conviction that we know God will answer. It sounds like Martha believed, and yet, like us, she didn't know for sure if it was God's will.

<sup>40</sup> *Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"* Actually, what Jesus said was, "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." If you believe in Jesus, you

**Commented [notes1]:** John 11:22 (NIV)  
22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

have life. Having life is to see the glory of God. Jesus also said, "Your brother will rise again." Martha is being challenged to believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. (John 11:25) The disciples had the same challenge. We have the same challenge. If we believe, we will see the glory of God. We will have life. We will see the heart of God manifest in the world as we pray His kingdom into the earth.

**Commented [notes2]:** 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; John 11:25 (NIV)

We saw the glory of God when Gloria's macular degeneration disappeared. We saw the glory of God when Cathy was restored to health after being run over by a car. We have seen the glory of God in the Potter's Hand productions. We have seen the glory of God in the transformed lives of some of people in our congregation. "If you believed, you would see the glory of God! He who believes in me will live!" We have seen Jesus resurrect some lives that the world gave up on. We've seen spiritually dead people come to life. Jory just told you his own resurrection story. He will never die the second death. (Revelation 2:11) He possesses life.

**Commented [notes3]:** 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death. Rev 2:11 (NIV)

Those who were around Jesus still weren't quite sure what they believed about Him. He told them earlier that He was glad that the circumstances had Him arrive after the death so that they might believe. (John 11:15) Jesus knew what was about to happen. The Spirit of God had revealed it to Him.

**Commented [notes4]:** 15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." John 11:15 (NIV)

*41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."* This was Jesus' prayer. Notice that He didn't pray that Lazarus would be restored to life. It was a prayer of thanksgiving and gratitude for already being heard. It was also a prayer of revelation in that it revealed the reason why He prayed aloud, so those who heard would believe that the Father sent Him. (John 20:31)

**Commented [notes5]:** 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:31 (NIV)

Jesus' use of the term Father is found only a few places in the Old Testament (Isaiah 63:16) and in a Qumran scroll. It was fairly unusual. Jesus saw Himself in a special relationship with God as the one and only Son (John 10:36). He thanked the Father for having heard Him in the past tense. He apparently had already prayed about this situation and heard the Father instruct Him to call Lazarus from the grave.

**Commented [notes6]:** 16 But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name. Isaiah 63:16 (NIV)

In that age, some believed that people possessed magical powers. Some Jews thought righteous men could ask extraordinary things of God. Romans and Greeks thought that sons of god came into earth as humans and performed miracles. Jesus' prayer showed them that it was all about looking to God. Jesus could thank God that His prayers were always heard because He always prayed what was in accord with the will of God. (1John 5:14) That is often the difference between His prayers and ours. We are sometimes confused about what is God's will but Jesus never was.

**Commented [notes7]:** 36 what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? John 10:36 (NIV)

Jesus prayed aloud this prayer of gratitude so that others would know He was sent from God. That is what this miracle is all about. It is verification that He is the resurrection and the life. This prayer will help those within the sound of His voice make that connection. That is why He prayed it.

**Commented [notes8]:** 14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 1 John 5:14 (NIV)

Some scenes in Scripture are so powerful that I think we need to visualize them. Can you see Jesus and the crowd in front of the mouth of that cave? It could have been a

group of people about the size of the crowd here this morning. A group of men come forward to roll the stone away. When Jews buried the dead, they tied the hands and feet in place with strips of linen. They laid the body on a linen sheet twice the length of the person to cover them on both sides. It was called the "traveling robe". Something similar to a modern day bandana was tied over the head and face. Everyone is looking at each other in disbelief. (Person 1) "Can Jesus really do what Elijah and Elisha had done in Scripture?" (1Kings 17:21; 2Kings 4:34-35) (Person 2) "He said God heard His prayer? What does that mean?" And then *Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"* (Person 3) "What is He doing? Does He really expect Him to walk out of the tomb?"

