

John 11:17-44
Tim Anderson 7/1/2018
Raising Lazarus

Why did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead?
It might seem at first blush a strange question.
I mean if someone you loved had died,
and you had the opportunity to raise them,
you'd do it wouldn't you?
But if you think about it for a minute,
how many people do you think died in Israel
while Jesus was doing his public ministry?
There must have been tens of thousands.
How many people died where Jesus knew about the death?
There must have been very many.
But in the gospels,
there are only three instances where Jesus raised someone back to life.
There is the Roman centurion Jairus' daughter,
there is the son of the widow of Nain,
and there is Lazarus.
The first two of those are children.
If you were going to raise anyone back to life,
children would be a first priority, wouldn't it?
Adults have at least had a decent go at living.
Children have most of their life left ahead of them
in the normal course of events.
So Lazarus is the only adult that Jesus raised back to life,
at least that we have recorded in the gospels.
Why raise Lazarus?

I'm not a great fan of temporary measures.
I'm due a haircut.
It's getting a bit long and out of control.
But sometimes I wonder what the point is.
I'm only going to have to do it again in six weeks.
Maybe I could let it grow all boofy,

and then have a hair cut in six weeks,
and I would have completely skipped that hair cut.
The resurrection of Lazarus is a bit like that.
When Jesus raised Lazarus,
it was only a temporary fix.
Lazarus was going to die again.
In the next chapter John tells us this,
"The chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well,
for on account of him,
many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him."
So Jesus raising Lazarus may have been a very temporary fix.
The chief priests might have disposed of him soon afterwards.
But even supposing Lazarus managed to avoid the chief priests
and their murderous plans,
suppose he lived to the ripe old age of 90.
Well raising him is still only a temporary fix.
Jesus is still going to have to do it again on Judgement Day.

Well you might say to me,
it's about compassion, Tim.
Jesus raised Lazarus because he cared deeply for Mary and Martha.
They were close friends,
he loved them like sisters.
He didn't want to see them grieving,
so he raised Lazarus from the dead.
Well that's a nice theory.
And I'm very sure that Jesus did care about Mary and Martha.
But unfortunately as a reason for raising Lazarus,
there's a hole in the theory.
Jesus could have healed Lazarus
as soon as the messenger came to tell him Lazarus was sick.
If he had done that,
he would have saved Mary and Martha the grief
of having their brother dead for 4 days.
Jesus knew that Lazarus was going to die.
When the messenger arrived, Jesus said,

"This sickness will not end in dead.
No it is for God's glory
so that God's Son may be glorified through it."
Well his disciples didn't realise it at the time,
but once you've read the story,
it becomes clear that Jesus knew all along that Lazarus would die
and that Jesus would raise him to life.
And Jesus planned it that way.
He intentionally didn't heal the sickness
so that he could raise Lazarus from the dead.

So why did Jesus raise Lazarus?
I want to suggest two reasons.
The second grows out of the first.
Jesus raised Lazarus
so that God would be glorified through Jesus being glorified.
That is exactly what Jesus says.
"No, it is for God's glory
so that God's Son may be glorified through it."
And in the same way,
when Martha protests about rolling the stone away,
because there will be a bad odour, Jesus says,
"Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?"
It's about God's glory.
When Jesus demonstrates that he has the power over death,
that brings glory to God.
People realise that Jesus is not just some special bloke
with a few miraculous powers and some nice teaching.
Jesus actually has power over life and death.
Only God has that power.
Jesus must be directly connected to God the Father.
And Jesus does everything to demonstrate his power over death.
Think about the timing that John very carefully tells us about.
When the message came to Jesus,
he delayed two more days
before travelling to Bethany.

