

## Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave – John 11 v1-44

**Scene 1 - Perea: 1-7:** *Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." <sup>4</sup> When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." <sup>5</sup> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, <sup>7</sup> and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."*

**Scene 2 - Edge of Bethany: 17-33:** *When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had been buried four days before. <sup>18</sup> Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup> and many Judeans had come to see Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother's death. <sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, "If you had been here, Lord, my brother would not have died! <sup>22</sup> But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask him for." <sup>23</sup> "Your brother will rise to life," Jesus told her. <sup>24</sup> "I know," she replied, "that he will rise to life on the last day." <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life.** Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup> and those who live and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup> "Yes, Lord!" she answered. "I do believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." <sup>28</sup> After Martha said this, she went back and called her sister Mary privately. "The Teacher is here," she told her, "and is asking for you." <sup>29</sup> When Mary heard this, she got up and hurried out to meet him. (<sup>30</sup> Jesus had not yet arrived in the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.) <sup>31</sup> The people who were in the house with Mary comforting her followed her when they saw her get up and hurry out. They thought that she was going to the grave to weep there. <sup>32</sup> When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." <sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.*

**Scene 3 - Tomb of Lazarus: John 11 v34-44:** *<sup>34</sup> "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. <sup>35</sup> Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup> Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" <sup>38</sup> Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. <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 odour, for he has been there four days." <sup>40</sup> Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup> 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." <sup>43</sup> When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup> The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.*

Jesus has a heart for unity. So why do his words often cause divisions?

We are looking at the arguments and evidence that the writer of John's Gospel, is laying down to convince us that Jesus is God. Today we look at the argument that comes from Jesus' own words, I am the Resurrection and the Life, and some evidence to support this argument in the miracle of Lazarus being raised from the dead. But also at the divisions caused by these words, and by this incredible miracle.

### Walls divide.

Not everyone gets on with each other. My friend ordered a book of Amazon entitled 'How to have absolutely nothing to do with your neighbours'. Unfortunately, he was out when it was delivered !!

In 1961 the East Germans started building the Berlin wall which restricted emigration to West Berlin and from there into the West. The East Germans officially referred to it as the *Anti-Fascist Protection Rampart*, whereas the West Berlin city government sometimes referred to it as the "Wall of Shame". It came to symbolize physically the "Iron Curtain" that separated Western Europe and the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War. Growing up during that period, there was a strong sense of us 'the West' verses them 'the Communists'. As some of the Eastern Block Communist states started to crumble politically in 1989, the wall was breached then dismantled. It made incredible TV viewing at the time.

In 1969 the so called '*Peace walls*' went up in Ireland after some terrible riots. I love Ireland, North and South but it is a country that has known much division. The peace walls are a series of separation barriers in Northern Ireland that separate predominantly Republican and Nationalist Catholic neighbourhoods from predominantly Loyalist and Unionist Protestant neighbourhoods. I have driven up the Shankill Road in West Belfast which is on the Catholic side of the giant wall which separates the two communities. It has large gates which are open when its peaceful but closed when trouble starts. The graffiti on the wall and the political art painted on the sides of houses has become a tourist attraction and there are over 3 million signatures on the wall now. I admire those that work with both sides to promote peace, and as things improve there is now talk of taking down some of the peace walls in Ireland.

There was another wall which started in Sept 2000, the '*Israeli West Bank barrier*', a separation barrier in the West Bank. Israel considers it a security barrier against terrorism and necessary to stop the wave of violence. Palestinians see it as political and land grabbing. Some of it is in Israel, but the majority of it cuts into the West Bank isolating about 9% of the people. In all senses it is a very divided community. The second biggest town in Palestine is divided by the wall, al-Azariya, which translates as 'town of Lazarus'.

## **Bethany**

Located on the sunny south eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, less than 2 miles east of Jerusalem, Today al-Azariya is an overcrowded town but 2000 years ago it was a small village called Bethany, with its vineyards and olive groves. The mighty temple was not visible from Bethany, so it was an acceptable place to build an almshouse, a place for the poor and sick. One such sick man who may have stayed there, Simon the Leper. who had been cured, presumably by Jesus, of a dreaded skin disease (Mt 26v6).

