

The Bible in One Year Week 20: Lazarus (John Pt. 5)
(John 11:17-44)

You Came (Lazarus)

VERSE 1

You stood outside my grave
With tears still on Your face
I heard You say my name
My night was turned to day

VERSE 2

You said death's only sleeping
With one word my heart was beating
I rose up from my grave
My fear was turned to faith

CHORUS

You came I knew that You would come
You sang My heart it woke up
I'm not afraid I see Your face I am alive
You came I knew that You would come

BRIDGE

You are a miracle-working God
You are a miracle-working God
You are a miracle-working God
(A miracle-working God)

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• **Death: it's a Pretty Big Problem**

- *"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die..."* and I love how he ends, did you hear what he said to Martha? *"Do you believe this?"* Jesus is *the resurrection and the life*, but there's that word other word, too: *die*.
- Death: it's a pretty big problem. It's kind of...the worst. It doesn't take a whole lot of imagination to relate to the way Lazarus's sisters, Mary and Martha, were feeling when Jesus first showed up.
 - Some of us know that feeling *all too well*. Loss. Grief. Mourning. Your world turned upside-down. There are two kinds of people in this world at any given time: those who are in the midst of the storm of struggle and loss, and those who are waiting for the next storm to come. All of us, all humans experience suffering and loss. (If you want to dig into that topic more, go back and listen to our messages on *Job* from early this year.)
- Death is the great *fear*. Humans for millennia have used the fear of death and suffering to control each other, to oppress each other, enslave each other, war against each other.
 - Death is the great *curse*, the curse of sin that plagues the world.
 - Death is the ultimate *problem* that must be addressed if the Story of this world is going to turn out right. And that is exactly what Jesus addresses in his life, death, and resurrection. In a world of death, the Gospel is the light shining in the darkness that the darkness can't overcome.
 - John says *Jesus is that Light and Life*. And I love this from Hebrews: *"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death,"* (2:14-15). Jesus comes into *this setting* and announce to his friends, *"I am the resurrection and the life..."* (John 11:25).

• **A Hinge-Moment**

- Today, we're simply going to look at this incredible story of Lazarus and make a few brief observations that might help us in the journey. We've been going through the Gospel of John, this is week 5 of 7 (we took a brief detour last week and now we're back on track). Every time you read one of these stories from John's Gospel it helps to see how it fits into the bigger picture.
- Do you remember how we said that John has these *seven signs* and *seven I Am statements* of Jesus? What were they? The Seven Signs are: *The Water into Wine* (John 2:1-11), *Healing the Nobleman's Son* (4:46-54), *Healing the Paralyzed Man* (5:1-9), *Multiplying the Loaves and Fish* (6:1-14), *Healing the Blind Man* (9:1-12), *Raising Lazarus from the Dead* (11:1-44), and *Jesus' own Resurrection* (20:1-29). And the Seven "I Am's" are: *I Am the Bread of Life* (6:35), *the Light of the World* (8:12), *the Gate for the Sheep* (10:7), *the Good Shepherd* (10:11), *the Resurrection and the Life* (11:25), *the Way, the Truth, and the Life* (14:6), and *the True Vine* (15:1).

- So, the story of Jesus raising Lazarus is the *second to last* of the seven signs and the last one before Jesus' own death and resurrection. This is an important moment in the story. It's a *hinge story*, it's like the hinge between the first part of the book that's all about Jesus' ministry and the last part of the book that's all about his death and resurrection.
- And when you look at all that leads up to it and comes after it, you see that there's been all this rising action and tension building to this moment: Jesus signs and statements were getting greater and greater. He was becoming increasingly popular and increasingly hated. The religious leaders were trying to thwart him at every turn, but the movement just kept growing. This moment here with Lazarus is the final straw that sets everything in motion that will lead Jesus to the cross—and he knows *exactly* what he's doing.
- **Lazarus, Come Out**
 - So, here are just a few observations to take away here.
 - **1) Show and tell:** One thing that's cool about this story is that it's one of the instances in John's Gospel where one of Jesus' seven *I Am* statements overlaps with one of the seven signs. So, this story is about *who Jesus is* and *what Jesus does*. He *tells* it. Then he *shows* it. Pretty good evidence, I'd say. You know how the story went: Jesus got word that his friend, Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, was sick. They called for him to come because he was going to die. When Jesus finally gets there, Martha says Lazarus is already dead, and she's gutted: "Rabi, if you had been here, this wouldn't have happened." Then Jesus says, "Your brother will rise again." Martha replies, "Yes, yes, I know he'll rise again at the end, with the resurrection of the dead," but Jesus says, "No, no listen to me: *I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.*" Our biggest problem is death. Jesus is the Life and Light of God. Jesus doesn't just *bring* the solution, *he is the solution*. He *is* the resurrection, he *is* the only one with the power to bring the reversal of death itself and lead us into the restoration we all long for. He tells us. And he shows us. Here, with Lazarus, and ultimately, with his own resurrection. He's for real.
 - **2) Laying Down His Life:** A detail of this story that's easy to miss in the larger narrative is that by going to save Lazarus' life, *Jesus is choosing to go to lay down his life*. His disciples knew it, verse 8: "*But Rabbi, a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?*" Going back to Judea again and performing this unforgettable sign means Jesus is walking right into the "devil's den," if you will: he knows exactly what he's doing, he knows what it will cost him, and that's why he goes back and heals Lazarus. He lays down his life for his friend: where have we heard that before? Remember a little earlier when Jesus talked about the Good Shepherd? The Good Shepherd does what? "*He lays down his life for his sheep,*" (10:11). And remember, a little later, when Jesus is in the Upper Room with the disciples, what does he say to them? "*Greater love has no one than this...to lay down one's life for one's friends,*" (15:12). Jesus goes back into danger to save Lazarus, and in doing so he's laying down his life. Jesus lays down his life for his friends. Jesus laid down his life *for us*. It's what he came do! He's following through with the plan that was from the beginning, to lay down his life, to rescue the world.
 - **3) Deeply Moved:** This is a really profound moment, where it says Jesus was "deeply moved." He arrives on the scene, he sees his dear friends, Mary and Martha, and all their relatives, mourning. It says he is *deeply moved*. And then you have the shortest verse in the Bible: "*Jesus wept.*" We sometimes try to stifle our grief, sometimes we try to hide our emotions, sometimes we try to downplay the pain of others: "*Don't cry, it's ok, they're in a better place, you'll see them again...*" Jesus could have said all that stuff: "*There's no reason to cry, he's about to wake up!*" But he doesn't. He sees their pain, and he weeps. He weeps with them. Real tears. Of all the people there, he had a reason to not be affected by the pain: the story makes it clear, Jesus knew this was going to happen, knew Lazarus was going to die and that this would be used to show the glory of God. He knows this is going to be one of his most powerful signs and Lazarus is going to rise from the dead. *And still, he weeps*. Maybe we think that because God has the bigger view and sits, so lofty, so high above this broken world, that our pain must not matter to him. Jesus is God in the flesh, he knows it all, sees it all, *but still, he weeps*.

