

## 7<sup>th</sup> sign John 11:1-45 - Raising Lazarus from the dead

### Signs

Semeion say-mi'-on from Semaino see-mah'-ee -no - to signify a legal term used in evidence or a scientific term used in a proof.

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### The Death of Lazarus (NIV)

1Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. 3So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

4When 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." 5Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

7Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

8"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"

9Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. 10It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."

11After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

12His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." 13Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

14So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, 15and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

16Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

### Jesus Comforts the Sisters

17On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, 19and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. 20When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

21"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

23Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

24Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection, at the last day."

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

28 And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." 29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

31 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

32 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."

33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34 "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

35 Jesus wept.

36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

#### Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 "Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 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."

43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

#### The Plot to Kill Jesus

45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

"What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

49 Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! 50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."

**51He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. 53So from that day on they plotted to take his life.**

**54Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.**

**55When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. 56They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple area they asked one another, "What do you think? Isn't he coming to the Feast at all?" 57But the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him.**

### **The sign of raising Lazarus from the Dead:**

It is strange that what was perhaps the greatest sign of Jesus' ministry is also the sign that caused the most trouble for his ministry.

One of the strange delusions of our day is the quite unwarranted belief of many that medical science is making great strides in conquering disease and in eliminating or reducing the aging process.

It is true, of course, that people do live longer than they did 25 or 30 years ago.

It is also true that science has virtually eliminated certain diseases that once were great killers among us; hardly anyone dies of tuberculosis, polio, diphtheria or smallpox anymore. On the other hand, however, deaths due to heart disease, cancer, etc., are skyrocketing. The striking fact that no one refers to at all today is that in spite of this apparent progress, the death rate remains exactly what it has always been -- a flat 100%!

You can jog, you can avoid cholesterol, you can watch your health and you will end up the healthiest corpse that ever died, because death is still the master of our race and nothing can be done about it.

The story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead provides a factual account of an eyewitness to the ability of Jesus of Nazareth to reverse the iron grip of death. Although Lazarus had been dead for four days, Jesus turned that all around and brought him back to life, not by painstaking medical research, not by voodoo, and magic incantations, but by a simple word of command because in addition to being the master of all other things (storms, blindness, lameness, water and wine) he was, and is, the Master of death.

The account concerns a family in Bethany, Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus, who had died.

The problem:

**1Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. 3So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."**

**4When 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." 5Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.**

**7Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."**

Another Problem:

**"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"**

**9Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. 10It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."**

A Side Issue:

**11After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."**

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**24Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."**

**25Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"**

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**32**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."

Jesus and Death:

**33**When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. **34**"Where have you laid him?" he asked.  
"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

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Response of the Jews:

**36**Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

**37**But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead

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The Two Very Different Responses of the Jews:

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"What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. **48**If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

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**54**Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.

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### **Jesus and Martha:**

Martha has left the many mourners who came out from Jerusalem. Evidently Mary and Martha were well known and popular, so there were many mourners there, just across the Mount of Olives from the city of Jerusalem. Hearing that Jesus is on the way, Martha goes to meet him. This is very characteristic of her; she is a woman of action. Mary, on the other hand, in line with her more shy, more retiring nature, waits at home.

Martha greets Jesus with a phrase that must have been frequently on all of their lips when Lazarus was sick. How many times had she thought or said, "Oh, if Jesus were only here."?

Regardless of the answer to that question, it comes automatically to Martha's lips when she meets him: "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died."

This is probably not a statement of reproach. Martha is not saying, "Lord, why didn't you come sooner? We sent for you. If you had responded we wouldn't have had this loss." She may well have known that the message did not reach Jesus until Lazarus was dead and that there was no way he could have responded and gotten there before Lazarus died. Martha's word is not one of reproach, but rather one of regret: "Lord, I wish you could have been here, because if you had, my brother would not have died."

Then she goes on to say, "But even now, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will give it to you."

What does she expect? What is it that she wants from him? Some commentators say that she really did expect Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead, pointing to her words,

"Even now." I am reminded of Joseph Parker's comment, "When the angels want a good laugh, they read the commentaries!" Some commentators seem to miss the point because, of course, the very next word of Jesus is, "Your brother will rise again." If Martha had any idea that that would happen then, she would have said, "How wonderful, Lord! That is exactly what I expected you to do now that you have come." But she does not say that. What she says is, "Yes, I know. He will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." No, Martha is not looking for the immediate resurrection of her brother.

What, then, is she looking for from Jesus? What does she mean by the words, "Even now, whatever you ask of God, God will give it to you?"

Perhaps she is looking for his comfort, for the release that God can give to a heart that is burdened and saddened, torn with grief, anticipating the loneliness and emptiness of the days ahead. God can give marvelous inward peace. Many have testified to that. This may have been what Martha was asking for, "Even now, Lord, even though he is gone..."

Martha's faith was placed right where ours often is, in what she thought would happen, not in who Jesus is and whom she is dealing with.

How many times have we said, "I know God has worked in the past, and I know that he will work again in the future, but today, well, this is not the day of miracles"?

