

## THE RAISING OF LAZARUS: PART 2

A certain pastor observed a little girl standing outside the preschool Sunday school classroom between Sunday school and worship, waiting for her parents to come and pick her up for *"big church."* The pastor noticed that she clutched a big storybook under her arm with the title *"Jonah and the Whale."*

Feeling mischievous, he knelt beside the girl and asked, *"What's that you have in your hand?"*

*"This is my storybook about Jonah and the whale,"* she answered.

*"Tell me something,"* he continued, *"do you believe that story about Jonah and the whale?"*

The girl said, *"Why, of course I believe it!"*

The pastor inquired further, *"You really believe a man can be swallowed up by a*

*big whale, stay inside him all that time, and come out okay?"*

She declared, *"Yes! This story is in the Bible, and we talked about it in Sunday school today."*

Then the pastor asked, *"Can you prove to me this story is true?"*

She thought for a moment and then said, *"Well, when I get to heaven, I'll ask Jonah."*

Finally the pastor asked, *"What if Jonah's not in heaven?"*

The girl put her hands on her hips and sternly declared, *"Then YOU can ask him!"*<sup>1</sup>

This little girl had the kind of faith it takes to be saved. She believed everything that was in the Bible, everything that came from the mouth of God. That is the kind of faith Jesus is trying to establish in His disciples, in Martha and Mary, and all that witnessed the miracle of raising Lazarus. Now here is what happened:

John 11:38-44 NAS:

<sup>38</sup> *So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came\* to the tomb.*

*Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.*

<sup>39</sup> *Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased,*

*said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days."*

<sup>40</sup> *Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"*

<sup>41</sup> *So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.*

<sup>42</sup> *"I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me."*

<sup>43</sup> *When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth."*

<sup>44</sup> *The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."*

Imagine yourself there, as part of the crowd surrounding the grave and mourning loudly. You watch as Jesus comes to stand in front of the cave.

There is a large stone covering the entrance to the cave. You hear Jesus say, "Remove the stone," and Martha's response, "Lord, by now he stinks"

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<sup>1</sup> , "Citation: Rich Tatum, Carol Stream, Illinois; source unknown," in – *Perfect Illustrations: For Every Topic and Occasion*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "BELIEF".

(which is the literal translation of the words in verse 39). But they obey and remove the stone. What would have been going through your mind as you heard Jesus call, “*Lazarus, come forth*”? And then what would your reaction be to see this dead man walk out of the cave? Would your mouth be open and your eyes big? And what would you be feeling? I daresay your heart would be pounding very hard and that you would be feeling some fear. And that would be appropriate fear—an awesome respect—for the tremendous power of God. It would be “*the fear of the Lord.*” I would also think that within a few seconds you would drop to your knees or even prostrate yourself on the ground to worship Jesus because you would have realized that truly He is the Son of the living and almighty God. John simply states in verse 45 that “*many believed.*”

This is not a complicated theological passage. What do you think is by far the most important statement in this passage? Jesus said to Martha, “*Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?*” Anything is possible for God. There is nothing that He cannot do (Matthew 19:26). Hebrews 11:6 (NAS) tells us: “*And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*”

Faith means everything in our relationship with God and Christ. When we have true faith and are obedient we will see the wonders of God every day, including miracles. God wanted these people to have that kind of faith so He demonstrated the most remarkable miracle possible. He brought Lazarus back to life after being dead for four days. Do you know of anyone else who can raise the dead? Here is a miracle of miracles that was documented by many eye witnesses. Jesus was the Savior and He demonstrated that ability by giving new life to a dead body. I hope you have such faith, and if not, I pray God will lead you to it.

John 11:45-46 NAS:

<sup>45</sup> *Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him.*

<sup>46</sup> *But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done.*

Many of the people who saw this came to faith in Christ. But guess what? Some people refuse to believe the truth even when it collides with them like a freight train. And sure enough there were some people like that in this crowd who immediately ran to tell the Jewish leaders what had happened. This should confirm what Luke wrote in Luke 16:30-31 NLT:

<sup>30</sup> *“The rich man replied, ‘No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God.’*

<sup>31</sup> *“But Abraham said, ‘If they won’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they won’t listen even if someone rises from the dead.’”*

And what did the Pharisees set out to do? What are they always trying to do to Jesus?