Possibly the biggest property in the village had been inherited by three siblings and was taken charge of by the eldest of them, a young lady called Martha, who ran the home, the business and the servants. The good reputation of a whole village rested on the hospitality that was offered within it. When the popular Rabbi Jesus came to the village, they chose Martha as the best hostess for the job. Martha was always organised and determined to do the right thing, and worked hard for it. Her younger sister had a more free spirit and less get up and go. One thing they firmly had in common though was their support and love for their young brother called Lazarus. All three of them loved Jesus, and he loved them, so had probably visited them several times on route to and from Jerusalem.

On one occasion Mary had joined his disciples at the feet of Jesus upsetting Martha who had been organising all the catering for the large entourage, and thought her sister was duty bound to help her. Mary had been excused by Jesus to stay and show her love. The last time he visits the house just before his crucifixion, whilst Martha is showing her devotion by working away on the kitchen, Mary pours out a whole pint of expensive perfume onto his feet, and wiped them with her hair, in what would have been seen as shocking behaviour by most present but a beautiful gift in the eyes of Jesus. Both these women were devoted to Jesus, and each expressed herself in her own way. Martha was practical, concerned in material service; she was by nature hospitable and self-denying. Mary, contemplative and more spiritually inclined, showed her devotion through the service of companionship and appreciation. Jesus loved them and accepted them just as they were today, with their different personality types just as he does today.

## **Perea**

Jerusalem and Bethany lay on the West of the Jordan, but on the East was a rugged and desert region called Perea. However there were valleys and a few small towns to which Jesus would go to and teach and heal. This is only a week or two before the Triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem which commenced the final week of his ministry on Earth. Jerusalem had become a dangerous place for him already. Perea was a territory of King Herod and was free from the reach of Pilate, but more importantly from the Temple authorities that had its own set of guards. He was relatively much safer there until the right time had come for him to suffer. We do not know where in Perea that Jesus was when he got the news, but he was likely to have been 20-30 miles, so a day or twos walk.

## **The death of Lazarus**

Lazarus was ill. A messenger was sent from Bethany to Perea to find Jesus. The message was a simple one 'Your dear friend is ill'. There is no indication he is about to die, and no insistence that Jesus must come straight away. Though informing Jesus was a polite way of asking him to come. Tell Jesus that his own beloved friend Lazarus is ill and he will surely come rushing over to make him better. We don't know what was wrong with Lazarus, but it must have been a lot worse than his sisters had thought, because he probably died a short time after the messenger was sent, before Jesus had been tracked down. Even if Jesus had left straight away from Perea and walked through the night, it would have made no difference to the outcome. Lazarus was dead, and Jesus, always in touch with his Father in heaven, knew he had died. His response to the messenger was cryptic. 'The final result of this illness is not death, but glory to God and the Son of God (v4).' I wonder what the messenger was thinking on his way home. Oh well. I have not brought Jesus back to heal Lazarus, but he's done that thing where he speaks the word, and the person is healed from a distance, like He did with that

Centurion's servant boy in Capernaum. So he would have been very surprised when he returned home to Bethany, without Jesus, to find Lazarus dead.

### **Jesus calm and in control.**

Jesus waited for two days before he left Perea. He has declared that the 'end game' was not that Lazarus would die. Yet he knows he is already dead, and yet still spends a couple more days in Perea. He is in no rush to rectify matters. He knows what is important. He knows what is urgent. He has perspective, especially a spiritual perspective, that we don't have, and certainly his disciples didn't have.

As we look across the life of Jesus, there are times when he is calm and the disciples are stressing out, such as being in a boat on Galilee when a storm comes in. The disciples are going crazy with fear and worry whilst Jesus is asleep. He knows they are safe. No-one is going to die with him in the boat. On being woken up, he is a bit annoyed with them, then tells the wind and the waves to shut up, which they do. But in contrast there is another time, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus is agitated and stressing in prayer because he knows that they have a real spiritual fight on their hands. He needs the support, encouragement and prayers of his closest disciples. But they are thinking about their full tummies from their lamb meal, and need a nice after-supper doze. So this time, it is Jesus waking them, but they keep falling asleep, when they should be alert for him.

