

## Raising Lazarus From The Dead

This sermon was preached in Shalom Church, Singapore in 2004.

### Scripture Reading: **John 11**

Is there anything else that we can think of, which Jesus has not done? He has turned water into wine. He has healed a dying boy. He has healed a man paralysed for 38 years. He has fed 5000 men with 5 loaves and 2 fish. He has healed a man born blind. What else is there for Him to do? What about raising the dead? Can He do it?

*"Yes He can! That's exactly what He has done here,"* replies our text in **John 11**. This miracle --- the raising of Lazarus from the dead --- is said to be the greatest miracle that Jesus has done. Actually, it is not the greatest, for there is one coming that is even greater. But we will rest content to say that it is the greatest, up to this point in the **Gospel of John**. It is also true that this is not the first time or the only time Jesus has raised the dead. He has raised the daughter of Jairus --- **Mark 5**. He has raised the only son of a widow at Nain --- **Luke 7**. Therefore, this raising of Lazarus in **John 11** is the third time Jesus has done it.

But there is a big difference between Lazarus' resurrection and the first two. Jairus' daughter and the widow's son --- they were both came back to life within 24 hours of their death. Sceptics might mischievously suggest that that young girl and that young man may not have been really dead! Maybe the doctors make a mistake in giving the death certificate too quickly. Maybe they just fainted. So it is just 'resuscitation', not 'resurrection'. But no such mischievous suggestions can be entertained here in **John 11**, not at all. We are told clearly that Lazarus has been dead for 4 days. Not just dead, but dead and buried. Not just dead and buried, but dead and buried and starting to rot! Everyone present at that time knows that. Dead for four days, buried and starting to rot, and yet Jesus raised him from the dead --- who has ever heard of such things being done! This is

why this miracle has been named the greatest that Jesus has done. It is also called the greatest because it deals with man's last enemy --- **death**.

**Death** - to many a taboo subject, a matter most feared. We have developed many nicer terms to talk about death --- *passing away, passing on, gone upstairs, graduated, . . . .* This only shows our fear and abhorrence of it. To the unbeliever, death is the grim reaper. Woody Allen, a rather famous Hollywood actor, said this: *It's not that I'm afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens.* Death is a taboo subject and a most hatred thing because it is something we cannot conquer. Facing many problems in life, man can do many things and try to do many things to deal with them. But come face-face with death, and we are helpless. Helpless, and hopeless!

Isn't this the picture we are confronted with here in **John 11**? The gloom, the sorrow, the hopelessness and helplessness! Lazarus' two sisters can weep and mourn, but they cannot bring Lazarus back to life. Those sympathetic Jews can come to attend the funeral, to say words of comfort, to sympathise and support, but they cannot bring Lazarus back to life. Everyone is stumped. Everyone, except Jesus! The moment He appears on the scene, the whole scene changes. It changes from gloom to gladness, from a funeral to a party! What no man can do, this Man does. He raises a dead and buried and rotting Lazarus back to life! Like the other miracles in **John**, this miracle is also a sign --- a sign to tell us about Jesus Christ. Once again, it tells us that Jesus is the Christ, that He is the Son of God. God is the Giver of Life, and only God can bring a person back to life. Jesus has done it here, and you can have but one conclusion: He is God.

Speaking to the disciples of John the Baptist, Jesus said, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; **the dead are raised up** and the poor have the gospel preached to them." When God sent His appointed Saviour into this world, among other things He will do, He will raise the dead. Jesus has done it here, and you can but have one conclusion: He is the God-appointed Saviour, He is the Christ. So once again, this miracle is meant to lead us to see, to see without any shadow of doubt, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. In fact, the focus is even sharper. To use the very own words of Jesus, we are meant to see that Jesus is the Resurrection and the

Life. He is the Resurrection --- He can raise the dead, He can conquer death. He is the Life --- He can give life, a life that not even death has any power against. Only one response is fitting. O bow down and worship Him --- He is God. Oh, submit and follow Him --- He is Christ and Lord. Worship Him now, submit to Him now and follow Him now, now and for all eternity!

The sermon this morning will have three sections. We will look at **THE MIRACLE ITSELF**, then **THE ADDITIONAL LESSON**, and finally **THE PERSONAL CHALLENGE**.

### **THE MIRACLE ITSELF.**

This is a funeral. The issue is death, nothing short of death. We have no mention of the parents. We assume that they have already died, leaving the three of them --- Martha, Mary and Lazarus. The only male in the family is now sick, in fact very sick. Imagine the anxiety and grief as the two sisters see their brother going from bad to worse medically. Finally, the moment comes --- he has died! The sorrows, the tears, the pain, the helplessness, the hopelessness. They buried him on the very same day he died --- that's the practice of the Jews. One day has passed, two days have passed, three days have passed. It is now the fourth day since Lazarus death. The tears are still flowing and the sorrows have not been removed. Here comes Jesus. And within the next few hours, the whole situation is reversed. Tears have given way to laughter, sorrows have been replaced by joy. Who makes the difference?