- N. T. Wright says: “...when we look at Jesus, not least when we look at Jesus in tears, we are seeing not just a flesh-and-blood human being but the Word made flesh. The Word, through whom the worlds were made, weeps like a baby at the grave of his friend. Only when we stop and ponder this will we understand the fully mystery of John’s gospel. Only when we put away our high-and-dry pictures of who God is and replace them with pictures in which the Word who is God can cry with the world’s crying will we discover what the word ‘God’ really means.” If the Word could stand there, weeping with his friends, even though he knew the bigger picture, I wonder what he’s doing when we’re weeping.
- **4) The Sign and the Reality:** Jesus tells them to take him to the tomb. He stands there and looks. Everyone’s watching. He tells them to roll the stone away. This is an incredible, intense moment. Hear what N.T. Wright says again: “*This is one of the most dramatic moments in the whole story of Jesus. When Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter in Mark 5, he ordered almost everyone out of the room, and when it was over he told them not to tell anyone. Now he stands in front of a large crowd, puts his reputation on the line, and shouts to Lazarus to come out. And the dead man comes out—a heart-stopping moment of shuddering horror and overwhelming joy, mixed together like dark mud and liquid gold. All of this is hugely important. If we don’t feel its power, and find ourselves driven to awe and thanks and hope, then either we haven’t learned to read or we have hearts of stone.*”
- Wow. What an incredible moment. Who else can do things like this? But think about this: what does John call these episodes? *Signs*. These miraculous moments are *signs* that point to what? To something greater. To who Jesus is and what he’s ultimately going to do for everyone. Signs that point to his glory. Raising Lazarus from the dead is Jesus’ final sign before his own resurrection: it’s a foreshadowing and a foretaste of something even greater. How could anything be greater than raising a man from the dead after he lay in a tomb four days? Here’s how: Lazarus rising from the dead was simply a reversal of death. He rose to life, and went on living. But Lazarus, and anyone else Jesus raised from the dead (it wasn’t common but there were a few others) went on to eventually die again.
- Jesus’ resurrection, on the other hand, is rising to an entirely different kind of life. Resurrection life. A resurrection body. A New Creation body. (Read 1 Corinthians 15 if you want to learn a little more about that.) This greatest sign of Jesus points to the real thing: the New Creation. Now, we’d be pretty fortunate if somehow we got to experience rising from the dead like Lazarus, to come back and have another chance in this world—and who knows, maybe someone here will? Anything’s possible, right? But here’s the really Good News—the real thing that this signs points to: because of Jesus, *all of us who believe in him will have a resurrection like he did!* We will one day rise to a New Creation life, never to die again. Because, “*I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.*”
- **Let’s Stick with this Guy**
 - And this brings us to the whole point of John’s Gospel: it’s the same point of every one of his stories. *Jesus is awesome. Jesus is for real. Jesus is unlike anyone or anything else. So why don’t you just go ahead and trust him!* Believe in him. I don’t know about you, *but I want to stick around this guy.* I don’t have all the answers, I still have my questions and my moments where I wonder and even doubt, but at the end of the day, *where else can I go?* There is *no one like this!* There is *nothing* that comes close to this! What an offer! I want what he’s got, I want what he offers, and I plan to go for it. I want to follow him, I want to believe in the one who is the resurrection and the life, because he’s the one that can really solve the problem and give what all of us are looking for. So, let me finish by stating Jesus’ question to Martha *to you:* “*Do you believe this?*”