

Lazarus At The Table With Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Now, let's turn together to John chapter 12. John chapter 12, and for a short time this morning, we're going to focus on words that you find in verse 2, especially these words, Lazarus was one of those reclining at table with him, reclining with him at the table.

Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at the table with Jesus, that is. Lazarus is a fascinating feature of John's gospel, fascinating man because he doesn't appear in many instances.

We know very little about him other than that he was a brother to Mary and Martha who occupied a house in Bethany. And in all the instances in the Bible that he's referred to in John's gospel, he never speaks.

There's no record of any word that Lazarus ever spoke in any of these passages involving him. And yet he is the subject of the most astounding miracle that Jesus actually performed, the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead.

There were others that Jesus raised from the dead, the widow of Nain's son, for example. But this one is really the most astounding in the sense that Lazarus had been for four days in the sepulchre, in the grave, and Jesus raised him from that.

[1 : 3 8] He brought him back from the dead, having been dead all of that time. Before Lazarus died, I'm fairly sure, certain indeed, that he would never, ever have known himself that he was to be the means by which Jesus would demonstrate the truth of the statement he made about himself.

I am the resurrection and the life. It's defined there in chapter 11. I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet he shall live.

And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? He said to Martha, Lazarus' sister. Lazarus would never have known that he was going to be the means by being brought back from the dead, the means to demonstrate the truth of that great statement that Jesus made about himself.

And today, I want you to imagine that you knew Lazarus, that you lived in those days, that you knew who he was, that he was a neighbor, to imagine that you actually knew that he had died, that you were at his funeral, that you had seen the placement of his body in the sepulchre.

And then that you were also present here at this table or around this table with Jesus and those who sat at it. You'd be looking at Lazarus and saying, I know that he was dead.

[3 : 1 0] I saw him. I saw his body being laid in a sepulchre. And yet, I'm looking at him now. He's sitting at this table.

He's alive. And I can't stop looking at him because I'm amazed at the fact that this man was dead four days ago.

And now he's living and sharing this meal. And this statement that you find here about Lazarus is very deliberate on the part of John.

Indeed, it's more than one statement. There's also references at the beginning of the chapter. Jesus therefore came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at the table. Then you go to verses 9 and 10. There was a large crowd that come not only to see Jesus, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

[4 : 12] So the chief priests made plans. They were plotting to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him, many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. He is such a focal point of this passage, this figure, this person, Lazarus.

And so I'd like us today to make him the focal point of our thoughts in preparing for the Lord's Supper next Lord's Day, God willing. Because there are two things here that we can follow out for ourselves by way of preparing for the Lord's Supper.

First of all, here is a man who came from his grave to sit at this table. And secondly, here is a man, Jesus, who came from this table to go to his grave.

A man who came from his grave to sit at this table a man who came from this table to go to his grave. The man who came from his grave to this table, this figure, this person, Lazarus.

And there are three features in the passage or in relation to the passage that we can think about in terms of this man who came from his grave to this table. Firstly, is the reality of death.

[5 : 34] Because this man was absolutely, truly dead. Look at the chapter 11 and verse 14 there where Jesus had said that Lazarus, our friend Lazarus, has fallen asleep, but I'm going to awaken him.

The disciples said to him, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. Now, Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest and sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died, and for your sake, I'm glad that I was not there so that you may believe, but let's go to him.

Jesus is making absolutely clear there to the disciples that Lazarus is dead. He had died. This is the reality of death. He's not fainted. He's not unconscious. He's not in a coma.

He's dead and buried. Absolutely. Absolutely. What happened to him? And that's, for us, a picture, the whole thing is really a picture of life, of resurrection, of Christ's power over death.

It's a picture for us of the reality of death because the Bible makes it so clear in many places that this is spiritually what we are like. We are entombed in death. We are closed in to the clutches of death.

[6 : 46] That's the wages of sin. That's what rightly is ours in view of or in consequence of our sin against the Lord. Ephesians chapter 2, verses 1 to 3, one of the most telling verses in the Bible that really specifies and says that so clearly to us.

You who were dead in trespasses and sins. It goes on to speak about God making us alive, bringing us back to life.

But that's our spiritual condition. That's our natural condition. It's not something I'm going to labor just now, but it is actually the case. That's where we are spiritually. That's what we are like when we come into this world.

That's the consequence of our sin. We are dead. Just like Lazarus here was dead physically entombed in the sepulcher. His body had been laid into the sepulcher. So are we spiritually dead.