Jesus Christ! He has raised Lazarus from the dead! Just pause and ponder this, my dear friends. Jesus Christ makes the difference, the real difference, all the difference. When the Resurrection and the Life comes upon the scene, the funeral becomes a party! How did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead? Fix your eyes now on **verses 38-44**, especially **verse 43**. A prayer to God, and then a simple 3-word command: *Lazarus, come forth!*

Once, again we are confronted with the majestic simplicity in which Jesus performed His miracles. No shouting, no dancing around, no elaborate rituals, nothing. Just a simple 3-word command: *Lazarus, come forth!* This is something none of us can do, and this is something Jesus has done. And done in such a fact-of-the-matter, such ease, such simplicity. Oh feel the impact of this, dear friends! The majestic simplicity, and the immense power! It has been point out that if Jesus has omitted the name 'Lazarus', all who were dead then would have risen!! Oh the power of Jesus! No touching or no shaking of Lazarus' dead body, no elaborate rituals. Just a word of command! And Lazarus stood up and walked out of the tomb!! The giving of life to Lazarus was instantaneous. Immediately, he is alive! Friends, let the scene at the tomb sink in slowly.

Now, what is the message? The message comes to us at two levels.

- 1. *No thing is too difficult for Jesus to handle!*** Death is our last enemy, the problem we cannot conquer. Jesus has conquered it. Man is helpless before death, but Jesus is all-victorious. If Jesus can conquer our biggest problem, is there anything else that He can't conquer for us? I say this to the Christians especially. That marriage that does not seem to be able to get out of its regular conflicts and tensions; that child that is so rebellious, or that has that very special learning difficulty; that relationship with that parent, or that friend, or that Christian, that seems impossible to mend; Jesus can handle it!! Remember He is God, the Almighty God. If death is no problem for Him, then nothing is a problem for Him!! Do what Martha and Mary did in **verse 3**. Bring it to Jesus, and leave it there. Leave it to Him to handle it for us, as He sees fit.
- 2. *No one is too difficult for Jesus to save!*** We are face-face with physical death here. From the human viewpoint, physical

death is the ultimate. But in truth, it is not the ultimate. Physical death is a figure, as well as the effect of another death infinitely more dreadful. It is spiritual death. Spiritually, we are dead, all of us. We have rebelled against God in Adam. Physical death is one of the consequences of our spiritual death. And eternal death will be the ultimate consequence of our spiritual death --- to be eternally separated from God, the Source of Life. Physical death brings us sorrows and tears. Physical death conveys the idea of separation, separation from our loved ones. Physical death, real as it is, is also meant to convey to us truths about spiritual and eternal death. The sorrows and tears of our lives today is the result of our spiritual death, of our rebellion and therefore separation from God. And our eternity will be one of everlasting separation from God, one of everlasting sorrows and tears.

But Jesus can change all that! Just as Jesus can raise Lazarus physically from the dead, so Jesus can raise you and me spiritually from the dead. This is the deeper meaning of His declaration, "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" Not only can He raise dead people from the dead. Not only will all men be raised from the dead by His power on the Last Day. He can also raise spiritually dead sinners. Raise you and me TODAY! And He can give us life, eternal life, the life that not even physical death can conquer. ***No one is too difficult for Jesus to save!*** Yes, even when we are rotting spiritually, when we give out terribly foul smell!

Friends, you may not like to hear this, but this is the truth. We are not just dead spiritually. We are decomposing spiritually. And the people around us can smell it! The mess we create, the problems we bring, the sins we commit!! Dear Jesus, I am dead and rotting spiritually. Is there any hope for me? Jesus says, "*If I can raise a dead and rotting Lazarus, I can raise you!*" By a simple word, though dead as you are, Jesus can give you life, spiritual life, eternal life. How is it done? None of us know the

full details, and thanks be to God, we don't have to know. But it can be done, and it being done, and it can be done to you today. Why hear this sermon, if this blessing of spiritual life and eternal life is not going to be yours from today onwards? Oh friends, despite the deadness in you, and you might feel just how dead you are spiritually, I call you now --- call out to Jesus, even if it is a feeble cry. "*Jesus, have mercy on me and raise me from my spiritual death!*"

And oh Christians, pray for the one sitting next to you, for your parents, for your children, for your friends. They are so dead that they can't even pray. But you can, and so plead with Him: "*Jesus, have mercy on him, and raise him from his spiritual death!*"

We have seen **THE MIRACLE ITSELF**, and noted its message: *No thing is too difficult for Jesus to handle, no one is too difficult for Jesus to save.*