They had seen his dead body. Four days earlier most of them had seen him placed in the tomb. They had cried their eyes out for the first three days with their friends, Martha and Mary. <sup>44</sup> *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."* Literally, "Untie him!" (Lazarus shuffles out of the tomb.) Fright, shock, disbelief, all kinds of emotions just swept over the crowd, but then it began to settle in. (Person 1) "Who can do such a thing? Who has authority to speak to the dead?" The words came back to Martha, "Even though he dies, yet shall He live. Do you believe this?" She certainly does now! Then exuberant joy in tears and laughter as they untie Lazarus in amazement. Someone might have said in awe, (Person 2 sniffing the toward the tomb and then toward Lazarus) "The grave still stinks but Lazarus doesn't!" And Lazarus might have responded, "You don't smell so bad yourself."

Then imagine the questions to Lazarus. (Person 3) "What did you see? What was it like to be dead?" (Person 1) "Did you see Abraham?" And on and on... I would have liked to ask a few of my own, wouldn't you? And then the celebration must have begun. People who thought they had no more tears were now crying tears of joy. It was a little foretaste of the Day of Resurrection when all will rise at the voice of Jesus like the wind of the Spirit on the valley of bones. (Ezekiel 37:9-10) Someone once said that it is a good thing Jesus used Lazarus name. If He just said "Come out", every dead body on earth would have risen.

It was said of the prophet Samuel that God let none of his words fall to the ground. (1Samuel 3:19) His life was so righteous, that God honored everything he said. If God was faithful to honor every word of that prophet, could the word of His only begotten Son, the Flawless One, ever fail?

Now, I want you to realize something. Jory and I and many of you are just as much miracle as Lazarus. We were dead in our sins. (Ephesians 2:1) Our hearts were hardened against the love and goodness of God. We justified our sins and rebelled against our loving God, but by His grace, His word entered our heart. (1Peter 1:23) We heard Jesus call us from our grave, and we shuffled into the fellowship of other believers. Someone had to come and help us untie our hands and feet that were bound in patterns of sin. Our head was covered with a cloth that prevented us from seeing the world around us as it really is. (2Corinthians 4:4) Our minds were darkened to the truth, but then, as the veil lifted, we could see!

**Commented [notes9]:** 21 Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!" 1 Kings 17:21 (NIV)

**Commented [notes10]:** 34 Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm. 35 Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. 2 Kings 4:34-35 (NIV)

**Commented [notes11]:** 9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army. Ezekiel 37:9-10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes12]:** 19 The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. 1 Sam 3:19 (NIV)

**Commented [notes13]:** 1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, Eph 2:1 (NIV)

**Commented [notes14]:** 23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 1 Peter 1:23 (NIV)

**Commented [notes15]:** 4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 2 Cor 4:4 (NIV)

We also needed the traveling clothes to be transformed into another kind of traveling clothes, not ones to cover us in death, but ones to see us through this temporal life. Those clothes were transformed into the righteousness of Christ that covered our nakedness. (Romans 13:14) We found ourselves in newness of life, and all of heaven celebrated! (Luke 15:7)

The miracle served its purpose, many believed. Not everyone was happy about this miracle of miracles though. <sup>47</sup> Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. <sup>48</sup> If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." "Let Him go on like this..." you mean raising the dead and healing the incurable? Did they even realize what they were saying?

There was a very real fear that the independence of the Jews would be revoked. The Jews were the only nation under Roman dominion that was allowed to worship their own God. They were also allowed to take care of most of their own internal affairs. Their "place" referred to the temple. In a number of other Scriptures, we see the Temple referred to as "the place". (Acts 6:13-14; 21:28) Jews feared losing the freedom to worship in their own Temple because they had lost that freedom a number of times in the past. They had lost the freedom to rule themselves and they did not want to lose it again. The irony is that they lost both their place and nation because of their rejection of Jesus. The revolt against Rome and consequential destruction would not have taken place had they accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Here was God in the flesh doing what only God could do, doing what they revered their greatest prophets for doing in an even greater way, and they are resisting God all over again to their demise.

<sup>49</sup> Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! <sup>50</sup> You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." Caiaphas held the office of high priest for 18 years, which meant he was great at pleasing Rome. This probably had to do with money derived from the business within the Temple. Many other High Priests only served for a year before they were replaced. It was thought that the High Priest could at times unknowingly say things that had a different meaning, a deeper meaning than they meant even without realizing it because of the office they held. There were several examples in history of that very thing. We can say it was better for us that Jesus died for us than that we perish. Thank God He was willing to take our place! Of course that is not what Caiaphas meant. He believed it was necessary to kill Jesus to keep the Romans from taking over the government in a bloody battle.