Jesus has the bigger picture, and wants to bring us rest and peace in all situations, even when it's kicking off all around us. He knows when we need to relax and not worry about things despite what they look like from our own viewpoint. But then there are times when his heart is troubled by events, and we need to hear from him, and get down and put in some serious prayer. We are sheep, and need to hear the voice of our Shepherd Jesus in order to follow him and to know when all is fine, and all is not. So often though, we trust our own judgement and don't seek the Godly perspective on our life's situations.

If he had thought like his disciples, he would have rushed instantly to Bethany just to do what he could, but Jesus knew he should wait a couple more days before leaving. He was totally in control.

### **The funeral and burial**

Lazarus would have been buried on the day he died, not in a common cemetery, but because of the family wealth, he was buried in his own private tomb, possibly a cave in a garden. Though if you visit his grave today in al-Azariya, or at least one similar that is claimed to be the grave of Lazarus, you won't find a garden cave. The entrance to the tomb today is via a flight of 24 uneven rock-cut steps from the street-level leading into a square chamber serving as a place of prayer, from which more steps lead to a lower chamber believed to be the tomb of Lazarus.

The tombs were either hewn excavated from solid rock, or may have started off as natural caves. In the rock entrance a court area about 9 feet square and 6 feet high would be made where the bier and its bearers would stand, then this would lead to the vault where the body, wrapped in cloth and anointed with many spices, would be laid. Men and women processed in separate lines on the funeral day, visiting the tomb and leaving the body saying 'Depart in Peace'. They then formed lines through which the professional mourners would pass to express their sympathy, and repeat this several times, helping the family and friends of the deceased to express their grief. They would have then processed back to the homestead, which now became the house of mourning for 30 days. The first 3 of these would be the most intense. After 3 days the Rabbis taught that the Spirit had now left the body, and on the 4<sup>th</sup> day the mourning would start to ease off. However the normal practice for close family would be to sit on the floor at home for a week with chairs and couches upturned, and have be visited their by friends. For the next three weeks they would abstain from any jewellery or other adornments.

For the death of Lazarus, there were many Judeans and professional mourners with the sisters comforting them on the 4<sup>th</sup> day. Mary just stayed in the house mourning her brother's loss, but Martha was finding it difficult to stay put for 7 days, and was wanting to get busy again. When Jesus arrived on the village, the news reached Martha and not Mary. Why? Because Martha was already up and about, in touch with the servants. She had probably sat around for 3 days and it was killing her, there was so much to do, and though she would stay respectful during this period, she had to be doing something. So both acted typical to form. Mary has stayed 'put' in the house, sat on the floor with her comforters oblivious to the arrival of Jesus.

## Martha responds

So Martha hears Jesus is on his way, and goes out to the edge of the village to meet him. No doubt in her grief, she has some pent up anger that Jesus wasn't there when she needed him. She probably wants to pound his chest and shout at him. Jesus had done his miracles for all these people he had never met before, but the three of them all loved Jesus, and Jesus loved them, he loved Lazarus. Why wasn't he there? Why didn't he come quicker? You can hear the accusation in her voice, repeating what the sisters had no doubt said to each other. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died". She limits her faith in his power as Jesus had proved he **could** heal from a distance, and did not need to have come to her. She softens her rebuke, by saying that if he prayed to his Father, something still might be achieved, though she can not have really believed that her brother would be raised.

"Your brother will rise to life" (v23) says Jesus with confidence of what he will do that day. Martha is not confident. She could have said, Thankyou Jesus, I look forward to having a meal with him tonight. But Martha can only think of him of rising in the last day, when all who are Gods own will go from the grave to be with him, and says she believes that will be so. "I know that he will rise up to life on the last day" (v24). She limits Jesus and His power by her words. She has looked back to the past to how he saved others and not Lazarus, now she looking to the future to what will happen in the last day, but she is not looking to what he can do, right here, right now.

Jesus corrects her with one of his famous 'I am' statements. In the Old Testament, God tells Moses to say to the people 'the one who says 'I am' has sent me to you. So when Jesus starts his sayings 'I am' he brings attention to his relationship with and within God. Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; and all those who believe in me will never die, do you believe this?" (v25-26)

Martha says that she believes Jesus to be the Messiah the Son of God (v27), which is a statement of faith, but she is still limiting in her mind what Jesus can do that day in her life. Martha then returns to the house, leaving Jesus and his entourage on the edge of the village.

