

Renewal overview 5. Take off the grave clothes! John 11:1 – 44

If we were to list Jesus' miracles according to their ability to impress us, his raising to life of a man that had been dead four days would have to go near the top. However, this miracle is more than just proof of Christ's power. It is also a sign of an eternal truth that Jesus has declared to the world: *"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die."* (John 11:25) Let's explore this wonderful teaching further.

As John begins to reveal this great sign to us, he arrests our attention with the news that Jesus purposely chose to wait until his dear friend Lazarus had died before going to him. Through these events Jesus teaches us that he didn't come to spare us from pain, grief and loss. However, he *has* come to assure us of his complete authority over anything that life or death can throw at us (Romans 8:38 – 39). And yet Jesus is not indifferent to our suffering. The shortest verse in the Bible, *"Jesus wept"* speaks simply yet profoundly of Christ's deep love and heartfelt concern for his friends. (John 11:33 – 35)

But John also portrays the story of Lazarus as one that foreshadows Christ's own death and resurrection. For example, when Jesus finally informed his disciples of his plan to go to Lazarus in Judea, his disciples reminded him that an angry mob had recently tried to kill him there (John 10:31 & 39). Thomas' statement, *"Let us also go, that we may die with him"* leaves us wondering whether Thomas is referring to dying with Lazarus or with Jesus. It's also telling that John includes two references to Lazarus' sister Mary pre-anointing Jesus' body for burial, at the beginning and the end of the account of Lazarus (John 11:2 & 12:1 – 7). Through these details John seems to be revealing to us that, as we observe Jesus staring into the tomb of Lazarus, we are watching him stare into the face of his own divine destiny.

As we return to Christ's statement that he [alone] is *'the resurrection and the life'* we should remember that our hope should not be placed in things that will one day be buried in the mortal dust of the earth (where even Lazarus now sleeps again -- for a little while longer). Our hope should rest in Christ alone, because he was dead, but now is alive forevermore! (Revelation 1:17 – 18) Furthermore, through the power of his Holy Spirit, we who have placed our faith in Christ are now new creations – the old is gone and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). Therefore, as we come forth from our spiritual graves, let us hear Christ's command to remove our grave clothes of past sin and dead faith, and be robed instead with the righteousness and hope of eternal life with Jesus Christ.

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1. Why are the details of Christ's relationship with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus important to this story? (John 11:1 - 3, 32 - 36)
2. In light of his obvious love for Lazarus (and his two sisters), why did Jesus delay going to him when he heard he was sick? (11:4 - 6, 11 - 15)
3. Why did Jesus' disciples not want him to return to Judea? (11:7 - 8)
4. What did Thomas mean by his statement to the other disciples, "*Let us also go, that we may die with him*"? (11:16)
5. How do you think Mary, Martha, and the mourners felt about Jesus not coming earlier to save Lazarus from dying: (11:21 - 22, 32, 37)
6. Jesus wept, even though he knew what he was about to do. Why? (11:35)
7. Why does John tell us, at the beginning and the end of the Lazarus story, that Lazarus' sister pre-anointed Jesus for burial? (11:1 - 2 & 12:1 - 3)
8. What meaning and hope do you find in Jesus' statement, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.*"? (11:25 - 26, 40 - 44)