

**The Gospel of John (69);  
Jesus with Lazarus and His Sisters (4)**

**Introduction:**

Let us turn once again to John 11. We have been working through the passage before us for some time, in which we read of Jesus raising his friend, Lazarus, from the dead. We first considered the occasion when Jesus first learned that his friend, Lazarus, was sick, and determined after two days to travel to him (11:1-16). We then examined our Lord's interaction with the two sisters of Lazarus, first with Marsha (11:17-27), and then with Mary (11:28-37). We now arrive to the passage that relates to us the wondrous miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (11:38-44).

This miracle has application for us in several ways. Here, of course, (1) we see the power of the Lord Jesus displayed before us, who can raise the physically dead from the grave, even after decomposition has begun its work. (2) But we also see prefigured our own future resurrection from the dead when we will hear the voice of the Son of God calling forth our bodies from death unto eternal life. (3) It also illustrates, however, of the spiritual resurrection that takes place when any and every soul becomes a Christian, a humble, repentant, trusting believer in Jesus Christ. The event of salvation is the Lord Jesus imparting spiritual life to the one who is spiritually dead. And then, of course, (4) this even points to our Lord's resurrection from the dead, when on the third day after His crucifixion, He rose triumphantly from the dead, securing and assuring our own participation in the resurrection life that He bestows on us by His grace. We will touch on all of these applications today, Lord willing.

Let us read this portion of this account before us. Here is John 11:38 through 44:

<sup>38</sup>Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, 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 him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

<sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup>Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. <sup>42</sup>And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me."  
<sup>43</sup>Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" <sup>44</sup>And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

When we began to consider this episode that encompasses all of John 11, we identified the four discernible parts of this narrative unit, or pericope, as it is sometimes called. There is first the *introduction/setting* of the episode, which is John 11:1-16, in which the location, setting, and people are identified. Second, the *conflict* is set forth in 11:17-37, which is the death of Lazarus and the crisis of faith of his sisters and some of the Jews who were present. Before us today in 11:38-44 we have we have the third element of our pericope, which is the *resolution of the conflict*. Here we read of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

This event can be viewed as the highpoint of the ministry of our Lord as recorded by John, of course this would be second to our Lord's own death and resurrection. This may be regarded as the seventh of seven signs recorded in John's Gospel, which itself speaks of its centrality and importance to us. Of course in all four Gospels the Passion of our Lord is the ultimate focus and the culmination of our Lord's ministry and the successful accomplishment of His work on our behalf. It has been commonly said, "The Gospels are

Passion Stories with extended introductions.”<sup>1</sup> But in a way this miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead brings the larger introduction of our Lord’s Passion of His sufferings and death to a fitting climax. It serves as a portrayal of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, that would take place not too long after this incident. But again, it also displays what our own future resurrection will be like, when the Lord Jesus returns to raise all of His people from death to life, so that we will forever be with the Lord.

### **I. Jesus coming to the tomb of Lazarus (11:38-40)**

<sup>38</sup>Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, 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 him who was dead, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.”

<sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”

In **verse 38** we read, *“Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.”* We read of the emotion of Jesus in that He was “again groaning in Himself.” It is the same word as in verse 33 which reads, “He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.”<sup>2</sup> When we considered the first occasion in which Jesus is described in this way, we said that it may reflect not just grief, but irritation or even anger that death had brought such grief to the ones He loved, to the sisters, Martha and Mary. The same idea may be suggested here. And so, as Jesus approached the tomb, “the feeling of indignation again rises in Him”, as one put it.<sup>3</sup> But here we read that He was groaning “in Himself.” It may not have been as apparent to others as on the earlier occasion. The Holy Spirit gave the apostle John insight in the inner affections of Jesus that he recorded for us. You may be “groaning” in yourself today over some matter that is known only to you or especially to you, but your Savior knows intimately and personally your grief, for He Himself experienced the same.

We read of this tomb that “It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.” Most Jews were buried in the ground like most people are buried today. But the more well-to-do or notable would be buried in a cave. Our Lord was buried in a carved out “cave” or tomb, for it had been prepared for a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea. It was Joseph himself along with Nicodemus who gained permission of the Roman governor Pilate to bury the body of Jesus. We read in Mark 15:46, “And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away” (Matt. 27:59f). Both a grave as well as a cave would be covered or closed up with a stone, which served as a headstone, a memorial, as well as a seal to secure the body.