John 11:47-53 NLT:

<sup>47</sup> *Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. “What are we going to do?” they asked each other. “This man certainly performs many miraculous signs.*

<sup>48</sup> *“If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the **Roman army** will come and destroy both our **Temple** and our **nation.**”*

<sup>49</sup> ***Caiaphas**, who was high priest at that time, said, “You don’t know what you’re talking about!”*

<sup>50</sup> *You don't realize that it's better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed."*

<sup>51</sup> *He did not say this on his own; as high priest at that time he was led to prophesy that Jesus would die for the entire nation.*

<sup>52</sup> *And not only for that nation, but to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world.*

<sup>53</sup> *So from that time on, the Jewish leaders began to plot Jesus' death.*

<sup>54</sup> *Therefore Jesus no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called **Ephraim**; and there He stayed with the disciples.*

The Jewish leaders were by this time pulling their hair out. Jesus kept performing these miracles and making fools of them. What could they do to end the threat He posed to them? They were afraid that the great majority of the people would soon believe He was the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. That would mean they would support Him to be the ruler of Israel and they would be out in the cold. The Romans would view this as outright rebellion and surely send all their military might to crush Israel. Then the Pharisees and Sadducees would lose their positions of authority along with their magnificent Temple. That exact situation did occur

when the Jews revolted against Rome in 66 A.D.

In John 11:45 and 12:9–11 and 17, we see that Lazarus caused quite a stir in the area. When people saw him, many believed in Christ. In fact, Lazarus was a walking miracle. The great crowd that gathered on Palm Sunday came not only because of Jesus, but also because of Lazarus. In John 12:11 we are told that Lazarus was causing people to trust Christ.<sup>2</sup>

It was Caiaphas, the chief priest, who came up with the master plan, and without his knowing it, he declared a prophecy of what Jesus would become to the nation of Israel. So Caiaphas suggested that they make Jesus out to be a revolutionary leader and a troublemaker. They would suggest to Rome that if He were executed, all the problems would come to an end. Caiaphas was suggesting that Jesus die so that the nation of Israel would not be destroyed. They were going to use Jesus' death as a substitute for all the people being killed. Are you getting the connection? John's comment (verse 51) shows that he understands the statement as having implications far beyond Caiaphas's limited understanding, for that position was to have universal consequences. John sees the unifying purpose of the death of Christ in gathering together the children of God, a term here used for

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<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.: *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1997, c1992, S.



all who would come to believe in Jesus (52).<sup>3</sup> That is exactly why Jesus came. Only He came to die for their sins not so that they could just go on living. He came so that they could have eternal life in Heaven. And He also came *“not only for that nation, but to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world”* (verse 52).

It is really hard to believe that the Jewish leaders actually thought they were saving the people by offering Jesus to die in their place. But we cannot know for sure. It is also hard to believe that they could not see that Jesus was the Messiah from all the evidence that had been presented to them. But greed and selfishness can do strange things to the mind, and those are often the ingredients Satan mixes in for those who want to place themselves above their brothers and sisters.

It was from this time forward, however, that the council resolved that Jesus should die. Jesus, therefore, thought it would be best to relocate to the city of Ephraim, which was close to the desert about fifteen miles north of Jerusalem; and there He remained with His disciples. The crowd was gathering in Jerusalem for the Passover feast, and the pilgrims were wondering if Jesus would attend the feast even though He was in danger. If the Sanhedrin, which was the governing body in

Israel, would have had a “Ten Most Wanted List,” Jesus would probably have been **public enemy number one**. The council wanted Jesus out of the way and they wanted Him out of the way fast.

John 11 has made clear that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. At the same time it also has made clear the utter depravity of the human heart. The rich man in Hades had argued, “*If one went unto them from the dead, they will repent*” (Luke 16:30). Lazarus came back from the dead, and the officials wanted to kill the One who performed the miracle. Miracles certainly reveal the power of God, but of themselves they also reveal the sinfulness of the human heart in denying the obvious source of those miracles.

John 11:55-57 NAS:

<sup>55</sup> Now the **Passover** of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover to purify themselves.

<sup>56</sup> So they were seeking for Jesus, and were saying to one another as they stood in the temple, “What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?”

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<sup>3</sup> Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition. 4th ed.* Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-

<sup>57</sup> *Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he was to report it, so that they might seize Him.*

John shifts our attention to the pilgrims who began to find their way to Jerusalem. For the most part they were friendly to Jesus, in contrast to the authorities, and exchanged opinions with one another as to whether or not their hero would dare to brave the opposition of the council by coming to the feast. Jesus had attended the national festivals in the past, during which time He publicly taught in the temple area. Would He continue this pattern of ministry? Large crowds gathering in the city kept looking for Him.<sup>4</sup>

So Jesus withdrew and waited for the Passover, when He would go up to Jerusalem again and, as the Good Shepherd, would die for the sheep. Then Jesus would be restored on the third day, to an endless life.

What is the meaning of the resurrection of Lazarus for us? The same as it was for the disciples and other witnesses in Bethany. *This event is a demonstration of*

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Varsity Press, 1994, S. Jn 11:1.

<sup>4</sup> Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:316.