But when Jesus reached Bethany,
Lazarus had been in the grave four days.
So if Jesus was determined to wait until Lazarus died,
so that he would raise him,
he still could have left for Bethany as soon as the message arrived.
Why did he delay?
There was a belief amongst the Jews in the first century,
that the spirit of a person didn't leave their body
until three days after their death.
It's not that they were primitive people
and had trouble distinguishing
between someone who was very sick and someone who had died.
In fact,
people in those days were more familiar with death than people today.
Death in their society happened mostly in the home
rather than off in a corner in a hospital or a nursing home.
Here in this account,
Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days.
That is, they put him in the tomb on the day he died
knowing that he was already dead.
But it was their belief
that the spirit didn't finally leave until three days later.
And so Jesus delayed his arrival until after that point.
Then there could be no doubt at all.
Not only had he raised Lazarus from the dead,
but he had sent Lazarus' spirit back into him
after the point at which it had departed.
This is not just breathing the breath of life back into a person,
this is winding backwards the process of putrefaction and decay.
Think the power gets disconnected from your fridge
and you find it four days later.
Jesus reverses that process
and then brings Lazarus back to life.
I think that if you saw that,
you would agree that you had seen the glory of God.
The natural state of things on earth is that they break down.

Metal rusts and corrodes.
Compost breaks down and rots.
The tread on car tyres gets worn down.
It doesn't grow back.
Paint peels and fades.
Skin goes saggy and brittle.
Chanel or Orlane might want to try to convince you otherwise,
but the aging process cannot be reversed.
Except by the one who gave life in the first place.
And if you've seen that,
you have seen the glory of God.

Well it goes a bit deeper even than that.
What is being reversed
is not just the natural process of death and decay.
Look at verse 33.
"When Jesus saw Mary weeping,
and the Jews coming along with her also weeping,
he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled."
You might think that this is a sign of Jesus' tender compassion for Mary.
Except for one thing.
That phrase that is translated "deeply moved in spirit"
doesn't mean that he was touched, it means that he was angered.
It's a bodgy translation which probably came about
because the translators couldn't imagine why Jesus would be angry
when he saw Mary weeping.
But I think Jesus was angry.
Not angry at Mary.
But angry because of how broken and stuffed up
the good world that he had made had become.
You see, Lazarus' sickness and death,
and Mary's heartache and pain are consequences of our broken world.
And the root cause of the brokenness of this world is sin.
That's not to say
that Lazarus died because he committed some particular sin.
But it is to say that sickness and death would not be in the world

if human beings had not sinned.
And so as Jesus is angered
when he comes face to face with that needless pain and suffering.
"This should not be this way!"

And so as Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead,
what we are actually seeing
is the beginnings of the reversal of the curse.
When Adam and Eve sinned,
God put a curse on humanity and creation.
Everything would be subjected to suffering, death and decay.
And in Lazarus' resurrection,
we see the beginning of the breaking of that curse.
Here's one piece of suffering death and decay
that Jesus has put a stop to.
And then later on in his own resurrection,
he will break the power of sin and death for the whole world.

Why did Jesus raise Lazarus from death?
So that Jesus would be glorified.
And nowhere is Jesus glorified more
than in breaking the power of Satan over this world,
and bringing creation back to the way it should be.
Jesus is glorified because his glorious work
is returning to the way it should be.
And his glory is reflected in the perfection of his creation.

Why did Jesus raise Lazarus?
The first reason is to bring glory to himself and the Father.
But there's another reason.
This reason grows out of the first reason.
The raising of Lazarus was to give him a platform
to teach about the resurrection.
The key verses here are the conversation that Jesus has with Martha
between verses 21 and 27.
Jesus is glorified in raising Lazarus to life.

There's no doubt about that.
It's a demonstration of Jesus' power to reverse the curse
that is upon all creation.
But it's really only a sign of things to come.
Actually the resurrection of Lazarus is nothing too significant,
except in what it points forward to.
As I said earlier,
Lazarus' resurrection is a short term fix.
He would die again.
But the resurrection that it points forward to,
is the remaking of the entire creation.
Remaking of the creation that will never again be broken.
And that is what Jesus wants to teach his followers about.

Jesus said to Martha,
"I am the resurrection and the life.
The one who believes in me will live,
even though they die;
and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."
He's not at this point talking about Lazarus' resurrection.
He's talking about your resurrection,
if you have faith in Jesus.
In a sense, Lazarus' resurrection is not a real resurrection.
Lazarus was raised with the same body he had before.
He was raised to mortal life and he died again.
Lazarus' resurrection was a wonderful miracle.
It was a sign of Jesus undoing the curse
that came on humanity at the fall.
But it pointed forward to another resurrection.
Jesus' resurrection is the real deal.
Jesus was raised with a new resurrection body.
It was a different body to the one he had before.
It was a body fit for the new creation
which will be remade when Jesus returns.
And that's the resurrection that Jesus is teaching us about.
"I am the resurrection and the life."

Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

There is neither resurrection or eternal life outside of Jesus.

Some people think that sincere belief in another religion might result in resurrection and eternal life.

That's not true.

There is resurrection only in Jesus.

Some people think that God is such a benevolent being, that resurrection and life will come to all.

That's not true.

Jesus says,

"The one who believes in me will live even though they die."

Jesus doesn't just mean believes that he exists.

He means puts their faith in him.

He means accepts him as who he says he is.

He is one with the Father.

He is the one who will judge the world.

He claims to have the right to rule our lives.

If you accept that then you will live even though you die.

That promise for us is more than what happened to Lazarus.

Lazarus lived even though he died.

But he died again.

Jesus says,

"The one who lives by believing in me will never die."

The life we have by putting our faith in Jesus will not be extinguished by death.

If you are a Christian,

then you have eternal life now.

You don't have to wait until Jesus returns.

You have eternal life now.

Now how does that square with our experience?

We see good Christian people die.

What does it mean that we will never die?

Well before I get to answering that question,

I think this point is important enough

to show that Jesus teaches it in other places in John's gospel.

In John 8:51, Jesus says this,

"Very truly I tell you,
whoever obeys my word will never see death."

It's exactly the same idea.

Chapter 11.

"The one who lives by believing in me will never die."

Chapter 8

"whoever obeys my word will never see death."

To believe in Jesus is to obey him.

You can't believe in Jesus without obeying him.

Because when you believe him,

part of what you believe is that

he tells you to obey him.

Here is the same idea from John 5:24

"Very truly I tell you,
whoever hears my word
and believes him who sent me has eternal life
and will not be judged
but has crossed over from death to life."

Again, it's the same idea.

This time it gives us a hint of how to understand it.

Because it tells us that a person crosses from death to life
while they are still alive.

The people you know who have not put their faith in Jesus
are at this moment spiritually dead.

They might look alive.

They might be in perfect health.

But spiritually they are dead.

But when someone puts their faith in Jesus,
they cross over from death to life.

And spiritually they will never die.

"Whoever lives by believing in me will never die."

So how do we think about Christians who have died?

Their death was a physical death and that's all.
Spiritually they are alive right now.
Their souls are gathered to be with the Lord Jesus in heaven.
And when he returns,
they will be given a resurrection body.
But when they are given a resurrection body,
they won't be coming back to life.
They were already alive.
They will just move from being alive spiritually
to being alive with a resurrection body.

Why did Jesus raise Lazarus?
Well it was for God's Glory.
That people might see
that the roll back of the curse of the fall comes through Jesus
and give him glory.
But it was also a sign of things to come.
The resurrection of Lazarus was only a tiny roll back of the curse.
Things still rust and decay.
The resurrection of Lazarus was pointing forward
to another resurrection.
It was a sign pointing to the real thing.
In the resurrection of Jesus we see the defeat of death.
Jesus is the resurrection and the life.
And he comes to bring that resurrection and life
to all who put their faith in him.

Why do you think the SUFM team
gives up two weeks of their time to come to Balnarring each year?
Is it because they like playing games with kids?
If it were just because they like playing games with kids,
they could stay home
and run a holiday program for the kids in their own churches.
It's because they want children and families
who haven't put their faith in Jesus to come to faith.
That's why they do it.

That's the only way
to get the power of the resurrection to operate in more lives.
I was so encouraged to see five families connected with our church
along at the SUFM programs.
Six if you count my family.
I saw parents and grandparents who have faith making the effort
to connect their children and grandchildren with Jesus.
And I saw parents from our playgroup who don't themselves have faith,
bringing their children along to enjoy a fun program.
Both things fill my heart with joy.
But like Oliver Twist,
I want more.
Next year, I will be praying for 10 families connected with our church,
to join in the SUFM programs.

Only Jesus is the resurrection and the life.
Let us praise God that the power that raised Lazarus from the dead
is at work in us!