We do the same though, we declare Jesus as Son of God yet we are too ready to limit what He can do in our live, in and through us. We have precious truths, but we are too ready to put them to one side like Martha did, and so instead we believe for something much smaller. We look back to what Jesus did in the Gospels, and we look forward to heaven when we will be with him, but we can miss out what he can do with us right here, right now. You may have been a Christian for a long time, but like Martha you have not fully taken on the powerful words of Jesus as being relevant to you today, and have not let him transform your life by his resurrection power. Don't look back to what a historical Jesus did, or look forward to being with him in heaven. Instead ask him today, to show his power in your life.

## Mary responds

Mary, true to her personality, has stayed where she was, mourning in the house, until Martha goes to her and tells her that Jesus is waiting outside of Bethany and is asking for her by name. Probably, nothing else would take her on this fourth day from her place of mourning, but this was Jesus. He wants her, she must go to him. When she reaches her Lord, she falls her at his feet, a place she loves to be, and through her gentle weeping quietly repeats the words her sister had said, it sounded so different from the lips of Mary. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died". (v32) Without accusation, but in recognition of his greatness, that all things come under his authority. Martha and Mary say to Jesus the same words in the same place under the same circumstances "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died", but they say it in such different ways. In her grief, Martha angrily confronts him. In her grief, Mary bows down to him and acknowledges his greatness. Whatever our personality, however we feel, however we approach him, Jesus responds to us in love.

## Jesus wept

Mary has nothing else to say, she kneels weeping at his feet. Others have come out of the house with her and they are crying too. This touched Jesus heart and he was deeply moved by their grief and tears. Now was not time for more words, it was time for action.

**Jesus wept.** (v35). It is the shortest verse in the bible, but it tells us so much about the humanity of God. He is not distant, he is not unfeeling of the moment even though he knows the end-game victory. The Roman and Greek philosophers of the day encouraged the bereaved to remain calm and untroubled, but Jesus was very much of the Jewish tradition of openly expressing his grief. As Isaiah described him, 'a **man of sorrows, acquainted with grief**' (Isaiah 53v3). A true friend will rejoice and will weep with their friends in their joys and sorrows. Jesus is a true friend.

As Jesus wept, the crowd were divided. Some said, look how much he loved Lazarus. Others were unimpressed and mocked him. They wanted to find fault. '**He gave sight to the blind man didn't he? Could he not have kept Lazarus from dying?**' (v37)

He asks the group 'Where have you buried him?'  
'Come with us and see' they replied.

### **Stone is rolled away**

**'Deeply moved once more, Jesus went to the tomb, which was a cave, with a stone placed at the entrance. Take the stone away Jesus ordered.'** (v38)

Jesus being swept once again with a wave of emotion. He groans in his spirit as he contemplates the effect that death has had on these people, and more generally the fragile state of human life and the power that death has over us. He orders the stone be rolled away. This was no polite suggestion, it was a demand. It seemed a strange request from the Rabbi, perhaps he wished to remove the face cloth and look at his face, one last time. The unbelieving Martha, protests because his decomposing body will smell, winters gone and summers gone, so she is expecting it to be an un-pretty sight on the 4<sup>th</sup> day.

The believe of the Jews was that it took three days after death for the body to be corrupted after which point on the fourth day, the persons spirit left them. This is the point of no return. This is why Jesus stayed an extra 2 days in Perea, so he could arrive on the 4<sup>th</sup> day after death, so there that would be no doubt at all that Lazarus was truly dead.

### **Jesus speaks**

Imagine you are in the crowd in Lazarus's garden. Look around you. Who do you see – the disciples are there with a mixed look of expectation and bewilderment on their faces. There's Martha feeling irritable and holding back her tongue. Mary is there, eyes red and swollen with the hours of crying. There are the villagers, some straight from the fields. There are family friends from Jerusalem, and some of the household servants. The professional mourners are still here, but have stopped wailing. Some there are from the Temple Authorities keeping an eye on Jesus to see what he is up to, as news of his return to Judea had spread fast They are ready to report anything perceived as misconduct. Then there is you.

