



John 11:38-44
Is Anything too Difficult for God?

38 Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.

39 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."

40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

41 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.

42 "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."

43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"

44 And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

45 Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.

46 But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did.

Jesus had come to Bethany to awaken his friend Lazarus as he told the disciples. And yet as he stood before the tomb with Mary and Martha and everyone weeping, no one expects what is about to happen.

Nobody expected Lazarus to come shuffling out of the tomb still bound in his graveclothes, there is this weird idea that somehow everyone expected resurrections and miracles at this time. They forget that they were no more common in the first century than they are today. Tombs in the first century weren't built with revolving doors. People expected the dead to decompose. That is why the miracles of Christ and later the miracles of Christ's apostles made such an impact, because they displayed a power that was supernatural and could only come from God.

But the funny thing is, the sisters acknowledged that Jesus was the Son of God, and they knew He had the power to heal, they had faithfully declared that if He had been in Bethany when Lazarus was sick, he would not have died. But now Lazarus is dead, very dead, so dead in fact that the mourners could detect the smell of death around even this closed tomb.

That didn't even consider resurrection at this point, it was too late. *"Not even God could do that..."* Now you may laugh at that kind of attitude, I'd bet you've displayed it at some point yourselves, I know I have. I did last night. One of my children prayed in family worship that they might not get punished for anything this Sunday. And I actually thought to myself, *"yeah, that'll happen"* and then I thought immediately in my own head. Is that prayer too difficult for God to answer? Is anything too difficult for God? Did not Christ Himself say that what is impossible for men is possible with God? So if I can think uniformly good behavior on Sunday is beyond Christ's power, then the sisters can be forgiven for thinking that 4 days of decomposition put Lazarus well beyond any hope.

Jesus comes to the tomb, Incidentally, Once again we see an evidence that this was a well-to-do family, they had their own tomb, rather like the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea that Jesus was going to be laid in.

He stands before Lazarus' tomb and He groans, he is deeply troubled, probably both at the presence of death, the marring of his creation, and in true sympathy with his friends. I couldn't help but think here of Paul's words to believers, *Romans 8: 23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.* But it is not just we who groan at death, looking for our deliverance. Our sympathetic high priest Jesus groans for us. He is eager for the day of our release, just as hear he was eager for His friend Lazarus to be released from the bonds of death.

“Take away the STONE” Jesus says! Now why did our Lord say this? The One who could command a storm to stop, could easily have commanded the stone to roll away itself. And which was harder after all, to make the stone move, or the body behind it get up and walk! But that is not the way Jesus works. Here, just as at the wedding at Cana, when He commanded the servants to fill the Jars with Water before he turned it into wine, He chose to give man something to do. “In Christ's miracles the general rule is that He does the work men cannot do, but what man can do, he is required to do.” Here Jesus uses men to roll away the stone.

Martha, however is horrified, what are you doing? Four days ago you could have come and seen him, but not now. Surely you realize that he is decomposing? Can't you smell it? Poor Martha is about to die of shame.

Stench – Dead Cat story – and that was only a cat 2 DAYS in a sealed garage. This is a man 4 days in a hot tomb.

So rather than have her brother's memory tarred like this, she is essentially saying, leave Him alone Lord. You can't help Him, he's in the best place now. Again before we're tempted to criticize Martha for attempting to interfere in the Lord's work with her loved one, I have to tell you again and again, I have seen well Christians do exactly this with their relatives. Providentially brings that person to an end of themselves, puts them right on the verge of that place where they will have no choice but forsake their sin and run to Him, and then the relative wades in and bails them out, puts the pillow back under their head so they go to sleep again.

But Jesus is very patient with her, and simply reminds her of His original message to her when Lazarus first got sick: ***“Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”***

And at that point I want you to see that while she probably still didn't realize what was going to happen, she begins to walk by faith and not by sight. She has learned that she can trust the Lord for what she may not fully understand.

So she consents and the stone is rolled away, and I am sure that awful smell just rolled out of the tomb. And it is at this point that Jesus stops and prays. He speaks and prays a prayer of thanksgiving, not for His sake as if the issue was ever in doubt, but for the crowd's sake, so that they might know he was sent by God, the Father and that He was doing His will, and manifesting the glory of God before them.