That's what the Bible tells us. I know that it doesn't feel like that. I know it doesn't actually feel like we're dead because in a worldly sense we're very much alive. We're very much alive in following the ways of sin and the pleasures of sin.

[7 : 54] And that world out there tonight, today, will say to you, that doesn't feel to me that the Bible is true because here I am. I'm a living person. I think. I reach conclusions. I follow the dictates of my own mind.

I make choices. I enter into relationships. I go to this place and that place. I enjoy this and I enjoy that. Does that look like someone who is dead? Well, no, not outwardly.

But in terms of having spiritual life, it doesn't exist. We are dead in trespasses and sins. And the whole emphasis of the gospel in terms of the mission of Jesus, as we'll see, is that He came to give us life, to bring us back from the dead, to take us and bring us back to what God had intended us for in the beginning, fellowship, living fellowship with Himself.

So you see, that's important as you come to think of going to the Lord's table. And if you're at the Lord's table next Lord's day, think about it in these terms.

You'll find yourself sitting there just like Lazarus was here, sat at the table with Jesus. Here you are sitting at the table and you look at yourself and you say, I'm amazed that I'm here.

[9 : 13] I was dead. I was dead in trespasses and sins. And yet I'm here sitting with Jesus, in fellowship with Jesus and with His people, taking communion, taking what represents His death.

And if you are thinking of going to that table for the first time, this is also appropriate for you because you know that your life has been changed.

You know you're not as good as you'd like to be, but you know you're not what you used to be. You know that there's something in your life that's different.

That you look at God and Jesus and the Bible and worship and all these things in a different way to what you used to. That's a sign of life. And you look at yourself and say, well, I was dead, but Christ has brought me alive.

And so it's only right and proper and fitting that I should go and do this in remembrance of Him because that's what He's saying.

[10 : 24] You do this in remembrance of me. The me who took you from death to life. There's the reality of death, but there's secondly something interesting here in looking at this man who came from the grave to sit with Jesus.

There's the reality of death, but there's the rage of Christ. I want you to look back at chapter 11 and verse 34 and verse 38. He said, where have you laid him?

This is Jesus asking about where Lazarus had been buried. He said, where have you laid him? They said, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept.

So the Jews said, see how He loved him. And then verse 38, then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave and a stone lay against it.

And then He came again later on, groaning, still groaning within Himself. He came before He called Lazarus back to life. What does this mean?

[11 : 31] He was deeply moved within Himself. What does it mean that He groaned within Himself? Literally saying, before He actually came, He cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

He was moved, He was agitated, He was moved on Himself. Well, it's not to do so much with mourning along with Mary and Martha. That's not the grief of mourning, though that undoubtedly was something that Jesus did and Jesus felt.

The word that's used here is much stronger than that because it actually means to have His whole inner being in a kind of turmoil, in a very agitated state.

And what's happening really is that Jesus is looking at death in a way that nobody else could. What He's actually seeing in that sepulcher is the human being that He created for life.

Where is He? He's enclosed in death. There's a picture of humanity under the wages of sin. Christ rages against what's done this.

[12 : 38] He's raging against death. He's moved in Himself as He comes to the grave of Lazarus. He's saying, this grave is so different to the conditions in which I created man in the beginning.

Remember that Jesus is the Creator. John makes it clear at the beginning of the Gospel. Without Him, nothing was made that was made. He is the one who has created us all as well.

He's there in Genesis. Genesis 1 where it mentions God creating human beings. Well, here is Jesus coming and raging at death.

He knows that this is what man has brought upon himself. He's angry at the situation. He sees how total a contrast this is to the life that He created.

and Lazarus therefore is at the table with Jesus in consequence of Christ's rage at sin and death.

[13 : 49] Christ had simply shrugged His shoulders and said, well, that's it. If God had done that with regard to human life with human beings, if God had looked at us in our fallenness and in our being enclosed in death as the wages of sin are paid out to us in the death that we brought upon ourselves, where would you be today?

Where would I be today if God had looked upon us and shrugged His shoulders as it were and said, well, that's what you brought upon yourselves. Don't look to me. I have no sympathy for you. You have done this to yourselves.

That's not what God is like, is it? That's not why Jesus came into the world. And as you sit at the Lord's table and anticipate sitting at the Lord's table, you're so thankful that God, that Jesus didn't actually look upon you in the death that you brought upon yourself and I brought upon myself, that we brought upon ourselves by our sin and rebellion against Him.

