



## “Roll Away the Stone” Part 1

John 11:1-44

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**John 11:1-44** Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.

3 Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." 4 When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. 7 Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 "But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." 11 These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." 12 Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." 13 However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. 14 Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 "And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him." 16 Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." 17 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. 19 And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. 20 Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. 21 Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 "But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." 28 And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you." 29 As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. 31 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." 32 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." 33 Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. 34 And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" 37 And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" 38 Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 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." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" 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. 42 "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." 43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" 44 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."

The story before us is the “crown” of the public ministry of Jesus: *the climax of both the missional and the miraculous*. It both **stood** and **stands** as an earth-shattering event both physically and spiritually. Yet incredibly it was this act that led to the “final throw-down” from the religious “powers-that-be.” It would be this act of raising Lazarus from the dead that would finally and completely confirm the fact that Jesus “had to go.”

Ironically, the finger of accusation was not that Jesus was a charlatan...or that He was some sort of a con artist. Nor was He being accused of somehow channeling the powers of the dark side to do such miracles. *No*... He had to be stopped because such demonstrations could no longer be explained away. He could no longer be ignored, and it all **so** endangered the position of the religious right. It threatened their status and their power. You see, it didn't matter that He was the real thing! Because they didn't *want* Him, and thus He had to go.

The famous 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and rationalist Baruch Spinoza once quipped that "*if he could believe the raising of Lazarus, he would tear to shreds his system and humbly accept the creed of Christians.*" Therefore we can easily see that much is "on the table" in this account. For Jesus, this singular act would make the great leap from teacher, prophet, physician and humanitarian, to that of deity. One who literally and absolutely held the power over life and death. He had exercised such miraculous power before, but never so openly, and never so dramatically. Jesus, in this act, would "go public" in a way in which there would be no return. He was making the turn toward the cross, where He was saving His greatest performance of all.

Except for the resurrection of Jesus Christ post-crucifixion, there are few if any biblical events or even world historical events more fully confirmed and corroborated than the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Both friend and foe of Christ were present. What would happen there could not be refuted. Even the enemies of Jesus did not attempt to deny the miracle. Afterwards, the chief priests and Pharisees when meeting together would say to each other: "*This man certainly performs many miraculous signs. If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him.*"

This account before us has several "chapters" or "acts." Therefore I feel it would be criminal to move through it in an abbreviated way when there is so much here for us, so much for us to learn from the events at hand. Firstly, I would have you notice the way in which Mary and Martha approached Jesus on this matter. Unlike what we see, hear, and are often taught in today's greater church world, Mary and Martha didn't **demand** anything of Christ. They didn't "name-it-and-claim-it." They didn't tell Jesus what to do or how to handle the situation. In fact, they didn't even ask Jesus to heal their brother! Truly this was possibly the most perfect expression of faith and confidence found anywhere in Scripture. They didn't even say Lazarus' name, just that "*the one you love is sick.*" It was enough for those sisters to rest in the knowledge that their Lord knew the situation. I wonder if we get that? Matthew 6:8 tells us that "*your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!*"

It wasn't like these folks were strangers to Jesus, nor were they just groupies. These were clearly close friends of Christ...and yes, Christ the **Man** not just Christ the **deity**. In fact, while this is certainly an awesome example of the power of God, it is also an example of friendship, compassion, and human emotion. So let us not forget that while Jesus was all God, He was also all **man**, and he experienced temptation, pain, sadness, and anguish just as we all do.

Jesus was personally invested in this event. And yet when the message came concerning Lazarus, He didn't drop everything and sprint off to Bethany. That's what **we** would have wanted. We want Jesus to essentially drop whatever He is doing to come running and rescue us from whatever we got going on. He needs to not only come when we call, but **come right now**...

The old saying goes that "timing is everything." But how many of us would want to argue that, yes, while Jesus is awesome in so many ways, His timing is not so good. In fact, generally speaking, He is usually just slow

across the board. Certainly it seemed that was the mindset of Mary and Martha as they spoke those words “*Oh, Jesus...if you had only been here my brother would not have died.*” And on the surface, we might step back and wonder...*why the delay Lord?* Our text tells us that “*when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.*” Certainly one of the hardest bridges to cross in our faith is to acknowledge and to embrace the fact that God is never late...Jesus is always right on time.

Jesus in this passage said a lot of staggering things. One of which was when He said, “*This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.*” What?! What a stunning revelation, that someone could be called upon to endure sickness for the glory of God. That’s a new premise to a lot of us! In fact, such can put our trials and disappointments in life upon a level that is actually divine. It seems that God has a purpose in everything, making all grace abound, even when sickness, sorrow and disappointment enter the life of one of His own children. It can certainly be hard to recognize this fact at the time of enduring, and it can be quite contrary to our idea of what this “Christian walk” is supposed to look like. But the error is ours, for the premise being played out here is a truth found throughout scripture and throughout history.

