

If You Believe

John 11

Life of Jesus: Miracles

The story begins by telling the reader about “a certain man.” This man, Lazarus, lived in Bethany, and his sisters were Mary and Martha.

Mary was a very common name. Some think that this is Mary Magdalene, others do not; the scriptures are not completely clear. Does anyone remember a story about a Mary that did something unusual for Jesus?

The next verse tells you that this is the same Mary that is mentioned in all four gospels that anointed Jesus with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair; Jesus said she prepared his body for burial.

It seems that Jesus was very good friends with this family. We are told that Jesus loved Martha, her sister Mary, and Lazarus. The sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him that “he who you love is sick.” Who are they talking about?

When Jesus heard the message, he said to those around him,

“This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the son of God may be glorified.”

It sounds like he plans on doing a miracle.

After Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed another two days in the place where he was.

Discuss:

What would you do if you heard someone you loved was dying?

Would you rush to go see them? What did Jesus do?

After that, he told his disciples, “Let’s go back to Judaea.” The last time Jesus was there the Jews tried to stone him. So his disciples could not imagine why he would want to go there again. They said,

Lord, the last time we went there they tried to stone you; you want to go back?

This is a short time before Jesus’ death, and there is increasing hostility among the Pharisees and other leaders towards Jesus.

Jesus responded by talking about hours in the day. He talked about walking in the day and not stumbling because you see the light of the world.

Discuss:

What did he mean? It seems that he meant that traveling during the day was like traveling with God’s guidance; following the light of the world. Jesus was obeying the leading of the Father to go back to Judaea. He said if you travel at night (without God’s leading) you will stumble because there is no light.

Then he told the disciples, Lazarus is asleep, I am going to wake him up.

The disciples did not understand. They said, If he’s sleeping, that’s good, he will get well. Jesus was saying that Lazarus was dead, but they thought he was saying that Lazarus was just asleep.



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Why do you think Jesus used the word sleep instead of dead? Jesus may have used “sleep” to avoid the negative emotions of death and despair that would come with saying that he was dead. Perhaps when he said “sleep” it was because he knew it was a temporary situation that would change in the same way that he referred to Jairus’ daughter in Luke 8:52 & Mark 5:39. Also, the New Testament often refers to death as “sleep.” Sleep is temporary because God’s people do not “die” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14).

Then Jesus told them, “Lazarus is dead.”

But he continues, “And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there so that you may believe, but let us go to him.”

Jesus is basically saying, I’m glad I wasn’t there to heal him so that you would believe.

Discuss:

What is he saying? What does he want them to believe?

Maybe he knows that some of them do not really believe in him. Jesus wanted to do this miracle; he said as much when they told him Lazarus was sick and he said the sickness was so that the Son of God would be glorified.

Thomas makes a comment about going to die with him. It is not clear if this is speaking of dying with Jesus or Lazarus.

When Jesus arrived in Bethany he found out that Lazarus had been in the grave for four days already.

Discuss:

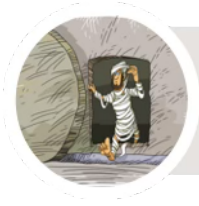
They have already had the funeral; he’s been buried. But they did not bury in the ground; they buried in a cave and would cover the entrance with a big stone. They wrapped the bodies in a light linen cloth.

Bethany was near Jerusalem (about three kilometers or almost two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to visit.

Discuss:

What usually happens when someone dies? Friends and relatives come over; some people bring food, and some just come and sit with the family when they are grieving. This is a similar situation: many of the Jews had come to comfort Mary and Martha. The house was probably crowded and full of people who were all sad and crying, maybe telling stories about Lazarus.

Martha heard that Jesus was coming. Someone must have sent a message because he had not even come into town yet, because she went and met him outside of town, but Mary stayed home.



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Discuss:

What do you think Martha said when she got to Jesus? When Martha got to Jesus, she said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know, that even now, whatever you ask of God, God will give it to you.”