We're so thankful that Jesus didn't turn away and say, well, that's your problem. Don't expect me to take your place. But that's what He did.

And it's the rage of Christ against death that led Him to His own death. His anger at man's lost condition, His anger against sin.

[15 : 08] Isn't that the amazing thing about Christ and about His death and about your place at the Lord's table that what you're considering is that instead of raging against you and leaving you in your death and in your sin, He turned that rage against Himself.

And He said, I am going to die in your place because I hate this death and I hate this sin and my will is life for my people.

So be thankful for the rage of Christ against death. That's why Lazarus is sitting at this table with Jesus because Christ is the resurrection and the life in Himself.

But thirdly, you find the release of Lazarus to facilitate this. Chapter 11 verses 43 and 44. When He had said these things, He said with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out.

The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, Unbind him and let him go. A wonderful illustration that is this really happened, this actually happened physically.

[16 : 28] This man, Lazarus, physically dead, he's now back living and he comes out of this tomb struggling to walk because he's tightly bound with the grave clothes and Jesus gives the command, Unbind him and let him go.

Grave clothes are removed. The grave is behind him. He's now living again. Death is no more in his experience though Lazarus will die again.

The amazing thing is he's been brought back to life here. And that too is an illustration for us of what Jesus has done for ourselves, for all of us who know him as our Savior, for all of us who come to confess him and remember him by taking the communion.

The grave clothes have been removed, the clothes of death, that which shrouded us since we came into the world due to our sin. What does Jesus do? He gives us life.

He takes away the clothes. Just think of the prodigal son. Think of the way that he came back to the father's house with the filthy rags that he had had for however long he was with the pigs and feeding the pigs and covered in the mire and in the muck of that existence and he comes back to the father and his father embraces him.

[17 : 46] His father receives him. This is Jesus, the picture of Jesus receiving sinners and eating with them. And then you find that the father says, bring out the best robe.

Put it on him. Take away the clothes that are so mucky and so grotesque. Give him the best robe in its place.

That's what God does when he brings us to know himself, when he brings us back to life, when he gives us life, when he saves us. He doesn't take out something second hand and say, well that'll do.

They don't deserve anything more. He takes the robe of righteousness. He takes the righteousness of Jesus. He takes that which is worked by Jesus through his death on the cross and resurrection and he says, put that on him.

Does that not amaze you? We should stand amazed every time we think of what God does. In Romans chapter 6 you have an account there of us of how we are as sinners, how we are bound to death, bound to sin, bound to the dominance of sin.

[18 : 57] But then Paul there is dealing with the way that we are emancipated, the way we are released, the way we are delivered from or freed from that, different ways in which he makes that clear.

and then he says, thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of bonded to sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you are committed and having been set free from sin you have become bond servants of righteousness.

And all the way through the rest of that passage he deals with that matter of being freed, the life that God gives, the end of those things he says, of which you are now ashamed, the end of those things is death.

That's what marked your life. That's what really characterized, what you are stamped with. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become bond servants of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

When Christ came into your life that's exactly what he did. He gave a command take these clothes and burn them. Put my best robe on him and on her because that's what Jesus deserves though it's not what we deserve.

[20 : 25] And that's what he did with Lazarus. It's interesting, isn't it, that when he called him out of death, when he called him out of the grave, he spoke with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

There is the loud, majestic, governing voice of Jesus, the creator, the governor of life and of death and he's speaking into this grave, he's speaking into the sepulcher, he's speaking into where this dead body of Lazarus is lying and he's speaking with a loud voice just to show that he is the master of death.

Where else do you find Jesus speaking with a loud voice? well at his own death because it's with a loud voice that he spoke from the cross and that he committed his life, his soul into his father's hand and said it is finished.

It's with a loud voice that Jesus expired demonstrating that nobody was taking life from him, demonstrating that he was dying as the master of death, as victorious over death, as the resurrection and the life, coming to die in the place of his people with a loud voice.

And it's with a loud voice, with a command, a command that cannot be resisted, that he came to your life, he came to the door of your heart and he said open to me and he came to the door of your heart and said, come out, come out from death.

[22 : 09] And he gave you this robe as he released you from that. Will you come to the Lord's table, perhaps hesitant, perhaps thinking, maybe more than ever before, I'm so unworthy of this, I shouldn't really be here at all.

And maybe that's keeping you away, the fact that you think you're so unworthy. Well, you wouldn't want to be at the Lord's table and feel you were worthy.