This miracle was so remarkable that the location of the tomb of Lazarus continued to be acknowledged into the Christian era.

By the fourth century the site had become important enough for Christians for a church to be built over the crypt believed to be Lazarus’ tomb, and called the Lazareion. From this word derives the modern Muslim name for Bethany, El-Azariyeh.<sup>4</sup>

We read in **verse 39a**, *“Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’”* Jesus commanded that the stone be taken away from the mouth of the tomb. This would have taken perhaps a handful of men as generally these quite heavy stones and were settled in a depression at the entrance of the tomb. Later the women anticipated the difficulty of moving the stone from the opening of the tomb of Jesus in order to anoint His dead body, a concern, of course, which proved to be ill-founded. Here is the record in Mark’s Gospel:

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<sup>1</sup> This was originally stated by the liberal theologian, Martin Kaehler in 1896. He was writing specifically regarding the Gospel of Mark, but this description is commonly used of all four Gospels.

<sup>2</sup> It is the same word, but different form. In verse 33 it is an aorist tense verb. In verse 38 it is a present participle.

<sup>3</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), p. 811.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 417.

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup>And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup>And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” <sup>4</sup>And looking up, *they saw that the stone had been rolled back-- it was very large.* (Mark 16:1-4).

We may assume this stone was very large also.

It is at this point that Martha objected. We read in **verse 39**, *“Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, ‘Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.’”* Although Martha believed that her brother would rise on the last day, she apparently still did not believe that he was about to rise from the dead on this day. But Jesus is the resurrection and life. Where Jesus is present, the power to bring about resurrection is present. Jesus is the life, and He has the authority to impart life to whomever He wills.

Embalming was not practiced by most, although it was by the Egyptians. Yes, bodies were wrapped in cloth and very strong aromatic spices were used, but they were to counteract, or mask, the repulsive odor of decomposition. Apparently even that treatment would only serve temporarily until the body was sealed in the tomb. After four days the spices would have provided little benefit.

Jesus responded to Martha which is recorded in **verse 40**. *“Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?’”*

Jesus speaks only to Martha because she is the only one who uttered the startled exclamation; yet all present may heed what Jesus says. The emphasis is on faith: “if thou shalt believe,” is the aorist subjunctive to express the act of believing now (the present [tense] would speak of believing in general). The condition of expectancy counts on Martha’s act of believing at this juncture. “Thou shalt see” is a positive promise. In a moment, believing Martha did see. “The glory of God” has been explained in verse 4. Thus Jesus encourages the faith that is already in Martha’s heart; at the same time we must remember the purpose clause in Jesus’ prayer, v. 42: “in order that they may believe,” for when the glory shines forth, this glory will impel those not yet believing unto faith, and so these, too, will see that glory (v. 45).<sup>5</sup>

Now the Gospel recorded Jesus telling His disciples before they had travelled to Bethany that Lazarus’ sickness was for the furtherance of the glory of God (cf. 11:4), but it is not recorded that Jesus had told Martha this word. But apparently He had done so. Not all the words of a conversation are recorded in the Gospel accounts for us, but only that which is essential to relate the account to us in order to impart the message of God to us. But Jesus must have told Martha that God was going to be glorified through the death of her brother, Lazarus. But it is a given, that whatever our Lord did resulted in giving glory to God His Father.

## **II. Jesus issues the command to Lazarus to come out of his tomb (11:41-43)**

<sup>41</sup>Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. <sup>42</sup>And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.” <sup>43</sup>Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!”

Martha must have resigned herself to what was about to take place. Trusting in Jesus’ word, she stood and watched while this scene played out before her. Can you imagine what she must have been thinking as the men rolled this stone away?

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<sup>5</sup> Lenski, p. 814.

Jesus ***“lifted up His eyes.”*** This was apparently a common way in which our Lord prayed. We read in John 17:1: “Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You...” We tend not to do so when we pray. Perhaps we identify more readily with the humble and repentant publican in the temple, who, “standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’” (Luke 18:13). We bow our heads, but Jesus lifted His head and lifted His eyes, which does instruct us.

