

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who will call you from the grave, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, amen.

I'm sure glad I'm not poor Lazarus! I mean he's the one Jesus loved according to John's Gospel. If you wonder what the love of Jesus looks like, closely read this story and you'll soon see what love means for Jesus. John tells us that though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. If love compelled Jesus to go from the region of the Galilee on the eastern side of the Jordan River to Bethany, then why did Jesus wait an additional 2 days before departing? When I was away from my family during many deployments in my Air Force years I loved and missed them every day I was gone. When at last I was able to return home I got there by the fastest means available. I didn't hang out an additional 2 days to see the sights or play at the casino tables. I'm not saying that's what Jesus did... The Bible gives us no clue what Jesus was up to during those days, but it does say Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. So, whatever he was doing, it must have been extremely important to cause Jesus such a delay.

By the time Jesus arrives, his friend Lazarus has died. He's been dead four days. Now a days, we've all heard stories about people who have died for a few minutes and then been resuscitated. They tell amazing stories of walking into a bright light or being with their long-deceased family members. One book I read

even had a young boy who met his great-grandfather who was long dead before he was even born. The man that the boy met in heaven was young, at the peak of life. He even identified him in old pictures of the grandfather when he was a young man. Anyway, that's not what we're talking about here with Lazarus. He has been stinking dead for 4 whole days. Nobody comes back from that... When Jesus sees the grief and sorrow of those he loves caused by the death of Lazarus, Jesus himself is moved to tears. At this point I have to ask another one of my off the wall questions, if Jesus was so certain he had the ability and the willingness to raise Lazarus from the grave, why did he cry?

For all his power and might, Jesus never acted as one who was better than anyone else. He humiliated himself to become human. Being human means, among other things, that you feel the full gambit of emotions. Here in this rare insight into the mind of Jesus Christ, we witness his humanity. For Jesus, love means being completely human and undergoing every human emotion, even sorrow and grief. If we didn't have this story we would be missing a piece of who Jesus was and is. Jesus still feels our loss and our pain.

All the commentaries point out this raising of Lazarus foreshadows the empty tomb of Jesus himself. I agree to a point. Lazarus wasn't really resurrected. He was merely resuscitated. When we're resurrected it will be to eternal life. Poor Lazarus, after having already gone through death once, would now have to go

through it again. Yes, he had to die not once, but twice... When Jesus was resurrected, he was resurrected to eternal life, never to face death again. That's the resurrection we're promised. Not some halfway measure where death still stalks us like a thief in the night. The promise we have in Christ Jesus is that we will be raised in a resurrection like his, not like this resuscitation like poor old Lazarus. If that's all we have to look forward to it would be a sad state of affairs for us Christians. Death would still hold the last word. Jesus would only be seen as postponing the inevitable.

I think that's the way most of us pray. We ask God, through Jesus, to heal our illnesses. We ask for the cancer to be gone or the heart to beat in rhythm. We ask for more time with the ones we love. Ultimately, those requests are asking for our Lazarus to be let out of the tomb, only to face death another day. Is that all we want in our savior? Not me! As the Rock Band Queen would sing I want it all! I don't want half a healing, I want it all. I don't want just my hardship to be lessened I want my death to be no more. I want eternal life with all the ones I love and with my loving God and my Lord Jesus Christ. I don't want to just be brought back to this same old stinking death enslaved world. I want to be truly free from death and to be raised up to a new life with no more tears and no more pain. I want a new life where the devil and all his empty promises have been not only debunked, but proven to be lies. I want it all, Jesus. So, if that means you have to

stay away for two more days while you pray and gather your plans and finally decide this is the hour for your glory, then I'm ok with waiting for you to come on your time and on your terms. I trust you, O Lord, because I've seen your love in action and I trust in your faithful love.

One final note regarding the extra two days Jesus stayed across the Jordan before returning to Bethany and his now dead friend Lazarus. John tells us poor Lazarus was already 4 days dead when Jesus arrived. Even if Jesus had dropped everything he was doing and immediately left for Bethany, Lazarus would have met the same fate. Instead of being dead for 4 days, he would have only been gone for 2 days. So, let's not make too much out of the fact that Jesus was delayed before coming to the aid of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus... Personally, I believe the delay was a detail John may have added to emphasize that Mary, Martha, and the crowd of Jews were able to see the glory of God when Jesus raised him from the dead. If Jesus had arrived before Lazarus died then the significance of the miracle would have been reduced to a mere healing of a sick friend. As the story is in its current form the raising of Lazarus from the dead serves to not only prove the power of Jesus as God's Son, but also this miracle, for John, serves as the catalyst for Jesus' own death and resurrection.

So far I've given you a lot to meditate on. This story is so rich and full of metaphor and hidden mystery that I've barely scratched the surface. Yet, every

time I read this story I'm confronted with the question did this really happen? Did this really go down the way John tells the story. Most scholars I've read say there's more evidence that this story is just made up by John. They point to the fact that there are no references to this Lazarus or his being raised from the dead anywhere else in the Bible. They also point to the parable Jesus told in Luke's Gospel where the poor man named Lazarus lived at the gate of the rich man and when both men died the rich man went to a place of torment, while Lazarus went to heaven to be with Father Abraham. These scholars make the point of all the parables Jesus told in all the Gospels, Lazarus is the only character with a name. They then make the leap that John's Lazarus may be his way of giving a historical account of one who was raised from the dead as the rich man begged Father Abraham to do. As for me, when I think about this story and the question of did it happen, or could it have happened, it always comes down to faith. For some people, even for those who are eyewitnesses to miraculous events, it's simply impossible to accept that the supernatural can sometimes overlap with the rational or natural world. For them, it's always an issue of reason over faith. Yet, for many of us, the experiences of our lives have led us to know there are certain times when the veil between the natural world and the supernatural world is thin and porous. For religious people, this mystery, is seen as God acting in the world for the sake of love. There is no way to prove the facts of this story. It's one that must

be taken on faith and either believed or rejected. The real question that defines our faith is this: do we believe God, acting through Jesus of Nazareth, has power over life and death? I already know my answer, how about you? This is the central question posed by John all through out his Gospel. Jesus himself gives us the answer when he says to Mary, "I AM the resurrection and the life."

All this is interesting and makes great fodder for meditation, but what relevance does this raising of Lazarus have for us and for our world. First, it draws many people into the great question for faith. I think that's the main point of the story. By raising Lazarus and then later when Jesus is raised from the dead, he is proving that death no longer gets the last word. Death no longer separates people from God. God has now demonstrated, through Jesus that as Saint Paul says, nothing, not even death can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ!

May this story of Jesus raising Lazarus bring you, like it has brought so many others to saving faith. May your trust be in the God incarnate who broke the bonds of death and opened the graves of all believers. May your faith in Jesus be that rock to which you cling when all the world seems to be falling apart around you. Yes, Jesus has the power over life and death. Yes Jesus has shown us God in action in the physical world. Yes Jesus is God acting for you so that you might have faith in the one who loves you. Yes Jesus, I, like Mary and Martha and the crowd of mourners with them believe you are my savior and my God. Amen.