

Back To Life (Part Five)

The Story of Lazarus

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Given 14-Jul-18; Sermon #1442

This is my last sermon in this series on the story of Lazarus. John's gospel focuses on seven of Jesus' miracles, to demonstrate His divinity. Jesus called people to have faith in Him promising eternal life. He proved that He could give life by raising Lazarus from the dead, His seventh miracle, and then by His own death and resurrection.

Now He has been revealed to us, not as an abstraction that any intellect could observe, but rather as a real person living a human life and knowing its sorrows. Therefore He is able to understand us in a very personal way and we are able to relate to Him personally as well, seeing Him in action in His earthly life.

Jesus joins His friends' sadness with heartfelt sorrow, yet underlying it is His knowledge that resurrection and joy will soon follow. Jesus' example shows that heartfelt mourning in the face of death does not indicate lack of faith, but rather honest sorrow at the reality of the suffering and death. We will pick up where we are in the story of Lazarus.

John 11:30-37 Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there." Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?"

It is possible to examine a subject such as this from different points of view. Let me give you an example of what I mean here. For example, the American Revolution can be studied from the point of view of what was happening in England or from an American point of view, or from the view point of economics, political theory, or other matters. If it is studied from the viewpoint of England, it can be expected to throw light on such questions as: what was England's relationship to the colonies at the time? What was King George doing? What were the policies of the court? Why were the cries of the colonists unheeded?

If it is studied from the American perspective the examination might tell in part how the revolutionary ideas originated; what the settlers desired from England, from their regional governments, and so forth. Each of these approaches are valid depending upon the amount and quality of work done in each of these areas.

In a similar way, John 11:35 regarding the statement that “Jesus wept,” may also be looked at from diverse points of view. In fact, we have already looked at it from two of these viewpoints in my previous sermons. It may be looked at for what it teaches about Jesus, or about the Father, or about ourselves, and finally about the love of Jesus for us which is to be our pattern for loving others.

It is the third of these, what it teaches us about ourselves, that I will examine here. What does John 11:35 teach us about ourselves? It teaches us that we are precious in God’s sight. It also shows us that we have gotten ourselves into such a state that even God sorrows over us and that we need Him.

Let us look at a few of these examples that John 11 teaches us here. One of the most obvious lessons is that we are precious in His sight. Since it is only that we are precious to God that Christ weeps over us, suppose for a moment that you are walking down the street and you step on a bug. How important is a bug to you? Do you stop and cry over the bug? Most likely not. The reason you feel nothing is obvious, it is because the bug is not precious to you. In the same way we do not weep over broken glass or a torn shirt etc. It may have value and the loss may be an inconvenient to us, however it is not precious to us and so we do not weep over it.

On the other hand, we do weep over the loss of a friendship, or the loss of a loved one, or similar heartbreaks and disappointments, and this is because these relationships were precious to us. God considers us precious in this sense. God tells us that we are valuable to Him, not because of anything inherently in us, but because of what He has made us and what He will yet make of us.

Why are we precious to God? The answer takes us back to the earliest chapters of Genesis, where man is said to have been made in God's image. This is stressed in Genesis so much that it can be said to be the most important characteristic of the man and the woman. It is what makes them different from the animals and from the plants.

Genesis 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

What an emphasis here! He repeats it over and over again so that we get it. In speaking of the fact that man was created in God's image, man consists of a body, a soul, and a spirit. We tend to think that the body is what differentiates man from God. We have a physical body, while He does not, but since God became incarnate, in a human body in Christ, this is not as obvious as it might seem.

Which came first in the mind of God: the body of Christ or Adam's body? Or to put it another way, did Christ become like us by means of the incarnation or did we become like Him by means of God's creative act? Well, we were made like God and if this is so than our bodies are of great value and should be honored in the way that we treat them. You take good care of your health, and you need to take good care of your mind and what goes into it as well.

Truly we can say, as Paul does, that our bodies were made to be temples of God and the soul is centered in the mind and includes all likes and dislikes,

special abilities or weaknesses, emotions, aspirations, and anything else that makes the individual different from all others of his species. Here again we are made in God's image and what we do with our soul is important!