The gesture he used was very significant: *He lifted up his eyes*, an outward expression of the elevation of His mind, and to show those who stood by whence He derived His power; also to set us an example; this outward sign is hereby recommended to our practice; see (John 17:1). Look how those will answer it who profanely ridicule it; but that which is especially charged upon us hereby is to *lift up our hearts* to God in the heavens; what is prayer, but the ascent of the soul to God, and the directing of its affections and motions heavenward? He *lifted up* His eyes, as looking above, looking beyond the grave where Lazarus lay, and overlooking all the difficulties that arose thence, that He might have His eyes fixed upon the divine omnipotence; to teach us to do as Abraham, who considered not *his own body now dead, nor the deadness of Sarah’s womb*, never took these into his thoughts, and so gained such a degree of faith as not to *stagger at the promise* (Rom. 4:20).<sup>6</sup>

Jesus prayed, ***“Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.”*** It would seem that Jesus had already been praying to the Father that Lazarus would rise from the dead. Perhaps He had been praying to this end since He had first heard and knew that Lazarus had been sick and died. Here Jesus is thanking His Father for having already heard and granted Him His request. As D. A. Carson wrote, “The prayer assumes that that Jesus has already asked for Lazarus’ life, that is not surprising: verse 11 also assumes that the raising of Lazarus had been determined for some time.”<sup>7</sup>

In His prayer then Jesus said to His Father, ***“And I know that You always hear Me.”*** Our Lord seemed to have ongoing communication with the Father. He spoke to the Father and the Father spoke to His Son. Their communion with one another was from eternity. The Father was never apart from His Son and the Son was never apart from the Father. Even in His incarnation, the Son of God was “with” the Father, as John wrote, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, ***who is in the bosom of the Father***, He has declared Him” (John 1:18). Even in His incarnation, the divine nature of the Son was one in essence with the Father even as the two persons of the Trinity related with one another as Father and His Son. In His human nature, Jesus grew in His understanding and His relationship with His Father as He matured from childhood to adulthood. When Jesus was but 12 years of age He was cognizant of His relationship with God as His Father. After His parents had searched for Him for three days they found Him in the temple conversing with the religious leaders of the day. Upon their inquiry of Him, “He said to them, ‘Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?’” (Luke 2:49). And then we read a few verses later that “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52). Jesus could say, ***“I know that You always hear Me”***, because their communion with one another had been continuous and unbroken, and in His human nature, it had grown to intimate fellowship, unbroken communion. Jesus knew that His Father ***always*** heard Him.

Let none think that this was some uncommon favour granted Him now, such as He never had before, nor should ever have again; no, He had the same divine power going along with Him in His whole undertaking, and undertook nothing but what He knew to be agreeable to the counsel of God’s will. “*I gave thanks*” (saith He) “for being heard in this, because I am sure to be heard in every thing.”<sup>8</sup>

After confessing to the Father that He knew that the Father always heard Him, on this occasion He prayed openly and in the hearing of people for their benefit, that they might believe in Him as having been

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 4 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 1057.

<sup>7</sup> Carson, p. 418.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Henry, vol. 4, p. 1058.

sent by the Father. **Verse 42** records Jesus' words, "***but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.***" Jesus knew what He was about to do. He would raise Lazarus from the dead. But He did not want the people to perceive that this great miracle was due to Him alone. Jesus sought to give glory to His Father for having sent Him to do this great work.

Here our Lord Jesus has taught us that ***we are to pray to our Father in heaven.*** He "lifted up His eyes" toward heaven, which we understand to be the place where God most wonderfully manifests His presence. Yes, God is omnipresent, everywhere in His fulness in every place, but He manifests His presence in heaven in a special way to show forth His majesty and sovereignty over all. Our Lord taught His disciples to pray in this way. He said, "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Matt. 6:9). And here He taught His disciples by His example. He looked to heaven and then addressed His Father.

Several matters are suggested to us for when we pray. (1) Here our Lord Jesus has taught us that when pray ***we are to express our thanksgiving to the Father.*** "And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, 'Father, ***I thank You*** that You have heard Me.'" We are to thank Him for previous kindness that He has shown to us. "When we come to beg for further mercy, we are to do so thankfully to acknowledge former favours" (Matthew Henry).

