

One day, in the town of Bethany, beyond the walls of Jerusalem, a man named Lazarus became ill, deathly ill. Although the physicians were helpless to affect a cure, his sisters were convinced that their friend Jesus would have no such limitations. Since they knew Him, and because they had seen and heard about what He had already done, these women were confident Jesus would be able to help and heal their brother—if He would arrive before it was too late. Not daring to leave their dying brother's side for an instant, the concerned sisters sent a messenger to find the Lord. The messenger was to deliver a simple plea, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." As I'm sure you're aware, in a situation like this, there is a desperate urgency to make contact with the right people. Jesus was found and the message was delivered, but it was all too late. By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had died. It's probable that Lazarus died on the same day that word reached Jesus. When Jesus arrives at Bethany, Lazarus had been buried for three days.

Lazarus was gone, his story was ended, his tale had been told. There was nothing more to be done. After all, dead men tell no tales, do they?

That is the common belief, isn't it? When death comes for us mere mortals, no matter how much we or those around us wish it would be otherwise, the ending is always complete. But Jesus is not a mere mortal. As the Son of God, He knows no human limits. That is why, even though Lazarus had been dead for three days, Jesus asked to be taken to his friend's tomb. When the Savior gave orders for the tomb to be opened, there were some serious objections voiced. "Lord, by this time there will be an odor." Lazarus was most assuredly dead. This was a cringeworthy request.

In spite of all objection, the stone which shut the tomb was moved away. Then Jesus, having made a prayer of thanksgiving, called into the tomb, with a simple, "Lazarus, come out." And that day, the day Jesus called into the darkness of Lazarus' tomb, an exception was made. Still confined by the customary wrappings, Lazarus, a living Lazarus, emerged from the tomb. The crowd stood in shock. They stood there until Jesus gave the command for his friend to be set free from the burial clothes. It was a unique moment in history. At the command of God's Son, a dead man had returned from his grave. Now, for the first time, someone would be able to lay to rest all the discussions about what lay on the other side. He would be able to share what he had experienced. He would be able to describe the happiness of heaven or the fiery flames of hell. Seeing Lazarus standing there, I would have been filled with a million questions, eager to hear his description of the Great Beyond.

And do you know what Lazarus said? Do you know what questions he answered; what wonders he revealed? Scripture doesn't tell us. The Bible quotes not a word. Nothing about white lights, or streets of gold, or a place where there was no crying or dying, or pain or problems. Indeed, Scripture doesn't list a single thing, not a single syllable spoken by Lazarus.

Instead, it shares the reactions and repercussions which came about because of this miracle performed by Jesus. The first group believed and was overjoyed that God's Son had come to earth and performed such a great thing. The second group also believed Jesus had performed a miracle, but this group was upset at an event which disturbed their worldview and the way they

wanted things to be. But there's more. The first group believed and worshipped the Christ while the second group did all they could to erase that event from their lives and the lives of all those who believed differently than they did.

Would it surprise you if I told you that these two responses are still 'alive and well?' Everyone fits into one of these two groups. Today there are religions of the world that use threats and violence to stop the spread of the gospel. There are governments who have attempted to legislate the voice of Jesus into silence. There are learned, credentialed men and women who actively deny humanity's need to have a Savior. In spite of wars, hatred and prejudice; in spite of ongoing inequities and injustice, they would have you believe that you and this world are fine. And if not "fine," then at least better off without Jesus.

But we're not fine, are we? If we could have changed the state of things, we would have by now. Left to our own devices, there's no reversing the evil which permeates the world, which includes human hearts. We need a Savior and in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Mary and Son of God, we have been given One. Today you heard of God's Son calling one man out of his grave and back to life. Someday that same Savior will summon billions of others out of their graves, into eternal life in resurrected bodies. How can know if you will be among them?

Jesus entered this world to do all that we were incapable of doing. Each day of our lives we sin, but all of Jesus' days were spent without breaking a single one of God's commands. Look back at your life, you will see numerous times when you did things that were hateful, immoral, cruel, and careless. Not once did Jesus fall or fail as we have. From start to finish, from beginning to end, Jesus did that which was right in order to give us His rightness before our Divine Judge. And, because Jesus has succeeded, all those who believe on Him are forgiven and saved.

And how do I know He succeeded? I know because after He was crucified; after His life was poured out upon a Roman cross for the redemption of a dying world, Jesus showed Himself alive. Now, in His Word, a living Lord Jesus comes to you, me, the world, and He says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" That's the question Jesus put to the family of Lazarus before He raised that man from the dead. It's the all-important question He puts to you. Do you believe this? Do you believe that you will know Jesus beyond the walls of your grave? If so, you are more than a conqueror. You are in Christ, who is the resurrection and the life.