She said, if you would have been here, this would not have happened.

What does this tell you about Martha’s faith? She believes that Jesus would have been able to heal him. She believed that If Jesus had been there, Lazarus would not have died. Does she think it’s too late? Maybe. But with her phrase, “...even now...” she seems to have some hope that maybe Jesus can do something.

Jesus tells her, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha responds that she knows that he will rise again in the last day at the resurrection. But that was not what Jesus meant. He tells her that He is the resurrection, and the life. He that believes on Jesus, even though he was dead, yet he will live. Resurrection is not just a thing or a future event. Resurrection is a person; Jesus IS the resurrection.

Then he says that whoever lives and believes in him will never die. This seems to refer to the eternal perspective that Jesus has about our real selves. Our bodies will die, but our born-again spirits will never die.

Then Jesus asks Martha directly, “Do you believe this?”

She responds by a profession of faith,

“Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

As soon as she said this, she went back home. It would have taken a while to get back into town. She probably went to Mary secretly and whispered to her that Jesus was asking for her. As soon as Mary heard she got up quickly and went to meet Jesus.

At this point, Jesus has not yet arrived. This means that Martha heard from someone that Jesus was on his way. As soon as she heard, she ran to meet him outside the town. Martha would have gone all the way out to meet him, come all the way back, and told Mary. Jesus must have been waiting for Mary because he was still in the place outside of town where he and Martha had been talking.

When Mary jumped up to go meet Jesus, all the people got up to follow her. They were probably talking and wondering where she was going. They thought she was going to cry at the grave.

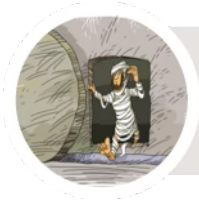
Is that what she’s going to do? No, but that’s what they think, and they all followed her. Mary came to the place where Jesus was and fell down at his feet.

What is the first thing she says to Jesus? The same thing that Martha said,

“Lord, if you would have been here, my brother would not have died.”

Both of these sisters knew Jesus well. They understood his love for them. They even described Lazarus as the “one you love.” They both knew Jesus so well that they had faith, and they knew he would have not allowed this to happen if he were there. They knew his character. They had experienced his love. They knew how he would have responded.

Mary was weeping when she came to Jesus, and the people in the crowd that followed her were also weeping. When Jesus saw how sad everyone was, he was troubled, and he asked them where they had laid Lazarus. The people told him to come and see.



If You Believe

Then Jesus wept.

Jesus was also human. Even though he knew the miracle he was about to perform, he empathized and had compassion on the people that were there and he mourned with them as he wept. Maybe he wept because he knew his death was coming soon and he knew his disciples and friends would be weeping and sad for him.

The people saw Jesus weeping and saw how much he loved Lazarus.

Some of them said, this man healed blind eyes (which was an amazing miracle) could he have saved Lazarus from dying?

He groaned in himself as he approached the grave, which was a cave. What do you think they had over the cave? A stone. The word for this groaning is close to an anger, an indignation. Jesus seems to be upset with the situation. He said,

“Take away the stone.”

Martha interrupts and says, “Lord, by this time he stinks. He’s been dead for four days.”

Some commentaries say that the Jews believed that a person’s spirit would be near the body for three days after death looking for an opportunity to reenter the body. But this fourth day would have been too late; by then the body has begun to decompose (stink), and this would have been an amazing miracle.

Jesus asks Martha, “Didn’t I say to you that *if you believe* you would see the glory of God?”

Why does it matter if Martha believes? Did Martha’s faith have something to do with Lazarus’ resurrection? It seems so.

Faith can move mountains (Matthew 17:20; Matthew 21:21) and all things are possible to those who believe (Mark 9:23).

If everyone there was doubting, Jesus may have not been able to do the miracle. He needed some faith to be present. Unbelief is a powerful force because when Jesus was in his own country where his hometown was, he could not do any miracles because of their unbelief (Matthew 13:58.) Unbelief is evil (Hebrews 3:12) and faith must be present for God to work.