The word "soul," to clarify things here since the mainstream Protestants just do not get it accurately, is used in numerous ways. It is a translation of the Greek word *psuche* and the Hebrew word *nephesh*. According to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* both of these mean: a living breathing creature; an animal life; appetite and similarly derived connotations. "Soul" never means an immortal part of man, woman, or animal, but always the living, breathing animal or human.

Also, the life of a breathing being which is in the blood. In Leviticus 17:11 the word translated "life" comes from the same Hebrew word for "soul" and can be correctly translated: "for the soul of the flesh is in the blood."

Jesus gave His life (translated from the same Greek word meaning soul) a ransom for us by pouring out His soul of life blood in payment for sin.

"Soul" can also mean the physical life of such creatures. God can destroy the physical body and the soul of life. Luke quotes Jesus as saying:

Luke 12:5 "But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him [that is, God] who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell ["hell" here is Gehenna, the fire outside of Jerusalem; the trash dump]; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"

Now God, who takes the present physical life from us at the first death also has the power to resurrect us, and if we have been disobedient, to cast us into the Lake of Fire—the second death from which there will be no hope of resurrection. Man can kill our bodies but nothing more.

We have already counted our lives dead upon baptism and the new life we now live is by the faith of Jesus Christ in us.

Colossians 3:3-4 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Jesus brings out the great importance of the fact that the first, or natural, life—the soul—of a Christian is already perished. There is nothing important of that life which remains for men to kill. That is why Jesus declared that man can kill the body but not the soul or life, and certainly not permanently.

Matthew 10:28 “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” [again “hell” here is Gehenna]

Once something is thrown into the Gehenna fire, it is instantly burned up, it is not an eternal burning. Jesus plainly says that we should fear God who is able to destroy the soul in Gehenna fire. The Eternal made this clear in Ezekiel 18.

Ezekiel 18:4 “Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die.”

So, the soul can be destroyed because of sin which is a transgression of the law. It can die, it will not live forever in torment.

We are figuratively dead already, our physical way of life is crucified, but the life of Christ in us cannot be touched by man. Man cannot kill it because it is Christ’s very own life, for those in His church who have God’s Holy Spirit dwelling in us.

Although the original word for eternal life is from another Greek word, Jesus uses *psuche* (soul; material life), because Jesus is living His life in our material bodies.

Now are we being trained to desire the best that God gives or do we wallow in the worst things that we know? Do we strive to think God’s thoughts and grow intellectually and spiritually or are we captivated by sinful thoughts and values?

In this area we are dealing with the fact that God has what we would call “personality” and we have our personalities because of Him. It is because we are created in God’s image, in respect to our minds, that we are able to have fellowship, love, and communication with one another.

Finally, man also has a spirit and this is the part of His God-given nature that communes with God and connects with God’s own essence. Man has a spirit which enables him to be able to communicate with God so we can have fellowship with Him.

Job 32:8 But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding.

So, people have a spirit which makes it possible to receive understanding from God. When we die, a record of our life returns to God by way of that spirit.

Ecclesiastes 12:7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit [the spirit of man] will return to God who gave it.

God owns us because He made us and empowers us and when we trust God, repent of sin, accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and are baptized, we receive God’s Holy Spirit. It bonds with our spirit and we are made His temple and a member of the body of Christ.

I Corinthians 2:7-14 [Paul speaking here] But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received,

not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

And so we see most of the world wanting to rid the world of Christians, or at least quiet them down to where they cannot say anything and it because of this very thing. "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, nor can he know them because they are spiritually discerned." So they remain in ignorance and blinded by God because of their rebelliousness.

No one could know or communicate the deep thoughts and plans of God except His Spirit. In a similar way, no one could penetrate the intentions of a man and fully know them but himself and God.

Now God is nowhere said to be just body or soul. He is defined as Spirit. Therefore He can understand the secret intentions of man when others cannot.

John 4:24 "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

He is a pure Spirit and since He is such a Spirit He does not dwell in temples made with hands, neither is He worshipped with material things as though He needed anything. He gives life and all things to every living thing.

Here than is a remarkable thing: man is made in God's image and is therefore valuable to Him. God loves man as He does not nor cannot love animals, insects, or plants in the same way. Also, God feels for man, identifies with man, and even grieves over him. He intervenes to make him into all that He Himself has determined him to be.