We come now to the second section: **THE ADDITIONAL LESSON.**

There is an additional lesson for the Christian here: *Trust Jesus, He loves you.* Fix your eyes now on **verses 1-16**. With the condition of Lazarus worsening by the day, Martha and Mary must be hoping that Jesus will be here. They were convinced that if Jesus is here in Bethany, Lazarus would be healed. "*If only Jesus is here!*" This must be on the lips and minds of these two sisters, as they watch their brother sinking lower and lower. It was the very first words each sister say to Jesus when they saw Him. "*Lord, if You have been here, my brother would not have died.*" Imagine the scene. They have informed Jesus, and now they wait for Him, believing that He loves them and that He will not leave them in their troubles. At the door, waiting for Jesus, straining their eyes to see His shadow; Return inside to see Lazarus, no improvement, in fact getting worse; out at

the door again, waiting, hoping, longing; come in again, worse, worse, worse . . . .

*Oh Lord, come! Where are You, Lord? Where will You come?* Did Jesus know that Lazarus is sick? **Verse 4** confirms that He knows. What did He do next? He made two comments about the sickness (**verse 4**), and then stayed two more days in the place where He was (**verse 6**). In fact, He only arrived at Bethany 4 days after Lazarus has died. Does it not appear cruel and heartless? He can heal Lazarus, and spare all of them those sorrows and anxiety and tears. Why did He not do it? Why did He not come?

We generally interpret any delay in giving help as cruel, because our view is, all pain that can be avoided should be avoided. Not only that, but we will say of 'help' what we say of 'justice'. Help delayed is help denied. So observers, and most of us included, will say, "*He does not care! How cruel and heartless a conduct!*" But is the interpretation correct? Sandwiched between **verse 4** and **verse 6** is **verse 5**. And what does **verse 5** says? Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. This is as clear as you can get about the love of Jesus. He loves them. He does love them, no doubt about it. And then note how **verse 6** begins: *So, Therefore, . . .* He loves them, and so He stayed away for 2 more days! The ways of God does look very strange to us at times! The delay is nothing but the delay of love. The silence is nothing but the silence of love. I know that when we are in that kind of a situation, it is very hard for us to believe that Jesus loves us. But we must also know this, that we do not comprehend the ways of Jesus in their completeness. Jesus is God, and we are but humans, and fallen ones as well. Trying to understand every conduct of Jesus is like an ant trying to understand every behaviour of a man. Yes, there is delay, but the delay is not final. Jesus finally came, four days later. God is the best time-keeper. He created time. He is never late for His appointments. He came just to offer a word of condolence? No! He came, and completely reversed the situation, so much so that the funeral became a party!! At the end of the day, Lazarus is alive, Martha and Mary and Lazarus and all the disciples present have a deeper understanding of who Jesus is.

To quote the words of Lydia Leech,  
*Some day He'll make it plain to me,  
Some day when I His face shall see;  
Some day from tears I shall be free,  
For some day I shall understand.*

What is the additional lesson here? It is this: *Trust Jesus, He loved you.*

Finally, let us come to **THE PERSONAL CHALLENGE.**

Look now at **verse 45** to the end of the chapter. No one can remain unaffected, no one can really ignore Jesus. **Verse 45** outlines one type of response. They saw what Jesus did, understood the sign, and believed in Jesus.

**Verses 46-57** outline another type of response. They admitted that a miracle has happened, but denied the Miracle-Worker. They admitted that a miracle has happened but opposed the Miracle-Worker. There is no clearer evidence of man's twisted nature and determined rebellion against God than what we find here. How could they be plotting the death of Jesus when Jesus has raised a dead and buried and rotting man from the dead? Isn't it true that only God can do a thing like this? Isn't it true that this is a sign that Jesus is the Saviour sent by God? Never mind the evidence. Jesus must be removed else our lifestyle will be affected!

Friends, I wonder if this is how you talk and reason inside your hearts? I can give you proofs after proofs, evidence after evidence about Jesus and His claims, the Bible and its truthfulness. And it is all in vain, because you have already made up your mind. Never mind what

is said, what is presented, I will have nothing to do with Jesus. Because I will not want to change my life, the way I am living now!!! Friends, I call you to consider this.

If you reject Jesus, you are rejecting the resurrection and the life. This means you are choosing death, you are signing your own death warrant. Why would you want to do a thing like this? Why? Why? Why? Friends, we see two different responses from the people to this stupendous miracle. Some turned and believed, others remained in their unbelief, and increased their hatred of Jesus. Which group do you belong this morning? You have to answer this question personally.

The miracle also presents a challenge to believers. The challenge comes in the form of **verse 25 & 26**. Jesus says, "*I am the Answer.*" He did not say, "*I have the answer.*" Then He asks Martha, "*Do you believe?*" Dear brothers and sisters, what will be your answer? In your pains and perplexities, amidst your tears and troubles, Jesus says to you, "*I am the Answer. Do you believe?*" Oh that we may fall on our knees and say to Him, "*My Lord and my God, I believe. Help my unbelief.*"