There were also rabbinical discussions about whether or not one person could be sacrificed to save many other Jewish lives. There was a Biblical example that caused the debate. (2Samuel 20:21) Caiaphas obviously came down on the side of letting one die to save others, only the way he used the expression was that they had to kill Jesus to keep Him from deceiving the people into following Him against Rome. John believed Caiaphas was unwittingly predicting that Jesus was dying for the sins of the nation, <sup>52</sup> and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. John was not writing just about the Diaspora, the Jews

**Commented [notes16]:** 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.[ Romans 13:14 (NIV)

**Commented [notes17]:** 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. Luke 15:7 (NIV)

**Commented [notes18]:** 13 They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. 14 For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." Acts 6:13-14 (NIV)

**Commented [notes19]:** 28 shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place." Acts 21:28 (NIV)

**Commented [notes20]:** 21 That is not the case. A man named Sheba son of Birci, from the hill country of Ephraim, has lifted up his hand against the king, against David. Hand over this one man, and I'll withdraw from the city." The woman said to Joab, "His head will be thrown to you from the wall." 2 Sam 20:21 (NIV)

who lived in foreign nations, but also of the Gentiles who would place their faith in Christ as well, as was predicted in the prophets and observed by John during the time in which he wrote this gospel. (Isaiah 49:6)

*53 So from that day on they plotted to take his life.* Amazing isn't it! "He's doing too many miracles, giving too many proofs. We've got to kill Him!" How hardhearted! How blind! Jesus was interfering with their agenda. They were determined to kill Him regardless of the proofs and the pleadings of Jesus for them see and consider.

Some today are determined to kill Him in their conscience. They know what He says. They don't doubt He is God's one and only, but they have another agenda. They don't want to bow the knee. They want to be their own god. He offers us life to the full (John 10:10), but many are deceived into thinking their way is better. Rebellion is so fixed in their heart that they murder Christ in their conscience. We have all been there at one time or another.

Jesus went to Ephraim, probably the Old Testament town of Ephron (2Chronicles 13:19) about 20 miles north of Jerusalem. It was almost Passover when Jesus would make His last trip to Jerusalem. Jesus' last days of training His disciples took place there.

As the Passover approached, many Jews came early for ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. Most of them lived near Gentiles who buried their dead by their houses. Touching the grave meant a cleansing had to be done before they could participate in the Passover. That was a week long process, so they had to come to Jerusalem early. The city glistened as all the tombs were whitewashed so that people would not accidentally touch them and be defiled. (Numbers 19:11-12) As the crowds gathered the talk was all about Jesus. Would He risk capture by coming to the Passover? Would He declare Himself to be Messiah?

Everyone was under orders to report any sightings of Jesus. The penalty for failing to do so would probably be expulsion from the Temple grounds, the inability to take part in the Passover. Tensions were high. A showdown of the Jewish officials and the One who raises the dead was inevitable. (Luke 7:14-15)

There is no denying that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. If you believe in Him, even though you die, you will live. What a promise! What security and peace that gives us who believe in Him! But I want to ask you if there is some area of your heart and mind that you refuse to allow the Giver of Life to enter? Would you rather have death in that area of your life just to have your own way? Can you see that the life that Jesus brings is good, and everything that rejects Him is evil? Are you afraid that following Jesus will mean the loss of something? That was what the religious leaders feared. They valued something more than God. They loved their Temple and their position as overseers of their nation more than God, and so they lost it all. If you are unwilling to follow Jesus in some area of your life, more than likely it is because you love that thing more than you love God. You have a distorted view of what is of value. Will you invite Jesus into that area of your life this morning and start experiencing life to the full?

**Commented [notes21]:** 6 he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."  
Isaiah 49:6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes22]:** 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.  
John 10:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes23]:** 19 Abijah pursued Jeroboam and took from him the towns of Bethel, Jeshanah and Ephron, with their surrounding villages.  
2 Chron 13:19 (NIV)

**Commented [notes24]:** 11 "Whoever touches the dead body of anyone will be unclean for seven days.  
12 He must purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third and seventh days, he will not be clean.  
Num 19:11-12 (NIV)

**Commented [notes25]:** 14 Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!"  
15 The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.  
Luke 7:14-15 (NIV)