(2) Here our Lord Jesus taught us that when we pray ***we are to acknowledge that God has called us and enabled us to serve Him in whatever lies before us.*** Thanksgiving to God is rendering glory to God for having been gracious to us. This miracle that Jesus was about to perform was an answer to His prayer, granted to Him by the Father.

(3) Here our Lord teaches us that when we pray ***we are to pray in faith that He has already granted us our petition.***

Though the miracle was not yet wrought, yet the prayer was answered, and He triumphs before the victory. No other can pretend to such an assurance as Christ had; yet we may by faith in the promise have a prospect of mercy before it be actually given in, and may rejoice in that prospect, and give God thanks for it. In David's devotions, the same psalm which begins with prayer for a mercy closes with thanksgivings for it.<sup>9</sup>

Our Lord has taught His disciples that they when they pray, they are to do so with faith that God has granted their petition. We read in Mark 11:22-24,

So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. <sup>23</sup>For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. <sup>24</sup>Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

This confidence would be based on their knowledge of God's will as revealed in His Word. We can pray with confidence if we know from God's Word what His will is respecting the thing for which we are praying.

Sometimes, however, the Lord gives a supernatural assurance of faith when making a specific prayer request that He is going to grant your petition. I recalled an incident in the life of **Charles Spurgeon** (1834-1892), which is recorded in his autobiography.

At the close of one of our services, a poor woman, accompanied by two of her neighbours, came to my vestry in deep distress. Her husband and fled the country; and, in her sorrow, she had gone to the house of God and something I said in the sermon made her think that I was personally familiar with her case. Of course, I had really known nothing about her; I had made use of a general illustration which just fitted her particular case. She told me her story, and a very sad one it was. I said, "There is nothing that we can do but kneel down, and cry to the Lord for the immediate conversion of your husband." We knelt down, and I prayed that the Lord would touch the heart of the deserter, convert his soul, and bring him

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

back to his home. When we rose from our knees, I said to the poor woman, ***“Do not fret about the matter. I feel sure your husband will come home; and that he will yet become connected with our church.”***

She went away, and I forgot all about her. Some months afterwards, she reappeared, with her neighbors, and a man, whom she introduced to me as her husband. He had indeed come back, and had returned a converted man. On making inquiry, and comparing notes, we found that, the very day on which we had prayed for his conversion, he, being at that time aboard a ship far away on the sea, stumbled most unexpectedly upon a stray copy of one of my sermons. He read it; the truth went to his heart; he repented, and sought the Lord; and, as soon as possible, he came back to his wife and to his daily calling. He was admitted as a member of the Tabernacle, and his wife, who up to that time had not joined the church, was also received into fellowship with us.

That woman does not doubt the power of prayer. All the infidels in the world could not shake her conviction that there is a God that hears and answers supplications of His people. I should be the most irrational creature in the world if, with a life every day of which is full of experiences so remarkable, I entertained the slightest doubt on the subject. I do not regard it as miraculous; it is part and parcel of the established order of the universe that the shadow of a coming event should fall in advance upon some believing soul in the shape of a prayer for its realization. The prayer of faith is a Divine decree commencing its operation.<sup>10</sup>

(4) Here our Lord teaches us that when we pray ***we are to pray with the desire that others would glorify God when they witness granting of our prayers.*** Jesus prayed, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, ***that they may believe that You sent Me.***”

We should tell people that we encounter who relate to us some need or concern that they have, that we will pray to our Father to grant that request. We should be specific, telling them specifically what it is that we will ask of our Father. Perhaps we should pray out loud in their presence. Let us do so, so that when that prayer is granted, they will only be able to conclude, “There is a God who has intervened on my behalf, and He has granted the request made for me by that man or woman of God.” Answered prayer is a marvelous way in which God reveals Himself to people who live in disregard of Him.

We may be reminded of the 19<sup>th</sup> century German Christian, **George Mueller** (1805-1898), who had traveled to England from his native Prussia, and there began an orphanage in the city of London. He never publicly or privately requested assistance, financial or otherwise, of the support of his orphans, except in prayer to His Father. Over his lifetime he cared for 10,024 orphans. Here is one account of one day in the maintenance of the orphanage.

