

**STORY**

Lazarus Raised from the Dead - John 11:1-54

TEACHER PRAYER

Dear Lord Jesus, sin has brought death to this world. Death has brought tears as we are separated from those we love. Yet, as You have said in this lesson, You are the Resurrection and the Life. You alone have power over death. And, because of Your death for our sakes and Your own resurrection we know that we too will rise from death to life with You. And so, death is but a sleep from which You can and will awaken us. Help me, O Lord, to share this comforting truth with the students in my care. They too will face death, that of loved ones and of themselves, and need Your reassurance that those who believe in You as their Savior will be reunited in heaven where there will be no more death or tears or sorrow. I pray with faith in You, the Lord of Life. Amen.

VOCABULARY

Bethany - a town two miles east of Jerusalem

Anoint - pour on oil as a special honor or to mark a person for a particular office. Scented oil was also applied at the time of burial to help the body smell better. See notes on verse.

Love and Loved - the original Greek language used five different words to describe what English includes in one. In verses 3 and 36 the Greek word *phileo* describes a brotherly love or the strong affection between good friends. In verse 5, the Greek word *agapao* (the verb form of *agape*) describes a committed love of understanding and purpose. Agape love seeks to understand what is best for the person loved and commits to accomplishing it. Christ's *agapao* love gave Himself for us by His death.

Graveclothes - In Jesus' time, bodies were wrapped up in strips of cloth with scented spices and perfumes mingled in and before being placed in tombs. That is different from today when people are buried in normal clothing and placed in a casket which is usually buried.

Pharisees - This sect or faction of the Jews attempted to very strictly keep the Law of God and of the traditions passed down. Jesus condemned many of them as hypocrites who acted holier than others but

did not show mercy or believe in Jesus. They generally held high positions in the Jewish church government.

Expedient - (Webster): "marked by a concern with what is advantageous without regard for fairness or rightness."

Prophecy - to serve as a mouthpiece for God (or another), many times in telling of future events.

OUTER AIM

Jesus resurrects a man who has been dead for days.

INNER AIM

Jesus, God's Son, has power over death.

BACKGROUND

(*Rupprecht Bible History References Vol.2, pp. 281-290*)

This miracle was a turning point in Jesus' ministry. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, His doom was sealed. The Jewish leaders could no longer ignore Jesus and hope that His following would go away. They were afraid that as soon as people heard that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, His following would become even larger. (cf. John 11:47-54) It was after this that the Jewish leaders felt it was necessary to get rid of Jesus.

John 11:1

- ▶ Sickness strikes in every family. Mary and Martha and Lazarus were well known in the Christian church and through other events in Scripture. (cf Luke 10:38-42; John 12:1-11).

v. 2

- ▶ This event demonstrates faith that was strengthened by the events of this lesson and should be included in your studies. It's recorded in John 12:1-8 and Matthew 26:6-13, (esp 13).

v. 3

- ▶ See vocabulary notes on "love." In faith, these good friends of Jesus let Him know their situation, trusting He would respond without saying how He should respond.
- ▶ This is a good way to approach God in a difficult situation. We will find that their expectations didn't guess the Lord's greater plans.
- ▶ Jesus may have been on the eastern side of the Jordan, outside of Judea, at this time (John 10:40; 11:7).

v. 4

- ▶ Jesus knew already what He would do in response to the request.
- ▶ His words offered comfort and encouraged faith while not specifically revealing His plans.
- ▶ Whatever Jesus did was to the glory of God, (1 Cor 10:31).

v. 5

- ▶ See vocabulary note on love. They were not only good friends to Jesus, He thought of their needs and would meet those needs.

v. 6

- ▶ This seems like a strange, uncaring reaction after having been told His good friend was very sick.
- ▶ This delay served to emphasize God's glory later and also tested the faith of the two sisters. Jesus knew what to do.

v. 7

- ▶ After delaying, Jesus announced it was time to go to Judea where Bethany was located.

v. 8

- ▶ The disciples, not understanding Jesus' plan concerning Lazarus or God's greater plan of salvation through Jesus, voiced their concern over the growing hostility of the Jews.
- ▶ The last two times Jesus visited Jerusalem the Jews had tried to stone Him to death. See John 8:59 and 10:31.

