

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL STORIES AND SIGNS

## JESUS THE MIRACLE WORKER

### *Jesus Raises Lazarus*

Today, we conclude our study of Jesus the Miracle Worker. The first miracle of Jesus was performed at a wedding where Jesus turned water into wine which brought gladness to the hearts of the wedding guests. **Psalm 4:7 (ESV)**<sup>7</sup> *You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.* Jesus' miracle of feeding 5,000+ from five loaves of bread and two fish exhibit the truthfulness of His words in **John 6:35 (ESV)**<sup>35</sup> ... *"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.* Unlike Moses who had to wait until God parted the Red Sea to cross, Jesus proved that He was greater than Moses and confirmed His divine nature when He walked on the water.. **Hebrews 3:3 (ESV)**<sup>3</sup> *For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.*

There are three resurrections recorded in the gospels apart from the resurrection of Jesus Himself. Technically, the people Jesus raised from the dead during His ministry did not experience total resurrection because they were raised to die again. But, they did have their lives restored – something that Jesus is still in the business of doing today. Jesus' own resurrection is the firstfruits of the type of resurrection we are anticipating when Christ returns – a resurrection to die no more and be fitted with a new body that will last forever. **1 Corinthians 15:20 (ESV)**<sup>20</sup> *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

The first two miracles (the restoring Jairus' daughter and the widow of Nain' son) occurred too soon after death for them to be as astonishing as the resurrection of Lazarus would be. In ancient times, there were no EKG monitors, and no stethoscopes; therefore, people had more difficulty than we do today ascertaining when someone was dead. On rare occasions, people who were wrongly pronounced dead would wake up. In Lazarus' resurrection there was to be no doubt of his death.

As I think of Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, I can't help but think of a song we have talked about numerous times in class – He's an on time God, yes He is. He may not come when you want Him. But He'll be there right on time! – Martha and Mary both thought that Jesus was four days late; but, they are about to discover that Jesus was right on time. Jesus is the Friend who sometimes delays.

**Read John 11:1-7 (ESV)**<sup>1</sup> *Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.*<sup>2</sup> *It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.*<sup>3</sup> *So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."*<sup>4</sup> *But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God 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 ill, he*

*stayed two days longer in the place where he was.<sup>7</sup> Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.”*

This was written about A.D. 90 and by that time people knew about Mary who had anointed the feet of Jesus with spikenard. The fragrance of the box that she broke still fills our world today. Jesus was about 20 miles from Bethany when He received the message: *Lord, he whom you love is ill.* This message confirms that sickness is not a sign that Jesus does not love us when illness comes for scripture specifically records that Jesus loved Lazarus. John who wrote this gospel always referred to himself as being the *one whom Jesus loved.* Paul in *Galatians 2:20* spoke of being loved by Jesus. And we should view ourselves as being loved by Jesus. The sisters shared their problem with their Friend but did not make a demand regarding what Jesus should do. This reminds us that we should not make DEMANDS of Jesus in our own prayer life. Nevertheless, they felt free to remind Jesus of His love for Lazarus.

If the sisters' messenger had traveled quickly, he could have made the trip in one day. Jesus sent him back with the encouraging message recorded in verse 4. But, Jesus waited two more days before He left for Bethany; and by the time He and His disciples arrived, Lazarus had been dead for four days. This means that Lazarus had died *the very day* the messenger left to contact Jesus! Jesus loved this family yet He did not arrive at the time the sisters had hoped. It is natural to wonder why didn't Jesus leave for Bethany immediately? It is a similar question that we often ask when we feel that the Lord is delaying answers to us. Jesus' reason for His delay is found in His own words – *It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.*

The chief priests had been anxious to take hold of Jesus when He escaped and left the Jerusalem area. To return to the area would put Jesus in harm's way. **John 11:8 (ESV)**<sup>8</sup> *The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?”* Since Jesus was on God's timetable His own safety was not an issue to Him. Jesus is the Friend who is our life.