You have seen the stone rolled back, and heard the murmurs all around you as Jesus steps up to the tomb entrance. He is deeply moved by the occasion, shaking a little, tears still clinging to his face. A hush descends, as Jesus lifts his head and declares to heaven for all to hear '**I thank you Father, that you listen to me. I know that you always listen to me, but I say that for the sake of the people here, so that they will believe that you sent me.**' (v41-42')

All eyes are now on Jesus and on the tomb entrance. Then Jesus speaks into the darkness. It is not a long prayer. There is no long petition, no pleading to heaven. In a loud voice, he throws his command into the Grave.

**LAZARUS – COME OUT !**

Then Jesus stands there staring into the darkness.

In those first few moments perhaps minutes of no movement from the grave, what are you thinking. It is impossible for a man to raise from his tomb, 4 days after he has died. Of course nothing is going to happen, but this is Jesus. When Jesus speaks, things happen. When Jesus speaks, you may not know what is going to happen, but somethings going to change.

Although for those outside the tomb nothing appear to be happening, inside the tomb it most certainly is. The moment Jesus spoke the command, life poured back into Lazarus.

Do you ever go on holiday or visit some-one then wake up in the morning and not immediately know where you are. It takes a moment to work it out. Lazarus was bound in long cloth strips. The wrapping was thorough, binding the limbs to keep them straight, and the face cloth bound tight around his cheeks to keep his mouth shut.

Lazarus opens his eyes, but at first can see almost nothing. There is a faint light coming through his face cloth, so he wriggles around on the floor until his body feels with enough to strength for him to push against the cave wall and work his self upright. He falls over a couple of times before he can get his balance. Bound up as a mummy, he finds he can stand there in the darkness facing toward the lights.

You are outside in the bright light of day with the crowd, looking into the dark hole that is the cave entrance. From your vantage point all you can see is darkness. You are all oblivious to what is happening with Lazarus. None of you can see into the darkness, so it looks like nothing is happening. The reality is very different. At this moment, Lazarus is unseen but very much alive.

You stand there thinking that nothing is happening, and as the minutes pass, you are thinking nothing will happen. Hold that thought and we will come back to it in a bit.

### **Lazarus comes out**

Having struggled to his feet, and got his balance, he shuffles his way towards the light showing dimly through his face cloth, and appears at the entrance to the tomb.

Look around at the reaction of those in the crowd. There are audible gasps. Some women shriek in fear and surprise. Some start to wail again. Mary falls onto her knees. Some men start arguing. Some are shouting into the house for others to come out. Tears are falling everywhere, eyes flicking between Lazarus and Jesus.

*It was a good job, Jesus made it clear that it was Lazarus he was calling out of the grave, or any other corpse in ear-shot would have jumped up at the chance to be up and out of their grave too.*

No-one moves towards Lazarus. Jesus smiles, and gets practical again. "For goodness sake, some-one untie his bindings, and let him go". The disciples remember back to when Jesus had raised Jairus' daughter from her death bed, then said 'get her something to eat'. When he had raised the widow's son on his funeral bier at Nain, he had engaged him in conversation then given him back to his Mother, quite naturally, no fuss.

The miracle was done. Martha would eat with Lazarus that night. News spread quickly to the Temple Authorities, who became even more determined now to have Jesus killed.

### **The purpose of Johns Gospel.**

The Apostle John tells us why he wrote his gospel. John 20v31 says " I have written this book, in order that you may believe, that Jesus is the Son of God , and that through your faith in Him you may have life."

John is making an incredible claim about Jesus, up front in his gospel. The first 18 verses are of Chapter 1 are just his claims where he tells us

- Jesus is God;
- Jesus always existed;
- His created everything;
- His light brings you life, both physical and spiritual.

He then takes the reader through 21 chapters of arguments and evidence to support these claims. The things you need to trust your life on these claim, and to convince you to trust your life into the safe hands of Jesus Christ.

Jesus's sayings of he who was, the I am sayings, are amongst the arguments that John is making to show that Jesus is all those things that John is claiming. His miracles are then evidence to backup these sayings, these arguments.