We tend to think that the Jesus is glorified when we are at our physical, mental, and emotional best. Yet, in 2 Corinthians 12:9 Christ says “*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*” It’s a fact: our pains, our difficulties and even sickness will at times be for the glory of God. One thing we can be sure about, we have the testimony of the Word of God that tells us frankly that all things work *together* for good to them that love the Lord. I know that we are aware of such truth intellectually but in our gut we all can doubt the validity of that verse. Sometimes we quite honestly will not understand what in the world God is doing until we get to the other side. That’s trust. That’s faith. That’s the real stuff, not the “fluffy Sunday-go-to-meeting Jesus light” stuff. Because He has told us that without such trust, it is impossible to please Him. The Living Bible version draws a clear picture of the test before us: verse 5 and 6 says “*...although Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, he stayed where he was for the next two days.*”

It’s easy for us to blow by this part of the story because we know how the story ends. But at this point in the account the end was **not** known...the future was **not** seen. The only thing that Mary and Martha could see was **backwards**. They could only see **back**. And that led them to speak those pregnant words: “*if you had been here Jesus, my brother would not have died.*” In other words, the attitude was “*where were you Jesus? Where were you?*”

While we might be able today to wax eloquent and spin a nice spiritual picture concerning this situation, the truth is that standing in the middle of that story is a lot different than looking at it now from a pew 2000 years later. If you are a person who looks back at some very difficult or painful time in your life...maybe you suffered some abuse or some neglect, then this story becomes very real for you. Because it could very well be that you too are saying today...at least in your heart, “*where were you Jesus?*”

The disciples also were not outside of this call to faith...the need to trust when they did not understand and they did not see the way out. When Jesus stated that he was going to go to Judea, then idea seemed like madness to the boys. They reminded Jesus that the people there had just tried to kill Him! Going back now would be tantamount to suicide! Jesus was probably thinking “Well thank you gentlemen! I wasn’t aware of that fact until you pointed it out!” But they, *at least tacitly*, got on board with what Jesus was doing. They assumed that **He**,

and by association **they**, were all going to die, and yet they went anyway. They didn't understand, but they trusted the Master.

So the pain was shared by Mary, Martha, family and friends of Lazarus, and now the apostles. But let's not miss the fact that they all were not the only ones enduring this pain. They were not isolated. Because they were joined by Christ Himself:

*“Jesus wept...”*

Jesus could have said the same: *“where were you Father?”* The Bible says of Jesus, *“This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do”* (Hebrews 4:15a NLT, second edition). He doesn't just care about your pain; he feels it, too. He shares your pain. The Bible says, *“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed”* (Psalm 34:18 NLT, second edition).

There isn't an experience, a disappointment or a trial that visits a believer that hasn't passed the Divine Will. And there isn't a one that we will travel alone. Jesus could have spoken those words after the cross...that horrific and painful scene where Christ the innocent was executed. He could have said *“where were you Father?”* And yet because of the cross, the glory of God is manifested through millions down the halls of history. And through all of this event before us they were no doubt challenged in the words of Psalm 136:26, *“... the God of heaven ... his steadfast love endures forever.”*

I do not pretend to understand the decisions God makes. And I would never tell you that every pain and trial has divine merit. The fact is we can often get ourselves into situations because of our rebellion and because of sin. But even in that, Jesus is there. Always with the “long view” in mind. Always forming the person He is trying to make you into. And whether we want to admit it or not, we are each today a sum of all our experiences, all our joys and all our pains. For those of us that are His own, God has radically invaded our lives and is designing us with minute precision to be the servant He created us to be. It may be a very difficult admonition, but I wonder how many of us look back at that pain, that trial and that crisis and have come to see the glory of God in such. We wish we could have avoided it, but we know we are today who and what we are because of it.

Everybody felt the pain that day. But everybody was also there to hear those words... *“Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”* They all were there to see a man come back from death. And nobody thought about the pain at that moment! No one asked any questions then.

Christ is still saying that to each of us today. There will be no shortcuts and no abbreviated lessons. Moses had experienced a lot of his own personal hell by the time he arrived at Mt Sinai. God tucked him in...back against the rock, almost to brace him for what was coming and passing in front of Moses God called out...

*“Yahweh! The LORD! The God of compassion and mercy!  
I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.  
I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations.  
I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin...”*

And there Moses stood...glowing all radiant...no doubt slack-jawed and weak-kneed. Hair blowed back, and eyes like saucers. *“Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”*