In the daily grind of life our world seems to be so barren of miracles that we think, "Those days have gone. God probably won't work now. He will work again, though..." This is Martha's faith -- in the future, at the resurrection of the last day, yes, the program of God is certain. Her theology is accurate, but she has forgotten that God is right there in the here and now.

That is what Jesus brings to her attention. He shifts the focus back from the program to his Person, in the words, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" Even in the grammar of this passage the focus is on the first word, "I, I am the resurrection and the life." Jesus is saying that wherever he is, then anything God ever did or can do, can happen! That is the faith Jesus wants from us.

To Martha, Jesus is saying, "Martha, don't talk about the 'last days.' That will happen, God's program will be carried out, but never sell short the Son of God. When he is involved in a situation, and he does not have to be physically present, then you can expect God to work in his own way in time."

**Jesus covers all the fears of men in these wonderful words. Two groups of believers are mentioned here.**

1 - First, "He who believes in me, though he die..." There he refers to those who have already died. What about those who have died, those whose bodies are now dissolving in the dust? All of us have relatives and dear ones who are in that category. This is a word of hope addressed to those left behind: "He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."

D. L. Moody once wrote, "One day you will hear that D. L. Moody of Northfield, Massachusetts, is dead. Don't you believe it! In that day I will be more alive than I have ever been before."

That is what Jesus is saying here: "Though he dies, if he believes in me, yet shall he be living." What a hope that brings!

2 - Then the second group: "Whoever lives and believes in me..." That is talking about us. We are not dead; we have not yet passed from this earthly scene; what about our future? The word of Jesus to us is, "Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." Actually the Greek phrasing here is very strong. It literally says, "He will never, ever die forever." He will pass from this scene, yes, through what to all appearances looks like death, but there will be no darkness, no loneliness, no separation, no limitation of his powers; he will pass immediately into life. That is the great hope that caused the Apostle Paul in Chapter 15 of I Corinthians to cry out, "O, death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor 15:55). To the Grim Reaper, the feared

lord of human life, the master of all our destinies, Paul cries, "Where is your sting? Where is your victory?" For those who believe, it is gone.

Notice that Jesus twice states the condition, "He who believes in me."

There is a very painful truth - Scripture holds forth no hope to those who do not believe in Jesus. To those who have had opportunity to hear his word and receive his offer of grace he extends this marvelous promise, but to those who refuse it, those who do not believe it, there is nothing ahead but darkness. This is what Jesus says. There only needs to be one way through death, if it is available to all. This is the promise of the gospel. It is available to all. Light from God is streaming down all the time to everybody. If you follow the light you have, dim as it may be, although it be nothing but the light of nature, it leads to more light until at last you know the way to God through Jesus Christ. "He who believes in me." That is the test.

Martha responds very nobly to this: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are (three things);

- 1 - The Messiah (the Christ);
- 2 - The Son of God (the divine Child of God, the One who is Deity himself); and,
- 3 - He who is coming into the world (i.e., the predicted one of the prophets)."

You cannot ask for a greater response than that. She says, "Yes, Lord, I am not going to focus on the program, I am going to focus on your Person. You are what you claim to be."

### **Jesus and Mary:**

Though Mary greets Jesus with the same words as Martha, she does so in a totally different atmosphere. John stresses here that when Jesus saw her she was weeping, and all those who came with her were weeping.

When Martha came to him she was far more sober and resigned. She was a more practical, pragmatic person, and she was able to handle it better. There was no sign that she was weeping or broken up with this, though she must have grieved inside tremendously. Her faith, which Jesus focused upon, needed to be stretched. But when Mary comes she is overwhelmed with her feelings. Her heart is broken. She is torn with grief and pain. It is obvious that she is suffering tremendously from a deep sense of loss of her dear brother.

Jesus' reaction here is highly significant: He was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled." It is very difficult to capture in English what the Greek text is saying here. The word for "deeply moved in spirit" is a word that only occurs three or four times in the New Testament, and in each place it is associated with a sense of indignation, of anger. It is a word that the Greeks used to describe a horse snorting with anger. Jesus is indignant, he is moved with anger, and it showed in his face: he "troubled himself"; he evidenced it by what he did and the way he looked. John emphasizes that his reaction to the deep grief of Mary and her friends is one of sharp anger.

Why? What is Jesus angry at? He is not angry at the people who came, as some suggest. Some of the commentators (making the angels laugh again), suggest that he was angry at the professionalism of some of the mourners.

It may be better said that he was angry with death and the slavery and bondage of the human condition (sin) – the liberty that was lost with Adam in the garden.

It was likely something of this, carried to a far greater extreme, that our Lord felt. We often feel a similar way when we read a newspaper account of an auto accident that takes the life of young people. We are angry that the Liar, the Murderer, that Jesus describes, has struck again.

This is likely what Jesus felt. He was angry at the terrible results of evil.

There is still another reaction here.

It says that Jesus asked where they had laid Lazarus, and as he started out to the tomb, that

"he wept."