vs. 9-10

- ▶ This metaphor tells the disciples that Jesus isn't in any danger yet, because it isn't the appointed time for Him to die. He can continue to work without serious trouble for now.
- ▶ Jesus used the metaphor of hours for the timing of life in other places. (John 2:4; 12:23; 16:21; 17:1; Mark 16:41).
- ▶ While the Lord grants life, work can be done; in death, no work can be done. (cf. Last paragraph of the General Prayer, TLH p. 13)

v. 11

- ▶ After letting that sink in, He revealed the purpose of their journey.
- ▶ He knew Lazarus was dead but gives this accurate picture of death.
- ▶ For the believer who will rise again from death, death essentially is a sleep. (See Application 1 for description of death.)

vs 14-15

- ▶ Jesus clarifies for the disciples in their misunderstanding.
- ▶ Then He reveals more as He explains that He had purposely stayed away so that they would believe something more about Him.
- ▶ So even though Lazarus is dead, Jesus wants them to come and see Lazarus and received benefit for their faith.

v. 16

- ▶ Thomas shows his skeptical side, not understanding or believing Jesus' assurance that there was no danger yet.

v. 17

- ▶ Lazarus had been dead four days by this time. Some commentators feel that he died on the day Jesus received the message of his illness by allowing one day for the messenger, two days delay, and one day for Jesus to travel to Bethany. Though possible, calculation is not certain as travel time can not be accurately measured from the information we have.

v. 18

- ▶ Jesus' enemies were in Jerusalem, the major city of the country where the most people could hear of what would soon happen.
- ▶ This detail adds reality, suspense, and helpful information for calculating the speed of news, (v 46).

v. 19

- ▶ Mary and Martha were well known and respected. So a large crowd had come to comfort them in their loss.

v. 20

- ▶ Martha anxiously hurried to hear Jesus' comforting words for only He can give true comfort at such times.
- ▶ Mary remained behind, perhaps to give Martha a chance to speak with Jesus privately or she was simply absorbed by mourning.

v. 21

- ▶ This thought was probably on many believers' minds at this time (cf Mary v. 32).
- ▶ They knew that Jesus was able to heal the sick, for by this time He had healed many people.

v. 22

- ▶ Perhaps Jesus' earlier reply (v. 4) had given her hope but she expressed her trust that Jesus could still do something about Lazarus' death.
- ▶ She isn't sure what is possible, but her faith in Jesus is evident. Nevertheless, her words imply she doesn't yet see that Jesus is actually God, but that only He can ask anything of God freely.

v. 23

- ▶ Jesus begins to create a newer faith and hope for her with this general statement.

v. 24

- ▶ Martha declared her belief in the final resurrection. The Old Testament also teaches this belief: (Ps 17:5; Deut 32:39; Dan 12:2; Is 26:19; Job 19:25ff; Hos 6:2; 13:14; Heb 11:10). But she didn't yet (dare?) believe that Jesus had the power to raise Lazarus from the dead after four days.

vs. 25-26

- ▶ This wonderful assurance declares Jesus' ability to raise all believers from the dead.
- ▶ Through faith, Jesus gives life to replace the hopelessness of death; for when a believer dies, Jesus will raise him or her to eternal life.

v. 27

- ▶ Martha doesn't then fully understand what Jesus is telling her but she humbly confesses her trust in His words by confessing her faith that Jesus is the Promised One, the Son of God sent into the world for her.

v. 28

- ▶ Then Martha leaves and secretly tells Mary that Jesus, the Teacher, wants to talk to her.
- ▶ Her choice of titles for Jesus perhaps was meant to encourage Mary to sit at Jesus' feet again to learn and find comfort from Him (Luke 10:38-42).

v. 29

- ▶ When she heard that Jesus wanted to speak to her, Mary quickly went to Him.

v. 30

- ▶ Jesus purposely remained out of town to have a chance to meet with Martha and Mary privately, before the town heard He was there and would crowd around Him.

v. 31

- ▶ But privacy was interrupted by custom, for the mourners felt it important to stay with Mary to comfort her in this time of loss. So they followed her.

v. 32

- ▶ When Mary found Jesus, she fell at His feet in sorrow and respect.
- ▶ Her words revealed at what point her faith was frustrated.

v. 33

- ▶ Sin causes great sorrow especially in its result, namely death.
- ▶ Jesus groaned in righteous anger as He saw the tears that sin had brought to the world He had created for life and joy.
- ▶ He fully empathized with Mary and those who felt the sorrow of death among them. (Heb 4:15, Is 53:3).