“The children are dressed and ready for school. But there is no food for them to eat,” the housemother of the orphanage informed George Mueller. George asked her to take the 300 children into the dining room and have them sit at the tables. He thanked God for the food and waited. George knew God would provide food for the children as he always did. Within minutes, a baker knocked on the door. “Mr. Mueller,” he said, “last night I could not sleep. Somehow I knew that you would need bread this morning. I got up and baked three batches for you. I will bring it in.

“Soon, there was another knock at the door. It was the milkman. His cart had broken down in front of the orphanage. The milk would spoil by the time the wheel was fixed. He asked George if he could use some free milk. George smiled as the milkman brought in ten large cans of milk. It was just enough for the 300 thirsty children.”<sup>11</sup>

Here are the opening words of his biographer, Arthur T. Pierson:

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Spurgeon, **C. H. Spurgeon, Autobiography; vol. 2; The Full Harvest 1860-1892** (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973, orig. 1897-1900), pp. 356f.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/church-history-for-kids/george-mueller-orphanages-built-by-prayer-11634869.html>

A human life, filled with the presence and power of God, is one of God's choicest gifts to His church and the world.

Things which are unseen and eternal seem, to the carnal man, distant and indistinct, while what is seen and temporal is vivid and real. Practically, any object in nature that can be seen or felt is thus more real and actual to most men than the Living God. Every man who walks with God, and finds Him a present Help in every need, who puts His promises to the practical proof and verifies them in actual experience, every believer with the key of faith unlocks God's treasures, thus furnishes to the race a demonstration and an illustration of the fact that "He is, and is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

George Mueller was such an argument and example incarnated in human flesh. Here was a man of like passions as we are and tempted in all points like as we are, but who believed God and was established by believing; who prayed earnestly that he might live a life and do a work which should be a convincing proof that God hears prayer and that it is safe to trust Him at all times; who has furnished just such a witness as he desired...

To those who are familiar with his long life-story, and, most of all, to those who intimately knew him and felt the power of personal contact with him, he was one of God's ripest saints and himself a living proof that a life of faith is possible, that God may be known, communed with, found, and may become a conscious companion in daily life. George Mueller proved for himself and for all others who will receive his witness that, to those who are willing to take God at His word and to yield self to His will, He is "the same yesterday and today, and forever": that the days of divine intervention and deliverance are past only to those with whom the days of faith and obedience are past—in a word, that believing prayer works still the wonders which our fathers told of in the days of old.<sup>12</sup>

Mueller demonstrated through his life of faith and prayer, that God was real, true, and active in His world. People came to faith in Christ through his witness and they grew in faith in Christ through his ministry. In short, in that our Lord Jesus prayed out loud in advance of raising Lazarus so that the people present would believe and give glory to His Father, we are taught that we should have the same kind of motivation and make similar efforts to demonstrate before others the truth, reality, and relevance of the one true God in Jesus Christ.

Let us return to our passage. We read in **verse 43** of our Lord raising his friend from death to life. ***"Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"***

When He had groaned in His spirit, and audibly given thanks to His Father for hearing Him, and testified that He did this, not because He ever had doubt of His Father's willing what He willed, but that the people might take notice of His favor and power with God, and that He was sent of Him; *He cried with a loud voice*; not whispering, nor, like the wizards, peeping and muttering, Isaiah 8:19, but speaking aloud, so as all might hear, and understand, that what was done was done by His powerful word. He calls him by name, He bids him come forth; they were not the words that raised Lazarus, but the mighty, quickening power of Christ, which attended these words.<sup>13</sup>

One day His voice will be heard again, but not just to raise one man from the grave, but all who are in the graves. As Jesus Himself declared,

"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which ***all who are in the graves will hear His voice*** and come forth-- those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." (John 5:28f)

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<sup>12</sup> A. T. Pierson, **George Mueller of Bristol** (Fleming H. Revell, n.d.). pp.15f. (This is a Christian classic)

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Poole, **A Commentary on the Whole Bible, vol. III, Matthew-Revelation** (Hendriksen Publishers, 2008), p. 341.

Jesus said that this future resurrection of the bodies from the graves is not something to cause one to “marvel,” as though it were something that should surprise anyone that He could bring this great event to pass. Paul expressed it this way to King Agrippa, “Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?” (Acts 26:8).