That would be a disqualification. You're coming to the Lord's table and you're saying, I know I'm not worthy, but I see the label on this garment that Jesus has covered me with and I read on that label made at Calvary.

That's what gives me the right and that's what gives me the privilege and that's what makes it impossible that I should not come to his table because he has done all this for me and what I'm doing in coming to the Lord's table is to remember what he has done for me, not to make me worthy, of anything he has to give me, not to think that somehow I have fashioned these clothes for myself.

It's entirely the opposite. What clothes are we wearing today? What clothes are you wearing in terms of your soul, your relationship with God?

[23 : 51] God? Are they the ones made at Calvary? Or are they the ones that were made in the Garden of Eden where Adam fell?

The ropes of sin, of death, of unrighteousness. It's either one or the other.

And today you and I have the privilege of knowing that Christ came into this world to give us life. How can we refuse that?

How can we go on refusing that? How can we say there's any alternative to accepting him? The man who came from his grave to this table, the reality of death, the rage of Christ, the release of Lazarus.

But secondly, more briefly, the man who went from this table to his grave. You see, in this passage itself, where you find the text we have this morning, there's an anticipation of Christ's death.

[24 : 57] Christ's death is anticipated in what Mary did when she took this expensive ointment and she anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. And Judas, Iscariot, typically him, came and said, why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii given to the poor?

John says it's not because he cared about the poor, he said this because he was a thief having charge of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put in it. And Jesus said, let her alone so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.

Or you could translate that, as some translations have it, she has kept this for the day of my burial. In other words, the ointment was ointment or nard that was associated with the burial of someone who and what Jesus is saying, leave her alone.

What she has done here in anointing me has a specific reference to my death, to my burial. So there's an anticipation there already of the death of Jesus.

And you know, when Judas is saying, why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii, the problem with Judas is that he wasn't aware, he wasn't himself caring about the value of Christ, the value of Christ himself to him, the value of Christ's death, the value of who Jesus was and what he had come into the world to do.

[26 : 24] But with Mary, you see, it's the other way about. What Judas was saying is, that cost a whole year's wages. That's what that reference in 300 denarii, that's on average then we're told, we understand that's a year's wage in those days.

And what Judas is saying, that cost a whole year's wage, what a wastage. You see, Mary, because she's thinking of the value of Jesus to her, Mary is really thinking, that's only a year's wage, what's that, compared to what he's worth, compared to the value of Christ himself.

This is really something that is, as nothing. It's a tiny amount compared to what he is worth to me. And you come to think of taking communion, isn't that how you're thinking of it?

Whatever you compare with Jesus that you have to give for him or to him, it's really very little, it's a tiny amount in terms of its cost, isn't it, compared to what it cost him to deliver you from death.

and you come to the Lord's table and say, whatever I have to give for him, whatever I have to give in terms of my time, whatever I have to give in terms of public witness, of making known that I'm his, whatever cost there may be to that to me, what does that compare to what he is worth to me, compared to the value that I put upon himself?

[27 : 56] And if you're hesitating coming to the Lord's table because whatever it is that's keeping you back, think of what Mary is saying here, think of what Mary is doing here. She didn't think that this was too expensive to use for this purpose.

Whatever he calls on you to do for him, it's never going to be too much, is it? What is coming out and saying that you love him, that you want to take communion, to remember his death by that, what is that compared to this man who went from this table to the grave for you, who took the death we deserve to die and took our place in that instead of leaving us to die that for ourselves?

What is there to be compared in value to Christ? what is he worth to you today? And if you're saying, well, of course he's worth everything to me.

He's my savior. I believe he has forgiven my sin. I believe he has released me from death as the wages of sin. I know him.

I speak to him. I pray to him. I love him. Well, here is one of the ways in which you show that by coming to sit at his table and saying of yourself, I was dead, but I'm now alive.

[29 : 32] I didn't know Jesus, but I do know. I once thought that what I would give to Jesus would be far too much of my time. I had better things to do, but now I think the opposite.

Whatever I can do for him is never going to be too much because of what he did for me. And there's Christ's death anticipated, but also Christ's death completed, of course, in John's gospel.

When you go ahead to chapter 19 and verse 30 there, you find Jesus, when he had received the sour wine said, it is finished, and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

And in the same chapter, verses 40 to 42, you find there Jesus' burial, they took the body of Jesus and bound it with spices, as the burial custom was of the Jews.