Sadly not all there would see the glory of God. Everybody there would see the miracle, but only believers would have their eyes opened to see the real significance of that miracle, only they would see the glory of God manifested

“The Glory of God is the revelation of His excellencies, the visible display of His invisible perfections. It was the glory of God which Christ came here to make manifest, for He is the outshining of God’s glory (Heb. 1:3) But the one special point to which our Lord here referred, was His own glory as the Bringer of life out of death. It was this which He came to reveal, both in His own person, by dying and rising again, and in the works of His hands – here in the raising of Lazarus. To remove the wages of death, to undo, the work which sin had wrought, to conquer him that had the power of death, to swallow up death in victory – this was indeed a special manifestation of glory.” – AW Pink

The rock is rolled away, and at this point Jesus gently issues the invitation *“If anyone in there would like to receive new life please step forward.”* No he doesn’t does He? That would be the Arminian version, but more about that later. Instead Jesus cries out with a loud voice LAZARUS COME FORTH. In the Greek its even stronger *COME OUT!*

He cries out calling Lazarus by name. Why did he call Lazarus by name? There is some truth to the old saying that if he had simply said **“Come Forth”** every dead man and woman in the cemetery would have responded. But there’s more to it than that, here the Shepherd is Calling one of His Sheep by Name isn’t He?

John 10:3 "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

4 "And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

Jesus knows His Sheep, He calls them by name, and when He calls they answer, so Lazarus comes forth, and it must have been difficult to come out wrapped up as he was rather like a mummy, and yet when Christ calls, no impediment is too great.

Jesus of course is concerned for his material well-being and instructs the people to take off his bandages, and again he gives us something to do.

Now here was an incredible miracle, Jesus Had Called for Lazarus to come out and there was the moment of truth. Everything was on the line here, you remember Jesus had said, John 10:37 "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me" had Lazarus not come forth. Then that would have been the end of His ministry, and you would never have heard of Him. But Lazarus did come forth and there would have been an explosion of amazement and Joy amongst the bystanders. Lazarus four days dead is alive again, by the mighty power of God.

And yet we read that some believed and some did not. If ever we need proof that signs and wonders in themselves cannot make men believe it is here. All saw, but only those appointed to eternal life actually believed in Him. Some will just see it as further evidence that this miracle worker has to die.

Some Applications:

1) *We see here a foreshadowing of what Jesus came to do.* Why did Jesus come? Was it just to give men an excuse to invent a gift-giving holiday 300 years or so after his ascension? To set us good example, so that people would be able to give each other “what would Jesus do?” bracelets on the gift-giving holiday? No Jesus came to death to death, to “kill death dead”, by his atoning death he would triumph over the power of death and the evil one and by his resurrection He would show their power over all whom He died for was forever broken. And this was a foreshadowing of that event, Jesus is showing His absolute power over our greatest enemy. Even the grave is powerless to hold anyone whom He calls.

2) **Also we see here a great truth about the nature of Salvation:** When it comes to salvation our situation is exactly akin to that of Lazarus, we are not sick and in need of some assistance. We are spiritually dead and stinking in the grave. And therefore to stand at the grave and say come out if you’d like to will be of no avail to us.

If moral persuasion could recover man, then faith would be an easy work, and not require such mighty power as has just been proved. Christ did more to the raising of Lazarus than morally persuade him to come out of the grave; when Christ said, “Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43) a mighty power went along with the command, which gave effect thereto. It is not enough to persuade a prisoner to come forth, but his chains must be struck off, and the prison doors must be opened (Ac 12:6, 7, 10); and man is more than a mere prisoner; he is dead in sin, so must have a quickening grace; which moral persuasion can never accomplish.

When Christ saves it is because He calls His sheep, whom the father has given to Him by name. When he comes to them they are dead, but His call comes with effectual power to animate to regenerate, to give them new life. Perhaps, you are saying, Andy you are going to far, this is about a physical resurrection, not a spiritual one, *spiritually we’re not dead, so we can cooperate with God. Deep down inside we have a desire to answer his call. Faith is our work, we exercise faith, and then we are born again.*

Really? Turn if you would to Ephesians 2:

*Ephesians 2:1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,
 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,
 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.
 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,
 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),
 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,
 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.
 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

Brothers and sisters, salvation is all of God, the gospel is “GOD SAVES SINNERS” not “GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES” because when he finds us, like Lazarus we can’t!

3rd Application: BUT GOD USES MEN in this process. He calls men to be HIS stone rollers. We preach the general call, he makes it effectual. Now we want to think its because we talk men into believing, but in fact, it is because he effectually calls his sheep.

Acts 13:46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.

47 "For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.' "

48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

Romans 10:4 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"

16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?"

17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.