*Jesus' ability to make His resurrection power available to His people—now!*

It is one thing to believe that Jesus has the power to raise us up on the last day. He does and He will. But it's something else to realize that Jesus' power is unlimited now, that we can tap into Jesus' resurrection power today and ask Him to help us with that situation that is most difficult or challenging in our lives. Jesus can bring new life to the deadened areas of our own personalities. Because of Jesus' power, we can risk taking actions that we might otherwise never have the courage to take. We need never draw back from anything God asks, for the unlimited power of new life is ours in Him.<sup>5</sup> There's one hitch though. We have to ask Jesus sincerely to wield His power in our lives. *"You do not have because you do not ask"* (James 4:2, NAS. See also James 4:3 and John 16:24).

But even though we come to the end of chapter eleven, the story of Lazarus does not end there. We see the sequel as chapter twelve opens at a dinner some time later, perhaps about two months.

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<sup>5</sup> Richards, Larry; Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Teacher's Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1987, S. 734.

## JOHN CHAPTER TWELVE

### Mary Anoints Jesus

#### John 12:1-11 NAS:

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus, therefore, six days before the **Passover**, came to **Bethany** where **Lazarus** was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.*

<sup>2</sup> *So they made Him a supper there, and **Martha** was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him.*

<sup>3</sup> ***Mary** then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*

<sup>4</sup> *But **Judas Iscariot**, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said,*

<sup>5</sup> *"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?"*

<sup>6</sup> *Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.*

<sup>7</sup> *Therefore Jesus said, "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial.*

<sup>8</sup> *"For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me."*

<sup>9</sup> *The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead.*

<sup>10</sup> *But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also;*

<sup>11</sup> *because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.*

The event that opens chapter twelve begins the last week of Jesus' earthly life.

Passover is six days away and Jesus knows what will happen to Him before this Passover is celebrated.

John chapter 12 as a whole reports the end of Jesus' public ministry. It details an account of Mary's anointing of Jesus in preparation for His coming sacrifice, His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and the prediction of His death.

John opens this gospel by telling us that Jesus “*came unto His own (world), and His own (people) received Him not*” (John 1:11). In the first twelve chapters of John, John presents one proof after another providing undeniable evidence that Jesus is the Son of God. Every bit of this evidence was seen firsthand by the Jewish leaders, and in spite of this evidence they refused to accept Him for who He was.

Now six days before the Passover, Jesus left Ephraim and returned to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, and attended a dinner in His honor. According to Mark this dinner took place at the home of Simon the Leper (Mark 14:1-11). Jesus’ good friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were all there. It seems that the twelve disciples were also there. They all must have also been good friends of Simon. So we have here a get-together among what we would have to assume was a collection of very close friends and followers of Jesus.

The pure nard was an expensive perfume, which would only be used on special occasions. The value of the perfume was a year’s wages (300 denarii), perhaps a lifetime of savings. This most generous gift offered to Jesus by Mary was a way for Mary to show how much Jesus was loved and how grateful they all were for His bringing Lazarus back to life. The comment, “*The house was filled with the*

*fragrance,*” verifies that John was actually present at this event, which makes it an eyewitness account of what was taking place.

Judas Iscariot took issue with Mary in such an extravagant waste of money, claiming that the money from the sale of the perfume could have been used to provide for the needs of the poor, which hardly expressed his true feelings. He was more interested in increasing the money in the treasury, which was placed in his care and from which he could take money for his own personal expenditures. Judas could certainly be identified as a prototype of the modern day politician. Perhaps that is one of the reasons our country is suffering the way it is. Judas not only betrayed Christ when he agreed to turn Him over to the authorities for thirty pieces of silver, but he had apparently been betraying Him over and over again by stealing money from the treasury. A large percentage of so-called public servants in this country steal from the public treasury every day. That is also a betrayal of the teachings of Jesus. Judas paid for his betrayal of Christ and those who trusted him with their resources. Our public servants who follow in the steps of Judas will also pay for their betrayal of our trust. It is too bad that people do not study their Bibles carefully so that they might understand the ultimate results of their disobedience to the will of God.



It was Judas who started the criticism, and, sad to say, Mark informs us that the other disciples picked up on it. They did not know that Judas was being controlled by Satan (John 12:4), and they admired him for his apparent, although insincere, concern for the poor. After all, he was the treasurer; and especially at Passover season, it would seem that he would want to share with those who were less fortunate (John 13:21–30). Until the very end, the disciples believed that Judas was a devoted follower of the Lord.

Mark 14:4-6 NAS:

<sup>4</sup> *But some were indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted?*

<sup>5</sup> *"For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they were scolding her.*

But then Jesus said: *"Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. "For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me."*

“You will always have the poor among you” is not a statement concluding that there will always be poverty in the world and because of that reality we should do

nothing about poverty, which, unfortunately, is how some have taken this statement. Instead, Jesus was saying that the causes of poverty are many and people will always have opportunities to help those who are less fortunate (Mark 14:7). But the opportunity to show the kind of love they all should be showing to Jesus while He was here on earth was limited, so extravagance was a proper way of showing that love.