They buried it in this new tomb, and so it says in verse 42, so because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

[30 : 38] That's interesting, isn't it? I think I mentioned this before. It doesn't just say they laid the body of Jesus there, they laid Jesus. What is laid to rest in that tomb is identified with Jesus himself?

It's Jesus who was buried in terms of his body. It's nobody else's body but his. It's nobody else's experience but his to experience death even physically.

What a contrast to Lazarus, who went from his tomb to the table with Christ. What a contrast in Jesus who went from the table to his tomb for Lazarus and for everyone else that he came to save.

When you read about the grave clothes in chapter 20 of John, the grave clothes of Jesus are mentioned there as well. When Lazarus came out of the tomb, Jesus gave a command, unbind him, loose him, and let him go, set him free.

Take these clothes of death and dispose of them. And when you look into the sepulcher of Jesus, it wasn't empty.

[31 : 51] His body wasn't there, but the grave clothes were there. And when John and Peter came and looked in and saw the grave clothes, it says in chapter 20, they believed.

What did they believe? They believed that he was risen from the dead. He left his grave clothes behind. Nobody gave him a command about him to take his grave clothes away to unbind him and let him go.

This was his own prerogative, as he had shown with bringing Lazarus back from the dead. Jesus is in charge of death. Jesus is the master of death. And when it came to his own resurrection, he rose out of his grave clothes and left them behind.

And the way that they were arranged, whereas they had been on his body, he didn't rise from the dead and carefully fold up these grave clothes, because if he had done something like that, the disciples would have said, somebody's come in here and disturbed this grave site.

What they saw was evidence that Christ had risen out of death and out of his grave clothes and left them behind in the sepulcher, just as they had been on his body.

[33 : 00] As he rose out from the clothes, they collapsed. And there's the sign. he is risen. And he's left this behind as a marker, that for him death is behind him, that for him death is below his feet, that for him he's demonstrated, I am the resurrection and the life.

Wonderful. Christ's death completed, just as had been anticipated at this table where Lazarus sat with him, where Mary anointed him.

But there's also Christ's death represented. In the Lord's Supper, that's what you have in the cup, in the bread, representing in these elements the death of Jesus.

And in John chapter 20 and verse 20, there's a reference there to Jesus showing himself to the disciples. When he had said this, he said, when he had said this, it says, he showed them his hands and his side.

And he invited Thomas later to come and handle him, come and touch his body, his hands and his side, where he had been wounded on the cross.

[34 : 26] And that's really exactly what you have in the Lord's Supper, though in a different way.

It's Jesus saying about the bread and about the cup. He's saying, these are the elements that show you my hands and my side, that represent and convey my death to you.

take this and do this in remembrance of me. It's remarkable, isn't it, that when you come to take communion, you're coming to meet with the dead Christ on the one hand, as represented in these elements.

And yet you're meeting with the living Christ on the other hand, because you know that he lives and that his presence is promised to you. What else do you find that in that particular way?

And as you see Christ dead before you in these elements, so you experience Christ living with you as you remember him and what he's done for you.

[35 : 49] Will you come to the table? will you show how much he means to you? Will you deny him that loving remembrance of him as if he had not done that for you?

Will you come like Lazarus to sit at this table with Jesus, knowing that you were once dead and you're now alive? will you come to meet this man who went from this table to his grave, this Jesus, in these elements of the supper?

He's saying, do this in remembrance of me. May God bless his word to us. Let's conclude our worship today singing in Psalm 30, and that's on page 34, Psalm 30, tune this brother James' air, Psalm 30, and it's verses 1 to 5.

O Lord, I will exalt your name for you have rescued me. You did not let my foes rejoice and gloat triumphantly. Lord God, in need I cried to you, and you restored my health.

O Lord, you brought me from the grave and saved my soul from death. Verses 1 to 5, to God's praise. O Lord, I will exalt your name for you have rescued me.

[37 : 33] You did not let my foes rejoice and no triumphantly. You did not let my foes rejoice and no triumphantly.

Lord, God, in need I cried to you and you restored my health. O Lord, you brought me from the grave and saved my soul from death.

O Lord, you brought me from the grave and saved my soul from death. you holy one sing to the Lord, sing our joyful voice.

When you recall his holy name, then praise him and rejoice. When you recall his holy name, then praise him and rejoice.

His hand got what a moment last I long to save my days.

[39 : 02] Though tears may last throughout the night, joy comes with morning praise. Though tears may last throughout the night, joy comes with morning praise.

I'll go to the door to my left here. And there may grace and mercy and peace from God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.