We get some idea of the special nature of this relationship when we remember that in a similar way Eve was made in the image of man. Therefore, although different, Adam saw himself in her and loved her as his

companion and corresponding member in the universe. In a sense, we can say that men and women are to God somewhat as the woman is to man in that they can identify with one another. They are God's unique and valued companions in the universe. In support of this we look to the teaching concerning Christ as the bridegroom and the church as His bride.

Revelation 19:7-9 "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." [that is, she identifies with and sees herself in His spiritual image] And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

This is what John saw in a vision that Jesus Christ revealed.

There is one more thing that I want to point out here before I move on. Man has been made in God's image and this gives Him value and we need to add to this that it is true even after he (man) sins. Even in the sinful state that man is now, he preserves something of the image of God and thus still remains valuable to Him.

We see this in several places in the Bible, such as Genesis 9, the verse that records capital punishment as a proper response to murder.

Or in James 3, in verses that forbid the use of tongue in cursing other men.

James 3:9-10 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

Here the murder or the cursing of another is forbidden precisely based on that fact that the other person retains something of God's image, and for this reason is to be valued by us as God also values man. All human life is precious to God and must be us as well! This is exactly why abortion is an abomination and a despicable evil.

Now we have dealt with the matter of man's value, the first of the lessons about man that the phrase "Jesus wept" suggests, but it would not be right to deal with this subject without going on to point out also that man has marred God's image and is therefore in a state to be wept over. Thus John 11:35 teaches that we have gotten ourselves into such a state that even God, who is thought to be above tears, grieves for us.

We find another example of His sorrow for us in an event that comes shortly after Lazarus' death. A few days after raising Lazarus, Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. He had sent His disciples to find it and when they had brought it to Him he sat upon it and rode toward Jerusalem, and those who came out of the city at His approach threw their clothes in His pathway and paved the way with palm branches.

In such a context we might expect Jesus to have been filled with excitement and even joy as He rode the donkey into Jerusalem knowing the prophecy that He was fulfilling. We might have expected Him to rejoice in the fact that so many were apparently following Him, but this is not the case here. Rather we find Christ weeping because He knew that the cheers of the people were shallow and that unbelief, rather than faith, characterized the multitudes that filled the city.

Were they still valuable? Yes, the people were valuable, but they were also so submerged in sin that their eyes were blinded to that which could have been their blessing and spiritual peace.

Luke 19:41-44 Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation." ["visitation" here means the Messiah's appearance]

Now turn to Romans 1. The shattering of the image of God in man is a catastrophic thing, both for the individual and for those with whom He is in contact. Paul tells about it in Romans showing that sin has broken relationships with God, with others, and even with the individual with himself. Paul says it this way:

Romans 1:21-25 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

This should cause weeping as we look at mankind through God's eyes. John 11:35 fulfills Ecclesiastes 3:4 which says that there is a time to weep.

Luke 23 contains Christ's words to the women in Jerusalem as they followed Him on His way to the cross.

Luke 23:28 But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."

This refers to the calamities that were about to come upon them in the desolation of their city, Jerusalem, by the Romans, which happened in 70 AD. The admonition to weep or mourn for yourselves was also a prophetic cry of future judgment for the Israelites, and the includes the descendants of the Israelites that live today, spread throughout the world.

The point is that we need God! We are valuable to Him, but we are so marred by sin and the world is so unable to extricate itself from the bondage

that there is no hope for any of us unless God calls and saves us. Without the miracle of God's Holy Spirit, we cannot understand fully what the resurrection of Jesus Christ really means.

Now turn to verse 40 of John 11. Here is the unique quality of Christ's tears at the tomb of Lazarus. If the situation had been redeemable by human effort Christ would not have wept. If sin could have been overcome or if death, the product of sin, could have been eradicated, we should expect Jesus to have said: "Dry your tears; stop feeling sorry for yourselves, get on with the work, solve your own problems." But He did not do that, did He? Because it is impossible for us to do anything about our sin on our own. Sure we can overcome some things on our own, like quitting a bad habit, but it is very limited and certainly not eternal.

So instead He weeps for us. From man's point of view, man's situation is hopeless and unsolvable, but with God all things are possible.

John 11:40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe [have faith] you would see the glory of God?"