## The Central Division

Jewish writings usually have the most important phrase, or story in the middle of the writing. Psalms, and parables are constructed like this. But what if we tried to apply the literary rule to a whole Gospel. What if John has put something of absolute importance in the middle of his book? I know the chapters and verses were added after John had written his book, but it illustrates the point well of what is central.

Ten chapters before it and ten chapters after it, the story of Lazarus sits central in Johns Gospels 11<sup>th</sup> chapter , and documents this remarkable miracle of raising him from the grave. This is the 7<sup>th</sup> of the 7 miracles that John uses as evidence to support his claim that Jesus is God, and that all light and life comes from him. Up to this point we see the rise in popularity of Jesus, as he delivers fresh teaching about the kingdom of God and accompanies it with signs and wonders. It charts the life and ministry of Jesus. In the last 10 chapters we see the persecution, death and resurrection of Jesus. It's not quite that clear cut of course, but that's the emphasis. In between these two sections is Lazarus. It is a chapter that does not just divide the Gospels pages but it divided the people, just like the West Bank Barrier divides al-Azariya today. Reeling at what they had seen that day, the people now either wanted him as Messiah, or wanted him dead.

The 7<sup>th</sup> and probably greatest miracle that John documents, underlines the claim of Jesus to be the Jewish messiah, and yet this very act started the intentional and determined persecution of Jesus to have him silenced by killing him.

But if this story of Lazarus is central to the Gospel, what is central to the story. What is in the middle of the middle? The story is in three scenes. The first in Perea where Jesus hears from a messenger and delays his journey. The second scene is played out on the edge of Bethany where he meets with Martha then Mary. The final scene is outside the tomb of Lazarus where the miracle takes place. So the 17 verses of dialogue with Martha & Mary, in verse 17-33 is the centre-piece of the account of Lazarus, and the middle verse of the middle passage is v25 where Jesus says to Martha.

### 'I am the resurrection and the life'. (v25)

This verse divides everything. If you believe it, your life is saved and you are reborn. If you are unable to believe it your life is lost. And to take it to the extreme, if we take the 7 words of this 'I am' argument then the middle words is 'Resurrection'. Could it really be that John planned this, that central to his Gospel was the story of Lazarus, and central to the story was this claim of Jesus to be Resurrection Power, the very centre-piece of Johns arguments for Jesus being the Son of God , and that through your faith in Him you have **life**.

### Believe – be on the right side of the divide

Jesus says '**whosoever** believes in me, will live, even though they die (v25). He doesn't say, if we love him, we will live, if we serve him we will live, or if we imitate him we will live. Though surely those things will follow. He says whosoever believes. That is the pre-requisite for Grace, all else involves our effort, but our salvation comes through Grace and Mercy as we believe. Nothing else.

Quite simply put, Jesus says he is the Resurrection and the Life, if you believe in your heart this is true for you, Jesus says you will live, even though you die? Why because he will come with his resurrection and power and live in you.

The three walls we mentioned at the start, divide people of different beliefs. The West Bank Barrier divides al-Azariya, the town of Lazarus. The miracle of Lazarus divided the people in Bethany. There were those that embraced the miracles, and in doing so embraced Jesus and wanted him to be their King. There were also those who rejected the miracle as a fraudulent trick, and in doing so turned their hearts against Jesus, wanted no part of Him in their lives, and some even wanting him dead because of it.

Even though Jesus desires unity and wants all people saved, his words 'I am the Resurrection and the Life', divides people then and divides us today. There are those of us that believe Jesus is Resurrection Power and

New Life, and by asking him into our own lives by his Spirit, we demonstrate our belief in Him and our need of his power to work in us. Don't be left the wrong side of the divide. Hear the arguments and see the evidence, that Jesus is the son of God who came and died for you, and you can be set free by his resurrection power. If you have never believed in Jesus, then please make the decision to do that today. Don't risk coming to the end of your life having not made the decision, and be on the wrong side of the divide.

There are of course many who put up arguments as to why they can not believe Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life.

### **The unseen reality – New Life now**

One excuse will be that our faith is not real. They have experienced nothing like it before and it can not be seen, so how can we believe in it?