v. 34

- ▶ He asked to see the tomb where death held temporary sway.

v. 35

- ▶ This shortest verse in the Bible delivers a long sermon on the humanness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- ▶ It assures us that we have in Him the perfect High Priest (Heb 4:15) and Savior who can meet us where we are and take the burden of our sins upon Himself to the cross and bring the oil of joy to replace our mourning.
- ▶ The Greek contrasts Jesus' quiet, yet sincere mourning and the loud, customary wailing of the general mourners.

v. 36

- ▶ Those who saw Jesus' weeping saw Jesus' love, though restricted it to His friend Lazarus.

v. 37

- ▶ Others mocked His tears, implying that if Jesus had indeed loved Lazarus, He certainly would have used the power to prevent Lazarus from dying in the first place.

v. 38

- ▶ Jesus, frustrated with the limited faith of the crowd, arrived at the tomb.
- ▶ To help the students visualize the story in their minds, point out the difference between the tombs of Jesus' day as here described and the graves of today.

v. 39

- ▶ Martha, still not fully grasping by faith what Jesus could or intended to do, attempted to discourage Jesus' seemingly insensitive order.
- ▶ She was right, a body four days dead would stink in those conditions.

v. 40

- ▶ Jesus reminded her of His previous assurances about the resurrection and added that she would be privileged to witness the truth behind those statements.
- ▶ In so doing, He called her again to increase her faith in Him.

vs. 41-42

- ▶ When the people then obeyed Jesus' command, He directed their attention to Heaven with His prayer of thanksgiving spoken out loud for their benefit.
- ▶ The people needed to understand that Jesus' actions were not for self-glorification, but done according to God the Father's larger plan for His Son.
- ▶ As the effects of His current actions flowed into the whirlpool of events surrounding His death and resurrection, the people might then believe in Him as their Savior as God the Father intended Him to be.

v. 43

- ▶ Loudly, for the benefit of the crowd, though it would have been just as effective as a still, small voice, the Word of God's Son instilled life and action into the body that had been dead for four days.

v. 44

- ▶ See vocabulary notes on graveclothes.
- ▶ As the detail of the eyewitness account testifies, when God's Word resurrected Him, Lazarus wasn't a spirit or a ghost but the actual living body of Lazarus, restrained by the cloths that had bound him at his death.
- ▶ So that the people would realize this, Jesus commanded them to loose him and let Lazarus move freely.
- ▶ Jesus performed this greatest, most powerful of miracles of His life on earth to reveal to the people then and throughout history that He is indeed the Lord of Life with the power to reverse death and break the power of sin.
- ▶ For those who were there and those who by faith see this miracle through God's inspired Words, this lesson gives the assurance to follow Jesus, the Lord and Giver of Life, to death itself and beyond.

v. 45

- ▶ For many who saw it, this miracle had God's intended result. They believed Jesus.

v. 46

- ▶ But others, in the hardness of their hearts rejected this clear message and went to Jesus' enemies with the news of what Jesus had done. See vocabulary on the Pharisees.

vs. 47-48

- ▶ This amazing event and others worried Jesus' enemies so that they called a meeting to decide once and for all how to handle the perceived threat to their position as leaders of the people.
- ▶ They obviously hadn't obeyed Jesus' sermon to them recorded in John 10:25-38.

vs. 48-52

- ▶ In his arrogance, Caiaphas ironically condemned his fellow conspirators for not knowing what needed to be done, (Rom 1:22).
- ▶ And so, by the direction of the Holy Spirit, Caiaphas presented one of the more powerful summaries of the Gospel to them as the plot to destroy Jesus.
- ▶ John's inspired commentary shows how different Caiaphas' meaning was from how the Holy Spirit intended those words.
- ▶ For it was expedient, that is necessary and efficient though not fair, that Jesus must die in order to prevent the whole nation, in fact the whole family of God, from perishing.

v. 53

- ▶ And so, without knowing it, they chose to become pawns on the side of evil but still would accomplish God's plan of good.

v. 54

- ▶ So that the timing of God's plan would be accomplished, Jesus withdrew with His disciples from His enemies until His hour should come (John 12:23; 17:1).