Martha did see God's glory because her brother was raised, but it was not until after he was raised that she actually believed it. But so do all that come to Christ as their Savior. We need Him! Sin, suffering, and death testify to that. But God through Christ is able to meet our need truly. He has met it because He has given His life and has been raised from the dead in order to deal with sin entirely.

Isaiah told about it a thousand years before Christ was born, stressing that we who have been made in His image, so bruised and battered Him, that physically at least, His image became even more deformed than our own. But he endured this and all suffering in order that He might restore in us that perfect image of God that we had before we rebelled against Him.

Isaiah 53:5 [this was written a thousand years before Christ] But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

Here is the ability and great love of our God because only these take us from the depths of our sin and restore to us that lost image of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

John 11:36 Then the Jews said, “See how He loved him!”

Now the last of our analysis of the phrase “Jesus wept,” brings us to the reaction of the spectators to Christ’s tears. There were two reactions that they had. First, there was the reaction of those who were obviously unbelievers. These people thought that Jesus’ tears were proof of His weakness so they concluded,

John 11:37 And some of them said, “Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?”

These people were surprised that Jesus had not been able to do something about Lazarus’ sickness earlier. But they reasoned that obviously He had not been able to help or he would have done it. It did not even begin to enter their minds that Jesus was about to raise Lazarus from the dead.

The other reaction to Christ’s tears was neither an expression of belief nor disbelief, it was just an observation. These people looked at Christ’s tears and concluded rightly that Jesus loved Lazarus.

John 11:36 Then the Jews said, “See how He loved him!”

Many people, perhaps most of those who will be reading these words, know Jesus Christ well enough to know that He loves others and that He loves them also. But if this is so, then it is surely right to take John 11:36 personally and say, “Behold how He loves (us)(me)!”

Now as we contemplate all we know concerning Jesus from the past to the present, where is it that we first see His love? Is it when we first became aware of His love? Or when He died for us? Or is it when He created us?

None of these points represents the true beginning. Certainly there is no beginning, because as far as we can look back into the past, we find Him

loving us. It was in eternity past that He so identified Himself with us that He took up our case and determined to redeem sinful people.

In His divine foresight Jesus looked upon the future human race that as yet was not created and saw it ruined through sin. We see everything through the blinders of time. For us, life is past, present, and future, but it is not this way with God. He is above and beyond time so that to Him, in some sense, all things are present.

It was in this way then that Jesus Christ looked out upon what was to come and saw the ruin into which our sin would plunge us. Who was there in that moment beyond time to take our side and pledge Himself to redeem that fallen temple? There was no one but Christ. Isaiah wrote concerning Israel's confessed sin and God's observation about a Redeemer which was considered and thought of far before the creation of man.

Isaiah 59:9-21 Therefore justice is far from us, nor does righteousness overtake us; we look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, but we walk in blackness! We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noonday as at twilight; we are as dead men in desolate places. We all growl like bears, and moan sadly like doves; we look for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us. For our transgressions are multiplied before You, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we know them: In transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. So truth fails [this is a description of mankind, the world, without God's Holy Spirit], and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. Then the Lord saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice.

He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him. For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His

head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, fury to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; the coastlands He will fully repay. So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun; when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him. “The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,” says the Lord. “As for Me,” says the Lord, “this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants,” says the Lord, “from this time and forevermore.”

It was Jesus then who took up our cause. In that moment He also pledged Himself to be the surety of His covenant people.

Jesus established a covenant on our behalf and for our good, and long before we were able to have any part in it personally, He pledged Himself to die for us thereby giving His life as a ransom and an atonement for our sins.

The pledge was unilateral because He did it by Himself and without our asking. It is eternal because what He has begun He will most certainly bring to completion. It is undeserved because we are lost in sin and therefore have no claim upon Him. Also, it is sealed with Christ’s blood by which we are saved and made complete, as the author of the letter to the Hebrews says.

Hebrews 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Jesus pledged Himself to do what we could never do, so closely uniting Himself with us that His death became our death, His life our life, and His resurrection our resurrection. And when did He decide to do this? Before we were even born, before there was even a physical creation.