**Read John 11:17-27 (ESV)**<sup>17</sup> *Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.<sup>18</sup> Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off,<sup>19</sup> and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.<sup>20</sup> So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.<sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.<sup>22</sup> But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.”<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”<sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,<sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”<sup>27</sup> She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”*

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she rushed out to meet Him. Possibly, she wanted to tell Him that some of His enemies were in her house. Mary stayed inside. Maybe Mary did not get the word as quickly as Martha. We know that people handle grief in many different ways. Recall that Martha is the one who worked

in the kitchen when Jesus visited and Mary stayed at His feet. Probably for Martha, knowing what we do of her personality, she was keeping “busy” and “trying not to think.” Funerals involve mourners, preparations and meals to be made. Those are physical things that help at the moment to drown out sorrow. Mary, on the other hand, may have needed solitude - a time to cry and grieve in private. Different personalities handle grief in different ways – that is not to say that one person’s way is better than the other.

Some see verse 21 as Martha blaming Jesus for not being present when Lazarus died. But in the same breath, she did say – *I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.* Possibly, she was thinking that Jesus could have raised Lazarus without returning to the area. She knew that the widow’s son was no staged resurrection from a coffin and she also knew that Jairus’ daughter was dead and not asleep. But, even for Martha, one who had a personal relationship with Jesus, four days in the grave seemed impossible to overcome.

Martha was the first of the sisters to have a conversation with Jesus concerning Lazarus. Jesus revealed something very important to this woman who is usually pictured as not being particularly “spiritual.” It was His fifth “I AM” statement recorded in the gospel of John. *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live* Never think that you are not “spiritual enough” for the Lord to reveal His Word and His Will to you. Jesus has something special to say to each of His children even when we are busy and mostly concerned with earthly things. He is a Restorer of Life if we will allow it. Martha made the same confession of faith that Peter made: *Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.*” Even though Jesus had delayed His return and her brother lay dead in the grave, Martha knew that Jesus was the Son of God! She believed in the future resurrection.

However, Jesus was moving the doctrine of the resurrection out of the future and into the present. Jesus centered her attention on the present where His resurrection power is available now. **Romans 6:4 (ESV)** <sup>4</sup> *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* Jesus is the Friend who grieves the curse of death.

**Read John 11:28-37 (ESV)** <sup>28</sup> *When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”* <sup>29</sup> *And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.* <sup>30</sup> *Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.* <sup>31</sup> *When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.* <sup>32</sup> *Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “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 with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.* <sup>34</sup> *And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”* <sup>35</sup> *Jesus wept.* <sup>36</sup> *So 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 also have kept this man from dying?”*

Why did Martha call Mary out secretly? Possibly because of the danger involved since they knew that the Jewish leaders were out to arrest Jesus. When Mary arose to go to meet Jesus, her friends misunderstood her

actions and thought she was going to the tomb to weep so they followed along. Mary, considered to be the ‘spiritual’ one of the two sisters, said the same thing to Jesus that Martha had said: *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*

Jesus will say later in **John 16:7 (ESV)** <sup>7</sup> *Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.* As long as Jesus was here in the flesh, He was limited geographically. If He were in Jerusalem, He could not be in the USA. If Jesus had not gone away, He could not have sent the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. But now that the Holy Spirit has come, He is everywhere. He indwells every believer today. So the Holy Spirit can be where I am, where you are, and on the other side of the world simultaneously. That is good news.

*Jesus wept* is the shortest verse in Scripture but very deep. His was a silent weeping (the Greek word is used nowhere else in the New Testament) and not the loud lamentation like the paid mourners. Why did He weep at all since He knew that He would raise Lazarus from the dead? His weeping gives us a glimpse of His humanity. He has entered into all of our experiences and knows how we feel. **Isaiah 53:3 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> *He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.* Jesus is the Friend Who Resurrects the Dead.

**Read John 11:38-44 (ESV)** <sup>38</sup> *Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.* <sup>39</sup> *Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.”* <sup>40</sup> *Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”* <sup>41</sup> *So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes 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 on account of the people standing around, 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 out.”* <sup>44</sup> *The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”*

The experience of Lazarus is a good illustration of what happens to a sinner when he trusts the Savior. Lazarus was dead, and all sinners are dead. Lazarus was raised from the dead by the power of God, and all who trust Christ have been given new life and lifted out of the graveyard of sin.

Lazarus was set free from the confines of his grave clothes and given liberty picturing the new freedom we possess in Christ today. We read in **John 12:2 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> *So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table.* When we are raised by Christ, we too have a seat in heavenly places. **Ephesians 2:5-6 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> *...—by grace you have been saved—* <sup>6</sup> *and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.* Jesus, the One who loves us is the One who raises us to walk in new life.