Go back to that moment where Jesus has shouted 'Lazarus come out' and a couple of minutes have passed but there has been no sign of Lazarus. You can see nothing, so the natural response is to believe nothing is happening. You could not be more wrong, as the great miracle has already happened and Lazarus is stumbling around wrapped up in his linen straight jacket and face-mask, trying to stand and orientate himself. In those moments, the miracle is unseen, but very much a reality.

Our faith is like that. We have faith in the unseen. When we except Jesus into our life, a miracle is born within us. You know it, you might even feel it, but you can't see it, you can not prove it to some-one who does not want to believe you.

Just because you cannot see something, it does not mean it is not a reality. People believe in Love, in Forgiveness, in the wind, in electricity, and many other things that they can not be seen, because they accept that they can see the impact it has on their lives. We experience all those things in different ways even though they are unseen, so we do not argue they are not real.

Our faith can also be experienced in many different ways, and the positive impact of our faith can be seen in the things we do, in the ways we behave, in the impact we have on the world. Without the influence of Christianity over the centuries, the world would be a much darker place to live in. Yet many people cannot accept that our faith is a reality, because they cannot see Jesus, and they are not prepared to accept the arguments or the evidence of him all around them.

Some say Christianity is make-believe, but new life in Jesus is a reality. His love for us is real. His promises to us for new life now, and eternal life when we die, is real. His strength, His peace, His protection, His grace, His mercy, His forgiveness – it is all real. It is no less real than what we can see, touch, smell, hear and feel. The only difference is that this reality is outside of our normal senses. If we have a friend in the early stages of pregnancy, then the baby is unseen, but is very much alive. It may not feel real at the time, but it is real. There is a hidden new life in the darkness of the womb.

### **Resurrection not Resuscitation – transformation not a patch job**

Jesus had done two previous miracles where lives were resurrected. He gave a widow back her son as he lay on the funeral stretcher, and got Jairus' daughter up from her deathbed shortly after she had passed away. Both were on the same day that they died, and there were plenty around who in their disbelief would have claimed that they hadn't really died. They still had their spirit, and were in some kind of coma state from which Jesus resuscitated them.

Jesus did not say 'I am the Resuscitation and the Life'. He said I am the Resurrection and the life.

Some people claim that Christianity is a sticking plaster, or a crutch, something vague to hope in when things are bad. They say 'if it works for you that's fine !'. But that is fundamentally incorrect. Of course Jesus does help us in life, we draw on his strength and his peace. But a crutch is something to lean on, so that our old body can cope a bit better. But that is not Christianity. Jesus does not say bring me your old life, and lets see if we can patch it up a bit, breath some new energy into those old bones. No we are reborn into a new life. As Paul tells the believers in Corinth **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new**

**has come! (2 Cor 5v17).** A We start out new lives in Him, still with the some of the habits and addictions, but his work is a work of transformation, as he gradually helps us move out roots from the old soil into new soil, and as we become like Jesus, take on more of his nature, our lives are radically changed.

So this is not Jesus patching us up, he is transforming us  
It is not him resuscitating us, he is resurrecting us

### **Resurrection Power. – life after physical death**

What many people hear from v25 is that Jesus has the power to resurrect Lazarus. That is true he did have, but that is **not** what he is saying. Some read a bit more into the verse and say that Lazarus is just a precursor to when he shows that he has the power to resurrect himself. Again whilst that is true, that is also not what Jesus is saying. He is not saying he is has the power to **do** resurrections, he is saying 'I am Resurrection'. I am Resurrection Power.

And I am the Life. In me is Resurrection, In me is New Life. It is because he has Resurrection power in him, he can then overcome death and bring Lazarus back on the fourth day, beyond anyone's reasoning or understanding of what was possible, even for a miracle worker like Jesus. It is because he has Resurrection power in him, he can then overcome death and do what no other prophet or anyone had ever done, and that is resurrect himself from the Grave.

So what does this mean for us? It means that if we have accepted Jesus into our lives, then he lives in us through his Spirit. God no longer dwells in the tabernacle or the Jewish temple, he dwells in us. If Jesus is in us, then his resurrection power lives in us. That does not mean I expect to be raised from the dead in my physical body. It does not mean that I should necessarily expect to see some-one brought back to life if I pray for them.