It is also true that Jesus Christ loved us enough to leave the glories of heaven and take the form of a man upon Himself. In this form He endured all temptations, disappointments, and sufferings that we were heir to. This is one of the greatest wonders of all time, but it means simply that Jesus became like us in order that we might become like Him. Now how was He like us? He became like us in temptations.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Now He reigns with the Father in heaven so that we might turn to Him and “find mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Jesus also became like us in disappointments. A friend betrayed Him, others let Him down, no one really understood Him. His own countrymen, whom He had tried to help, killed Him. Clearly Jesus knew disappointments, but these did not defeat Him, they did not make Him bitter, but instead He triumphed over them.

He also knew suffering. Did anyone ever suffer as much as Jesus did? In a physical sense it may be possible that some people could have, though there are few forms of sufferings as great as that endured in crucifixion. But in a total sense, which involves mental and spiritual anguish as well as physical suffering, no one can match what He had to go through!

He who knew no sin was made sin for us, and He who had never experienced so much as one second of broken fellowship between Him and His Father, was separated from Him so that He called out in great agony, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” No other suffering was ever as great as His, yet He endured this because His love for us was so immeasurable.

Now the raising of Lazarus from the dead is the climatic miracle of John’s gospel. By any standard of measurement, its position in the gospel alone indicates this because it is the last of seven miracles and is inserted just before the beginning of the final week of Jesus’ earthly ministry. The length of the narrative is 46 verses, and its detail also reveals its importance. It is the longest and most elaborately described of the miracles. Only the miracle

of the restoration of sight of the man born blind is of comparable length. The miracle in John 9 is still shorter than this one.

The results of this miracle are more momentous than of any other sign, primarily in the increased determination of the religious leaders to eliminate Jesus. Finally, and most importantly, the deeper spiritually meaning of the miracle is striking and is essential to the book's theology.

The first of the miracles in the gospel of John is turning the water into wine. We find that in John 2:1-11. As miracles go, it is a small miracle, but it reveals Jesus to be the true source of joy and of life in abundance. It concludes with the observation found here in John 2:11.

John 2:11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

The second miracle is the healing of the son of the nobleman found in John 4:46-54. It shows Jesus to have power over human sickness and by extension over that sickness of the spirit caused by sin.

The third miracle is the healing of the invalid in John 5:1-16. Here the spiritual meaning of the miracle is obvious because the invalid is an eloquent symbol of the helpless spiritual state to which sin has brought all men and women.

The fourth miracle is the feeding of the 5,000 found in John 6:1-14. It reveals that Jesus is the bread of life. The fifth miracle, the story of His walking upon the water found in John 6:15-21, points to His power over nature, over His creation.

The sixth miracle is the restoration of sight to the man who had been born blind in John 9. This shows the effect of sin on the mind. The sinner is spiritually blind and walks in darkness and has need for Christ, who alone can restore sight. The story is summarized in advance by Christ in John 8.

John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

In each of these stores there is a real miracle, but it is told by John primarily because of the spiritual meaning found in it. Now the same is also true of the seventh miracle, the raising of Lazarus from the dead back to life, and there were many witnesses to that. In fact, as John indicates, it was the report of this astonishing miracle that led the religious leaders to the conclusion that they would have to dispose of Christ immediately. We find out also that they also plotted to kill Lazarus because he was the physical proof.

In addition to this is also a picture of how a man or woman who is dead in sin is brought to spiritual life by Jesus. It teaches a tremendous amount about sin, faith, and the power of Christ. We will continue reading here, picking it up in verse 38.

John 11:38-40 Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”

There is something very interesting here that I never noticed in the order of things—“if you would believe, you would see the glory of God.” The lesson Jesus had for Martha and therefore for us also is that in spiritual matters, believing is seeing. Because He said there, “did I not tell you that if you *believe* you will *see* the glory of God?” These words “seeing” and “believing” sound natural to us because of the worldly expression “seeing is believing.” But Jesus puts it the other way around: “believing is seeing.”

Both are right, depending on the context, so long as we realize that in our expression we are talking about human affairs, while Jesus, in His expression, is talking about a relationship to God. In human affairs the expression means that men and women are untrustworthy. Some are more trustworthy than others and these are the ones we seek to work into positions of responsibility and authority, but even here we are not entirely believing.