STUDENT PRAYER

Dear Lord Jesus, Through this lesson You call us to believe that You are the Lord of life with power over even death itself. Because of sin within us we fear death. But You suffered death for us and the punishment of sin that we fear in death. You have taken away the sting of death and replaced it with the assurance that those who believe in You will rise from death to Live again, with You, forever. Help us to view death through the eyes of faith in You and Your promises of a joyful resurrection. Although we may mourn the loss of our loved ones and the separation that death brings, may we also have the joyful hope of faith that You will awaken us to be with You and be reunited with our loved ones who have believed in You. We ask this, trusting in You as our Lord of Life and Savior. Amen.

PRESENTATION

Briefly review the previous story as time allows. Make links to the new story when possible.

Tell the story: Teachers, be encouraged to tell the story in your own words while remaining faithful to the scriptural account. When scripture records the story in more than one place, you may want to harmonize the accounts (including extra details found in each account). Let the students know where they can find the additional details in the Bible.

Discuss the story: While reviewing the major events of the story, discuss the possible applications to the students' lives. Ask questions that make them think about the story and show that they understand the story.

APPLICATIONS

1. This might be a good opportunity to talk about death. Why do we die? Sin brought death (Genesis 2:17; 3:1-19 Romans 5:12ff). It is not natural, as the evolutionists claim. God created the world "Good" without death and tears. What is death? Death can be defined as "separation." The Bible describes three forms of death: 1) Spiritual death: separation of a person's soul from God by sin and unbelief. John 3 talks of this as Jesus tells Nicodemus that sinful people must be born again by the Spirit who creates and sustains faith in Jesus. 2) Physical death: separation of the soul from the body until God reunites them on Judgement Day or as related in the few miracles God records in the Bible. See Ecc. 12:7 along with Gen. 3:19. In Luke 8:55 the girl's spirit returned to her body at Jesus' command and she was alive. 3) Eternal death: the eternal separation of the unbelievers' body and soul from God for all eternity in Hell. What does this lesson teach us about death? Jesus, the Lord of Life has the power over death (John 5:21-29). And through Jesus' death and resurrection, we are assured that believers will be raised and be given eternal life (1 Corinthians 15). We no longer need to fear death (as the sinful nature within us naturally does) but see it as a door to heaven to be with Jesus. Is it okay to cry when people die? We mourn that sin caused our temporary loss, but we also rejoice when a believer dies. Even though for time we are separated from those who die, yet in eternity we will be reunited with those who believed on Jesus as their Savior from sin and death.
2. Compared with those who believed on Jesus, Jesus' enemies reacted quite differently to the miracle Jesus performed. They refused to believe in Jesus despite the more and more proofs there were to believe in Him. Eventually they began plotting Jesus' death. Some enemies of Jesus won't be converted to faith in Jesus. Yet, despite their evil schemes, God turned their plans to good, even having the High Priest summarize the truth of the Gospel. Likewise, God turns the horror of death into a passageway to life for the believer. How is this comforting to us (Rom. 8:28)? (If students want to know why some believe and others don't, here is your answer. Scripture teaches if someone doesn't believe, it is his or her fault; and if someone does believe, it is none of his or her doing but God's grace alone at work. More than that, we cannot say without giving man credit for salvation or condemning God for man's damnation.)
3. (Upper levels) Jesus described death as a sleep from which Jesus could awaken people. The Bible teaches us what death is (see above) and also that all will rise from death (John 5:24-29, esp. 29). After all are raised from the dead, God will judge them on the basis of faith in Jesus as their Savior. Believers will inherit eternal life (John 11:25-26) but those who do not believe will be condemned to Hell. Those who believe will have shown it in their lives, but unbelievers will have shown their unbelief by their lives as well (Matt. 25:31-46). Use 1 Corinthians 15 (esp. 12-19) to compare the Christian hope of the resurrection to alternative views of death. Some religions teach that when a person dies, there is no life after death. Others believe in reincarnation, that people return to this life in a different form to try to do better than before and eventually achieve the highest level of good called "nirvana."

PASSAGES

These passages can be assigned as memory work or simply discussed in class as to how they fit the lesson.

Lower

John 11:25 - Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."

Hebrews 11:1 - Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Middle any of the above and...

Job 19:25-27 - For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

Romans 5:12 - Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.

Upper any of the above and...

1 Corinthians 15:55-57 - "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 - But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

HYMN CHOICES

"I Know That My Redeemer Lives" (TLH 200 1,3,5-8)

"Jesus Lives, The Victory's Won" (TLH 201 1,2,5)

"When My Last Hour is Close at Hand" (TLH 594 all or 4-5)