With regard to His own people, it is said of Jesus:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven *with a shout*, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup>Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thess. 4:16-18)

The ESV translates it that “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with *a cry of command*.” And that is what the Lord did here at the grave of Lazarus. He commanded Lazarus to come forth.

### **III. Jesus instructed Lazarus to be let loose from the wrappings of his dead condition (11:41-43)**

<sup>44</sup>And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.”

When the stone was rolled away, the stench of the corruption of the body must have been apparent to those near the mouth of the tomb. But then Jesus issued the command and Lazarus came forth, who was still bound by the burial wrappings that had bound his dead body. The Lord gave instruction for him to be loosed from these wrappings, and he was then no doubt restored to his sisters. Can we imagine the surprise? The wonder? The joy of his sisters greeting their brother? Can we imagine the thoughts of these people as they pondered the implications of this event? This Jesus has the authority over death! He has the power to grant life even to the dead!

Now the question is commonly asked, “Where was the soul of Lazarus during the four days in which his body lie in the tomb?” Perhaps our Lord’s account of the rich man, known in literature as “Dives”, and another man also named Lazarus, provides an answer for us. In **Luke 16:19-31** we read this account:

“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup>But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, <sup>21</sup>desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. <sup>22</sup>So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup>And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

<sup>24</sup>“Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ <sup>25</sup>But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. <sup>26</sup>And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’

<sup>27</sup>“Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, <sup>28</sup>for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ <sup>29</sup>Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ <sup>30</sup>And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ <sup>31</sup>But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’”

Through the biblical record there have been several people who were raised from the dead. In the Old Testament we read of **Elijah** raising *the son of a widow*. This account is in 1 Kings 17:17-24:



<sup>17</sup>Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. <sup>18</sup>So she said to Elijah, “What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?”

<sup>19</sup>And he said to her, “Give me your son.” So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. <sup>20</sup>Then he cried out to the LORD and said, “O LORD my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?” <sup>21</sup>And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the LORD and said, “O LORD my God, I pray, let this child’s soul come back to him.” <sup>22</sup>Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived.

<sup>23</sup>And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, “See, your son lives!”

<sup>24</sup>Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth.”

Elijah’s disciple, **Elisha**, also raised a *young man* from the dead and restored him to his mother. This is recorded in 1 Kings

<sup>17</sup>But the woman conceived, and bore a son when the appointed time had come, of which Elisha had told her.

<sup>18</sup>And the child grew. Now it happened one day that he went out to his father, to the reapers. <sup>19</sup>And he said to his father, “My head, my head!”

So he said to a servant, “Carry him to his mother.” <sup>20</sup>When he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. <sup>21</sup>And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, shut the door upon him, and went out. <sup>22</sup>Then she called to her husband, and said, “Please send me one of the young men and one of the donkeys, that I may run to the man of God and come back.”

<sup>23</sup>So he said, “Why are you going to him today? It is neither the New Moon nor the Sabbath.”

And she said, “It is well.” <sup>24</sup>Then she saddled a donkey, and said to her servant, “Drive, and go forward; do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you.” <sup>25</sup>And so she departed, and went to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

So it was, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to his servant Gehazi, “Look, the Shunammite woman! <sup>26</sup>Please run now to meet her, and say to her, ‘Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?’”

And she answered, “It is well.” <sup>27</sup>Now when she came to the man of God at the hill, she caught him by the feet, but Gehazi came near to push her away. But the man of God said, “Let her alone; for her soul is in deep distress, and the LORD has hidden it from me, and has not told me.”

<sup>28</sup>So she said, “Did I ask a son of my lord? Did I not say, ‘Do not deceive me’?”

<sup>29</sup>Then he said to Gehazi, “Get yourself ready, and take my staff in your hand, and be on your way. If you meet anyone, do not greet him; and if anyone greets you, do not answer him; but lay my staff on the face of the child.”

<sup>30</sup>And the mother of the child said, “As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you.” So he arose and followed her. <sup>31</sup>Now Gehazi went on ahead of them, and laid the staff on the face of the child; but there was neither voice nor hearing. Therefore he went back to meet him, and told him, saying, “The child has not awakened.”