So corporation heads are bonded, builders are bound by contracts, union heads sign work agreements, and so on. Take, for example, a hiring

interview. A person of the company is interviewing a young applicant for a job. “Do you think you can do the work?” “Certainly!” says the applicant. So, it is obvious that the applicant does not lack confidence. Do you know what is involved in the job? Yes, I have read all about it and I have had two years experience doing the same thing at a previous job. And did the job go well there? Very well and I know that I can do well here.

The personnel representative here is probably pleased to see the young man’s confidence, he wants to know that the applicant can do the job. Despite this, he does not take his profession of ability at face value. Instead, he asks for references. Furthermore, he does not promise that the job will be permanent, even if he offers the job to him.

In other words, seeing is believing and this is right because, in human affairs, human performance has not always followed promise. So, we want references, or to put it another way we want collateral before the loan is made.

How than can Jesus invert the adage and say, “believing is seeing”? There is only one answer and it is because He is not speaking of men, but rather of God. Men are untrustworthy, but God is not like men in this respect.

Numbers 23:19 “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”

God has never made a promise that He has not fulfilled fully. Consequently, to believe God is to be in the position of specially blessed, from which we will certainly see all that is promised in due time.

Jesus’ statement links seeing the glory of God, which refers here to the raising of Lazarus, to such faith. But the interesting thing about this is that Martha apparently did not have such faith, nor did anyone else so far as we can discern from the account.

When Jesus said, “Did I not tell you,” He probably was referring to His message to Martha through the messenger recorded much earlier in John 11:4. But when Jesus finally arrived four days later, Martha did not expect the

resurrection. Also, even after Jesus had talked with her face-to-face, she did not expect it. Because when Jesus said, “take away this stone,” Martha replied that this would be unwise since the body would have already begun to decay. She did not expect the resurrection. She only thought that for some reason Jesus wanted to look at and mourn over the body. The crowd that was standing by did not believe in the possibility of a resurrection either, because as we see once again,

John 11:37 And some of them said, “Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?”

Where then was the faith that was to result in seeing God’s glory? There is only one answer. If it is not seen in Martha, Mary, or any of the others, the only person left in whom it can be seen is in Jesus Himself. He is the one who believed and who therefore saw God’s glory, and consequently His trust in God at this point becomes a model for our own faith.

What is it that makes Christ’s faith in the Father what it is? Or put another way, what is the nature of Christ’s faith? There are several answers to this. The first is that it is personal, that is it is not faith in some abstract concept or some mere truth that Jesus knew about God. His faith was in God Himself which He indicates by calling Him “Father.”

John 11:41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.”

Is our faith like that? Is our faith as personal? Faith in the biblical sense must certainly involve hope, but it is not hope alone, but it is faith in a living Being. We cannot just believe, we have to believe that God is right there with us.

Secondly, the faith of Jesus Christ was a perfect or totally trusting faith. This is indicated by the fact that Jesus offered God thanks for the miracle, even before it had taken place. We find Him praying in verse 42.

John 11:41-42 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.”

We do not know personally, as physical human beings, how close we can come to that total belief in Jesus Christ. Certainly, we often fail to express confidence that God will hear and answer our prayers. On the other hand, we often pray in ways that are mere presumption. We fail but we should still grow toward the point of such perfection.

Hebrews 6:1 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

This is assuming that we have faith, but we are to *increase* that faith. The faith that we have is Christ in us. It is Christ’s faith, and our faith building upon that. So we can move on to perfection, and we are told to. This happens during our sanctification which is the process we are going through now. Sanctification is a process. God is sanctifying us and is perfecting us. The word perfect often means complete. So God is completing us to the point that He will feel confident that we are ready to enter His Kingdom.

Third and finally, we notice that the faith of Jesus Christ was public. That is, that He did not express His faith quietly in a corner, but rather audibly and openly before people. If we do likewise at least on occasion, then others may come to believe as a result of our indirect testimony and God’s action.

Now I am not saying we should toot our own horns to show how faithful we are. I am saying that we should humbly and thankfully tell of the miracles that have happened in our lives, because they are inspiring to one another.

Now the prayer of Jesus leads to the moment of the resurrection itself. Having finished His prayer, Jesus called to Lazarus in a loud voice so all could hear. Lazarus would have heard even if Christ had whispered. But Christ wanted everyone to hear and be involved in this miracle.

John 11:43-44 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.”