But it does mean that no grave can hold me. It does mean that nothing can separate me from the Love of God. It does mean that when I do leave the body of mine behind, then I will live forever, because he is the Resurrection, and he is the life, and he lives in me.

### **Death the door to Heaven**

In medieval days when men were locked in chains and put in a dungeon, they would suffer a lot. Then after months or years they might be released. A blacksmith had to come and knock the chains off which was apparently the most painful part of the whole experience for the prisoner. But it was necessary pain to finally be freed, and no-one would say they didn't want it.

When we face physical death it can be a painful time, physically or mentally. Yet as Christians, our physical death is our freedom from the troubles and striving of this world. It is our release into the eternal and joyful presence of God. In the film – Paul, Apostle of Christ, Luke finds himself in Rome's Circus Maximus with the imprisoned Christians who will be sent out into the arena the next day to be torn apart by wild beasts. He gathers the frightened men, women and children together and assures them by saying "It will be a moment of pain, but only a moment, only a moment, then we will be home in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ forever.

We only have a few decades of physical life, at the end of which is a door to the next life for those who made the decision to believe in Jesus. He's at Death's door. But this door has been shut, locked and bolted all of our lives, and can only be open through death. What happens to an old door if never used. The key rusts in the lock, and will be a struggle to move, after oiling several times. The bolt seizes up and may need hitting with a hammer. It can be a hard and painful process opening the door after so many years, but once the door is open that short period of pain is forgotten.

The pain of death is what frees us into rest of our wonderful eternity with Jesus. He has promised to be with you forever, and declares 'I am the Resurrection and the Life, Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; and those who live and believe in me will never die.'

Through his resurrection power living in us, we need not be afraid of death. We can point at Lazarus, and more importantly point at Jesus, and say if He walked out the grave, then so will I. So will I.

**Amen.**

## **Ain't no grave gonna hold my body down**

Shame is a prison, as cruel as the grave  
Shame is a robber, and he's come to take my name  
Love is my redeemer lifting me up from the ground  
Love is the power where my freedom song is found  
There aint no grave gonna hold my body down  
There aint no grave gonna hold my body down  
When I hear that trumpet sound, I am going to rise up out the ground  
There aint no grave gonna hold my body down

Fear is a liar with a smooth and velvet tongue  
Fear is a tyrant always telling me to run  
Love is resurrection and Love is a trumpet sound  
Love is my weapon, I'm gonna take my giants down.  
There aint no grave gonna hold my body down  
There aint no grave gonna hold my body down  
When I hear that trumpet sound, I am going to rise up out the ground  
There aint no grave gonna hold my body down

There was a battle, a war between death and life  
There on a tree the Lamb of God was crucified  
He went on down to hell, and he took back every key  
He rose up like a lion and he's setting all the captives free.  
There aint no grave could hold His body down  
There aint no grave could hold His body down  
When he heard the trumpet sound, he rose up out of the ground  
There aint no grave could hold His body down

There aint no grave can hold my body down  
There aint no grave can hold my body down

Well if you walked out of the grave, I'm walking too.  
Well If you walked out of the grave, I'm walking too.

**Division:** Heart 4 unity; Joke; 3 walls

**Bethany** – siblings, diff devotion

**1. Perea** – safer

**Messenger** – L already dead; final result

**Calm** – Storm/Gethsemane – spiritual awareness

**Funeral** & mourning

**2. Village edge:**

Martha (21-27) Direct, Limits J power; I am..

Mary (28-32) softer

**3. Tomb.**

Jesus weeps – Isaiah; knows outcome; Division (v37)

Roll stone away – Demand – 4<sup>th</sup> day – Be in crowd.

Command. - L Come out. Delay.struggle up. Unwrap.

Johns Gospel – 4 claims, Arg/Evidence.

The Centre Division – c 11; dialogues; I am..' Ressurrection.

Believe – be on right side.

Excuse 1: Not Real - Unseen Reality

Excuse 2: Crutch - R not resuscitation

Resurrection Power – in us

Death – dungeon; Luke; door; walk from Grave .