

From Death to Life
John 11:17-27, 38-53
April 6, 2014

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "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." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 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." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 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." Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 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. 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." Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

The story of Lazarus being raised from the dead is one of the most striking miracles in the Gospels. If all we had was the account of this one miracle, it would be enough to conclude that Jesus was truly the Son of God. Today, we are going to examine this miracle to see what it has to say to us 21st century Christians.

This section of Scripture deals with a subject none of us enjoy talking about. It deals with death. Death is an ugly event. The story of Lazarus is no exception. The once happy home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha had been invaded by grief. Those of you who have experienced the death of a loved one know what I mean. You're familiar with the heartache and devastation that accompany death. Death always tears a hole in your heart that never fully heals.

One of the most disturbing things about death is that it is universal. Unless the Lord returns first, all of us will die. Everyone will die. Scripture tells us: *By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return* (Gen 3:19 NIV).

Death is not a pleasant subject, but the sobering fact is someday you will die. We will all die. Think about this. Every time you hear, “Happy birthday to you,” death is another year closer.

Even though we know we are mortal and death is enviable, it still seems to take us by surprise. I imagine Mary and Martha expected Lazarus to get well, even though he was sick. We are no different. We expect life to go on. We hope life will go on. But death will come.

Because death will come, we must always be prepared for death. In his epistle, James writes: *You do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes* (James 4:14 NIV).

Jesus told a story about a rich fool who thought his life would never end. The story ends with these words: *But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you”* (Lk 12:20 NIV). There are a million things in your life that you can put off until later – but not salvation. We must be prepared at all times to leave this world and meet our Savior.

A little girl was asking her mother questions about her grandfather’s recent death. Her mother explained that God had called grandpa home to be with him and one day God would call her home, too. The girl ran into her bedroom and her mother followed hoping to console her daughter. When the mother looked in on the child, she found her daughter packing a suitcase. The mother asked her what she was doing, the little girl replied, “I want to be ready when God calls me home.”

Human beings find death repulsive. We rebel against the idea of death because, on some level, everyone knows people were never meant to die. Believers and unbelievers alike sense that death is not natural. Still, we all die. But death is not the end of the story.

As our most basic instincts tell us, we all will live forever. Often we think only in terms of Christians living forever, but even unbelievers will live forever. The only difference is where you spend eternity.

That’s good news for us. We know Jesus and that means we know eternal life. Everyone who knows Jesus as their Savior will spend eternity with him. Sadly, those who do not know Jesus have a much different destination. In John’s revelation, we learn the fate of those who don’t know Jesus as their personal Savior. John writes: *If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire* (Rev 20:15 NIV).

Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Jesus is even the Lord over death. The story of Lazarus proves that fact. When Lazarus walked out of the tomb, only the most blinded skeptic could have denied that God was standing among them. And this was not an isolated incident. In the 5th chapter of Mark, we find Jesus raising Jairus' daughter from the dead. In the 7th chapter of Luke, we read about Jesus calling the son of the widow of Nain back to life.

If the story of Christ had ended at the cross, it would have been a tragedy of eternal proportions. But Jesus didn't stop at the cross. On the first Easter morning, Jesus rose from the dead. His resurrection puts the world on notice that Jesus means life beyond death – not just for him but for all who follow him.

Listen to Paul speak about what Christ's victory over death means to us: *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever* (1 Thess 4:13-17 NIV).

But wait, that's not all. There is more to a life in Jesus than life everlasting. Jesus has more than just the answer to the problem of death. Jesus has the answers for the problems of life, too.

When we totally give our lives over to Jesus, we experience a transformation from death to life while we are still here on earth. When Jesus becomes the Lord of someone's heart, he brings the power to change a life destroyed by sin. The Lordship of Christ brings a brand new start – a new lease on life.

Through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, Jesus specializes in bringing new life to dead people walking. Scripture tells us: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* (2 Cor 5:17 NIV).

God spoke of this fresh start through the prophet Isaiah: *"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool"* (Is 1:18 NIV).

A new life here on earth and life everlasting with Christ in heaven, does it get any better than that? No, it doesn't, but there is one more benefit we can enjoy since we have moved from death to life. Our new status gives us the privilege of inviting others into the family of God.

Because we know the truth, we can go to an unbelieving world with a message of good news and salvation, not a message of doom and condemnation. We have the food the

starving souls of this world are looking for. We have the roadmap for moving from death to life. We have the words of Jesus.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16 NIV).

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life (Jn 5:24 NIV).

I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death (Jn 8:51 NIV).

Beyond this wonderful news, there is one more astounding fact: the price of this move from death to life is only faith. This transformation can't be bought or earned. It is the most wonderful gift of all from the most wonderful God of all. Ephesians 2:8 tells us: *It is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.*

We have been moved from death to life by the grace of God because of the sacrifice of Christ. This is something too good to keep to ourselves. As most of the world focuses on the Easter Bunny and colored eggs, take advantage of the time and tell someone, who doesn't know Christ, the wonderful story of how Jesus can move them from death to life.