Here is the climax of the miracle and it is here that it must be applied spiritually. The resurrection of Lazarus happened, and we notice that it is also what happens spiritually whenever God calls a sinner out of the world. When Jesus said to the people, “Loose him and let him go,” is that not what Christ says when we are called, baptized, and receive His Holy Spirit?

According to Scripture, anyone without Christ is dead spiritually, he is dead in trespasses and sins, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians. As such he is helpless and there is nothing he can do to improve his condition.

Ephesians 2:1-10 And you [speaking to members of God’s church] He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for

good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Notice that although it was Jesus alone who could bring the dead to life, nevertheless He was pleased to involve the bystanders in the miracle. First, they were told to move the stone, then after the miracle they were told to unbind Lazarus. Christ could have done all of that by Himself, but instead He involved everyone.

It is true that we cannot bring the dead to life, but we can bring the Word of Christ to them and we can do preparatory work. We can do after work afterward, and we can help to remove stones of ignorance, error, prejudice, and of despair.

After the miracle we can help the new Christian by unwinding the “graveclothes” of doubt, fear, self-centeredness, and discouragement. Why did Christ have others do the physical work? Did He need help? This miracle was one of Jesus’s Fathers works.

So Jesus prayed and thanked God for the answer He knew would follow and it did not require the disciples help, yet Jesus commanded them in John 11: 39-44 to “Take away the stone.” “Loose him and let him go.”

Jesus always used His power wisely, never wastefully, frivolously, or unnecessarily. By involving His disciples in the event, He shows that we participate in God’s way of life and teaching with Him. We do not just sit back and kick up our feet and let God do the work.

The miracle is the Father’s and Christ’s, but there is work for us to do if we are willing to do it. Jesus used Ananias to reach Paul even after he had been struck down on the road to Damascus. He used Peter to reach Cornelius. So do you doubt that He would use you if you were ready to do His work? However, there are so many who are not ready to do His work or to support God’s work and the brethren.

What was the intended result of this miracle? After His prayer, Jesus in whom is life and who is the life, shouts to Lazarus with a strong confident voice and he walks from his grave alive. It is an incredible thing to read. Can

you imagine the effect it had on those who witnessed it? As the conclusion of the chapter shows, this miracle had diverse results. Many Jews believed in Him, but it only angered His enemies, making them more determined to rid themselves of Him.

Turn to Luke 12. The high priest, Caiaphas, a dupe of Rome and a Sadducee who did not believe in resurrections, suggests to the council that they must kill Jesus rather than lose their positions. The words and works of Jesus divided light from darkness, the believing from the unbelieving, and there is still division because of Him.

Luke 12:51-53 [Jesus speaking here] “Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”

And so, we have divisions among families, towns, and nations because of Christ’s teachings to this very day. That explains why one brother in one family is called and not the others in that same family, because God is the one who chooses who will receive that miracle of understanding.

Now the word John uses 13 times for “miracles” in his gospel and in Revelation, suggests wonders; foreshadows; or signs and not mighty works. E. W. Bullinger, in his *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, page 503, explains “miracles” as:

A signal or ensign; a standard; a sign by which anything is designated, distinguished or known. Hence used of the miracles of Christ as being the signs by which it might be made know that He was the Christ of God; a sign authenticating Christ’s mission, a sign with reference to what it demonstrates.

As John sees them, Jesus’ miracles are symbols, proofs, messages, and object lessons of spiritual truths embodied in the wonders themselves. They are living parables of Christ's action, embodiment of the truth in works. They

are not merely signs of supernatural power, but dramatic indications of the goal of His ministry and of His own all loving character.

His visible works of power and mercy foreshadow the spiritual restoration of all things, because of these elements: a lesson, discussion, or sermon usually follows to give explanation. Now John recorded only seven of Jesus' miracles choosing typical ones to illustrate while recognizing their greater spiritual scope.

John 20:30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book.

And in John's last chapter he provides a glimpse of the fullness of His ministry. In another scripture you are familiar with,

John 21:25 And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.
Amen.

All the many things Jesus did during His earthly ministry glorified God the Father and Himself. Are we following Jesus' wonderful example in service to God the Father and Jesus Christ and to our fellow brethren? This is a major question we must ask ourselves in our lives. Are we doing enough?