Actually this word is not the same as the word which described the Jews' and Mary's weeping earlier. It is a word that literally means "he broke into tears." Jesus began to shed tears. While walking to the tomb, his grief overwhelmed him, he so sympathized with them that he broke into tears, so that the Jews seeing him said, "See how he loved him." I think they misunderstood. It is true Jesus loved Lazarus, but he is not weeping for that. He knows he is on his way to raise him from the dead. He knows that in a few minutes this whole weeping crowd will be transformed into rejoicing people who can hardly believe what has happened; and that Mary and Martha are going to have their dear brother back again in their arms. No, he knows that; he has no doubt of it. He is weeping because he is sharing their heartache.

**Can there be anything more beautifully descriptive of the nature of God than this? He sympathizes with them. It is a precious thing to have someone empathize (sympathize) with us.**

Amazingly, this is what God does with us. In Romans 12, Paul tells us to "weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice," (Rom 12:15). Here our Lord himself sets the example of this. Knowing that he is going to turn it all around, he yet feels the sorrow of their hearts and weeps.

**Now we come to the actual miracle.**

**38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 "Take away the stone," he said.**

**"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."**

**40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"**

**41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 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."**

**43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."**

There are still two obstacles remaining before Jesus can raise Lazarus:

1 - One is the stone, the physical obstacle. According to John's testimony here, the tomb was a cave. If it is the traditional site shown to visitors to Bethany today, the tomb of Lazarus was not a horizontal cave but a vertical one, a dungeon into which you descend by steps. (The stone lay flat on the ground on the surface.)

It may have been that or a horizontal cave cut into the ground. But whatever the nature of the cave, the stone was blocking entry.

Notice our Lord does not wave his hands and the stone vanishes. This is what a magician of our day would do.

Jesus says to the people, "Take away the stone." There is always this remarkable combination of the divine and the human at work in our Lord's miracles, and so it is the people who remove the stone. Then there is still Martha's protest: "Lord, don't do this. We will all be offended by the odor." Notice how he answers. He does not rebuke her - he encourages her in the words, "Remember what I said." The word of God removes this obstacle which her momentary doubt interjected. "Remember what I said. Did I not say to you that 'if you would believe you would see the glory of God?' Trust me." How many times our faith needs some encouragement, some momentary word from the Word of God itself to steady us and keep us from faltering. This is what Martha needed.

Having strengthened her, Jesus now turns to do the great deed. He begins with a simple prayer.

**41So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42I 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."**

Notice the many times in this account that what Jesus did he did for the sake of the ones involved. Earlier he said to the disciples, "I am glad I was not there for your sake. He stayed two days where he was when the message reached him "because he loved Mary and Martha." It was for their sake he did so. Now he prays out loud for the sake of the people there. He wants them to see that God the Father is involved with him in this, that he is not a magic worker coming to astonish them, but that God is with him. He calls on God to work and he has every assurance, without the slightest doubt, that he will. It is a simple prayer of gratitude, a wonderful expression, spoken aloud to prove that God is behind him.

**43When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."**

What a sight that must have been! The loud voice was not for Lazarus -- he did not need any loud voice. When Jesus raised the young man in the village of Nain he merely spoke to him; when he raised the daughter of Jairus he only spoke to her. Our Lord does not need to call out for some soul wandering out in the darkness somewhere in order to return him to the body. No, the loud voice was for the benefit of the people that they might hear that it is his voice that summons the dead. The personal name, of course, was meant for Lazarus.

It has often been pointed out, if Jesus had not said "Lazarus", he would have emptied the cemetery!

He himself said in Chapter 5, "The hour is coming when all they that are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of Man and shall come forth," (John 5:25). One day that voice will summon all the dead to rise, and all of them will, but here only Lazarus is singled out.

And Lazarus does come out; life returns to his body. We do not know how, no one can explain it, but as the onlookers breathlessly observe, suddenly a figure appears in the door of the tomb, bound in grave clothes,

still wrapped in white, with a napkin still around his head, stumbling and staggering about. What a sight it must have been!

But notice again the blending of the human and the divine. Life is something God alone can give, but unbinding people is something we can do. So:

**44 Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."**

The Lord understood that this man needed more than life: he needed liberty, he needed freedom, and that is what God puts in our hands. We cannot regenerate people -- no one can -- but we can help the life they receive to be freed from the hangups of the past. We can teach them the Word that frees. We can show them fellowship. We can encourage them. We can take away the things that bind them. We can help them through problems. When the life is there, "Loose him and let him go," is addressed to us.

**What does this miracle say?**

The answer to that is given by the Apostle Paul in his Second Letter to Timothy. Timothy was a young man who was left in the pagan city of Ephesus. He had to struggle to live as a Christian in that polluted, pagan environment, just as we have to today in our society. He was sometimes discouraged, sometimes defeated, facing many problems. He was a little afraid. He was timid. He was frail of health.

What were Paul's words to him?

**"Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead. Remember Jesus right where you are. Remember he is with you," (2 Tim 2:8).**

This is his word. The glory of the good news is that he who was with but a few people in the days of his flesh is now, by means of the Spirit, always with us!