### John 12:9-11 NAS

<sup>9</sup> *The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead.*

<sup>10</sup> *But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also;*

<sup>11</sup> *because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.*

You can probably imagine after studying all that we have learned in John that Jesus had by this time become a very well-known figure. People from all over the country were going to come to see both the man who had brought Lazarus back from the dead as well as Lazarus himself. Because Lazarus had been brought back from the dead, many people had come to believe in Jesus. So the chief priests

decided to kill both of them (verse 10).

The account of Mary anointing Jesus is also found also in Matthew 26:6–13 and Mark 14:3–9. Do not confuse this account with the one given in Luke 7:36–50, where a former harlot also anointed Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee.

Mary was a virtuous woman, and she anointed Jesus in the house of Simon the leper (Mark 14:3). The Luke 7 event took place in Galilee, while the account we are now considering occurred in Judea. The fact that there are two “Simons” involved should not surprise us, for Simon was a common name in that day,<sup>6</sup> much as “Jeff” or “Eric” are today.

When you combine all three of these gospel accounts, you learn that Mary anointed both Jesus’ head and His feet. It was an act of pure love on her part, for she knew her Lord was about to endure suffering and death. Because she sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to Him speak, she knew what He was going to do.<sup>7</sup>

Mary was showing her devotion to Jesus *before* it was too late. Her act of love and worship was public, spontaneous, sacrificial, lavish, personal, and unembarrassed. Jesus called it “*a good work*” (Matthew 26:10; Mark 14:6) and both commended

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<sup>6</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 12:1.

her and defended her.<sup>8</sup>

It would have required a year's wages from a common laborer to purchase that ointment. Where do you think Mary got such an expensive perfume? Do you think she found it in the backyard, stole it from a rich neighbor, or received it as a gift? It is possible that she had had it for many years and was saving it. But my guess would be that Mary purchased it, and perhaps she purchased it not for her own use, but perhaps she purchased it knowing that she wanted to honor Jesus at this dinner for Lazarus.<sup>9</sup> I would not be too surprised if she had used what we would consider her life savings.

Like David, Mary would not give to the Lord that which cost her nothing (2 Samuel 24:24). Her beautiful act of worship brought a fragrance to the very house in which they were dining, and the blessing of her deed has spread around the world, *"Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her"* (Matthew 26:13).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

When she came to the feet of Jesus, Mary took the place of a slave. When she undid her hair (something Jewish women did not do in public), she humbled herself and laid her glory at His feet (see 1 Corinthians 11:15). Of course, she was misunderstood and criticized; but that is what usually happens when somebody gives his or her best to the Lord.<sup>11</sup>

We learn from John 12:4 that Judas had a plan in the back of his mind. He “*was intending to betray*” Jesus. That is, Judas was developing a plan to turn Him over to the Jewish authorities. No doubt the Lord’s rebuke of Judas at **Bethany** played an important part in his decision actually to betray Jesus. Also, the fact that Jesus once again openly announced His death would motivate Judas to escape while the opportunity was there.<sup>12</sup>

As mentioned we have no recorded words from Lazarus in the New Testament, but his miraculous life was an effective witness for Jesus Christ. (In contrast, John the Baptist did no miracles, yet his words brought people to Jesus. See John 10:40–42.) We today ought to “*walk in newness of life*” (Rom. 6:4) because we have been “*raised from the dead*” (Ephesians 2:1–10; Colossians 3:1ff). Actually,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

the Christian life ought to be a beautiful balance of worship, work, and witness.<sup>13</sup>

Our words and our works should clearly reflect the values, attitudes, and gospel of the One whom we worship.

But the fact that Lazarus was a walking miracle put him into a place of danger: the Jewish leaders wanted to kill *him* as well as Jesus! Our Lord was right when He called them children of the devil, for they were murderers indeed (John 8:42–44). They threw the healed blind man out of the synagogue rather than permit him to bear witness to Christ every Sabbath, and they tried to put Lazarus back into the tomb because he was leading people to faith in Christ. If you will not accept the evidence, you must try to get rid of it.<sup>14</sup>

This quiet evening of fellowship in the home of Simon—in spite of the cruel way the disciples treated Mary—must have brought special encouragement and strength to Jesus’ heart as He faced the demands of that last week before the Cross.

We should examine our own hearts and homes to ask whether we are bringing joy

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

to His heart through our lives.<sup>15</sup> What can we offer that will show Him our love?

What valuable thing can we present to Him? Our time? Our self? Obedience?

Service? How can each of us best offer Jesus our Lord true worship, the love of our hearts? And, do our words honor Him and plant in others a real desire to come to Christ? Through His resurrection power they can.

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<sup>15</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 12:1