Martha now is probably becoming quite hopeful. She knows he wants to take away the stone, and there must be a reason. She doesn’t stop him this time, and they took away the stone. Jesus lifted up his eyes and prayed. It looks like he prayed out loud so all the people would hear. He says,

“Father, I thank you that you heard me. I know you always hear me, but because of the people which stand by, I said it so that they will believe that you sent me.” Jesus wanted to do this miracle. He wanted people to believe.

Then he said, loudly, “Lazarus, come out.”

What do you think the crowd is doing now? Probably staring at Jesus and the open grave and wondering what is about to happen. Then Lazarus came walking out, wrapped with grave clothes. His hands and feet were tied up with the cloth, and his face was wrapped up. Jesus told them to unwrap him and let him go.



If You Believe

Discuss:

What would this have been like if you were there? This would be amazing.

The people there would have been completely astonished. They had never seen anything like this.

Is everyone happy and excited?

Some of them were.

Some of them saw what happened and believed.

BUT there were always people who are upset and some of them went to tell the Pharisees what Jesus had done.

It seems unbelievable that people would make this seem like a bad thing. But there were people outraged by the fact that he raised Lazarus from the dead. This seems hard to understand because it is such an amazing thing, and clearly something that only God can do, and it is wonderful that Lazarus is no longer dead. But it is also amazing what hatred and pride can do. The Pharisees were proud, and Jesus questioned their methods and ways of doing things, and they hated him for it.

After this, the Pharisees and chief priests came together for a meeting and tried to decide what to do.

They knew that Jesus had done many miracles. Is anyone else doing miracles? The Pharisees were concerned that people would believe on him, and people would no longer follow the lead of the Pharisees and the Romans would take over everything. What the Pharisees were really concerned about was losing their power, or control over the people.

Caiaphas was the high priest. He was not really serving God, but God still used him to speak prophecy about Jesus. He told them that they did not understand that one man would die for the people, so the whole nation would not die.

God used him to prophesy that Jesus would die for the nation.

Jesus would die not just for the nation, but to bring together all the scattered children of God.

After this, the Pharisees and priests met together to decide how to put Jesus to death.

And as a result, Jesus could no longer go to the places in public where the people were. The Jews had given commands that if anyone knew where Jesus was, to tell them so that they could come take him. He did an amazing miracle, but now the leaders wanted to kill him all the more. It is getting closer and closer to the time of his crucifixion.

Jesus in the Story



Jesus knew that if he went to Bethany to heal Lazarus, it would cost him his own life. He knew that once he did this miracle, the Pharisees would plan to kill him.

Jesus fulfilled what he spoke in John 15:13:

“Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

Jesus knew his death was very near, and his time was running out. He wanted to give an opportunity to as many people as possible to see the glory of God that they might believe on Him.

Jesus wanted to do this miracle of raising Lazarus so the people would know that it was the Father who sent Jesus (John 17:21).

Lesson Questions & Memory Verses

17. One Thing I Know

Read Isaiah 64:8

1. What is a potter?
2. Who is the potter?
3. What are we compared to in this verse?
4. What does it say about God's work?

Isaiah 42:16

And I will bring the blind by the way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, and not forsake them.

18. If You Believe

1. What does Mark 9:23 say is possible to those who believe?
2. John 12:44 says if you believe on Jesus you actually believe on who?
3. Luke 8:12 says if they believe they would be?

John 20:30-31

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing you may have life in His name.

19. Giving Thanks

1. When does Ephesians 5:20 say that we should give thanks?
2. Who should we give thanks to?
3. Colossians 3:17 says that we should do everything in the name of Jesus and then give what to God?

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

20. Have Mercy

1. Where did God meet with people? (Exodus 25:22; 30:6)
2. When you walk with Jesus, what will follow you? (Psalm 23:6)
3. What surrounds you when you trust in the Lord? (Psalm 32:10)

Psalm 147:11

The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his mercy.