<sup>32</sup>When Elisha came into the house, there was the child, lying dead on his bed. <sup>33</sup>He went in therefore, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the LORD. <sup>34</sup>And he went up and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands; and he stretched himself out on the child, and the flesh of the child became warm. <sup>35</sup>He returned and walked back and forth in the house, and again went up and stretched himself out on him; then the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. <sup>36</sup>And he called Gehazi and said, “Call this Shunammite

woman.” So he called her. And when she came in to him, he said, “Pick up your son.” <sup>37</sup>So she went in, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground; then she picked up her son and went out.

There was one other occasion in which a dead man came back to life. This occurred after Elisha had died. We read of this in **2 Kings 13:20, 21**.

<sup>20</sup>Then Elisha died, and they buried him. And the raiding bands from Moab invaded the land in the spring of the year. <sup>21</sup>So it was, as they were burying a man, that suddenly they spied a band of raiders; and they put the man in the tomb of Elisha; and when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet.

In the New Testament we read of Jesus raising from the dead two others beside Lazarus. Jesus brought to life *the 12 year old daughter of Jairus* which is recorded in **Mark 5:21-43**.

<sup>21</sup>Now when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea. <sup>22</sup>And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet <sup>23</sup>and begged Him earnestly, saying, “My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live.” <sup>24</sup>So Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him...

<sup>35</sup>While He was still speaking, some came from the ruler of the synagogue’s house who said, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?”

<sup>36</sup>As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the ruler of the synagogue, “Do not be afraid; only believe.” <sup>37</sup>And He permitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James. <sup>38</sup>Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly. <sup>39</sup>When He came in, He said to them, “Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping.”

<sup>40</sup>And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying. <sup>41</sup>Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, “Talitha, cumi,” which is translated, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” <sup>42</sup>Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement. <sup>43</sup>But He commanded them strictly that no one should know it, and said that something should be given her to eat.

The last account of one that Jesus raised from the dead was *the son of a widow*. Our Lord encountered the funeral procession which was probably taking place on the same day that the man had died. This account is in **Luke 7:1-17**.

Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. <sup>12</sup>And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. <sup>13</sup>When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” <sup>14</sup>Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried *him* stood still. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” <sup>15</sup>So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.

<sup>16</sup>Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen up among us”; and, “God has visited His people.” <sup>17</sup>And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

There were three others raised from the dead as recorded in the book of Acts. Peter raised *Dorcas* from the dead (Acts 9:36-43). Paul raised *a young man* from the dead who had fallen from a loft (Acts 20:7-12). And then Paul himself came back from the dead as recorded in Acts 14:19, 20.

Of all these ones who came back to life from the dead, there is no record recorded of their experience while dead. This is true with the exception of the apostle Paul. He was probably describing his experience after being stoned to death when he penned the words of **2 Corinthians 12:1-5**.

It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: <sup>2</sup>I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. <sup>3</sup>And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—<sup>4</sup>how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. <sup>5</sup>Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities.

Paul was hesitant to speak of this experience that he had fourteen years before writing this account. The experience of all these other ones who had died, could probably be regarded to have been similar to what Paul experienced. He did not fully understand whether he was in a physical or spiritual state. He heard things, saw things, but they were wondrous, mysterious, perhaps in a measure incomprehensible to him, which were not permitted to be told to others by him. Clarity and fulness of apprehension would come on the day of the resurrection of the body from the dead and its reunion with the soul.

We will close with the comments of **F. F. Bruce**:

The shout which calls Lazarus back to life is a parable of that coming day when all who are in the tombs will hear the same quickening shout and come out. It is only a parable, because Lazarus is called out to a renewal and continuation of mortal life, whereas those who hear the shout on the last day are called out to resurrection life. But before resurrection life, could be imparted to others, Jesus Himself must be raised from the dead. The difference may be indicated by the fact that, when Jesus was raised, the grave clothes were left behind in the tomb (John 20:5-7).<sup>14</sup>

May the day come soon when we hear the voice of the Son of God and we are translated into the presence of Him who calls us unto Himself. Thereafter, “we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17).

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Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead,  
that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,  
make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you  
what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ,  
to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb. 13:20f)

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<sup>14</sup> F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 248.