

## 42. Jesus Told the Disciples that Lazarus Had Died

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the love that Jesus had for Lazarus. Jesus chose to show His love for Lazarus by going to the town of Bethany even though He knew that the religious leaders in nearby Jerusalem wanted to kill Him. In our topic today, we are going to see that Jesus told His disciples that Lazarus had already died before they even left to go to Bethany.

Jesus was always concerned about doing the will of the Father. That is why He had told the disciples that they were going to Judea again. The disciples reminded Jesus that the Jews in Jerusalem wanted to kill Him. Jesus then explained why they were going to return to Judea. John 11:11-13 says, “These things He said, and after that He said to them, ‘Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.’ Then His disciples said, ‘Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.’ However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep.” Here, we see that Jesus told them why He was going to Judea in a way that they did not understand.

The reason that the disciples did not understand was due to the fact that Jesus was actually teaching the disciples how to describe the death of a believer in Jesus. Jesus said, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.” We will see later that Jesus had to tell them that Lazarus had physically died. However, the death of a Christian is called “sleep” several places in the New Testament because we go to sleep here on earth and immediately wake up in the presence of the Lord in heaven. One illustration of this use of sleep is in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 where we read, “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.” In these verses, we see that we have a different sorrow than those who have no hope because we know that Christians who have died (sleep) are with Jesus and will come with Him when He returns.

Jesus told the disciples that Lazarus was sleeping but that He was going to wake him up. The disciples thought that it was good that Lazarus was sleeping because they thought that meant that the health of Lazarus was improving. The disciples did not understand that Jesus was saying that Lazarus had experienced physical death because they had to learn that this was a new way to speak about the death of the followers of Jesus. As a result, Jesus had to explain exactly what He meant to the disciples.

We read in John 11:14-16, “Then Jesus said to them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.’ Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him.’” Here, we see that Jesus had to explain clearly what He meant. Suddenly, the disciples realized that Lazarus was no longer living. They realized that Jesus had made the choice to stay where He was for two days even though He knew what had happened to Lazarus. That probably caused them to be very confused for a moment as they had seen Jesus show love to many sick people by healing them. In fact, Jesus had healed a boy without even going to where the boy was located. Jesus told

a nobleman in John 4:50, “Jesus said to him, ‘Go your way; your son lives.’ So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.” That boy was healed the same hour. As a result, the disciples may have wondered why Jesus did not heal Lazarus in the same way since he loved Lazarus.

Then, Jesus said something even more surprising when He said, “And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there.” However, the next statement of Jesus probably caused even more confusion to the disciples as Jesus finished His statement by saying, “That you may believe.” Here, we see the real purpose for the physical death of Lazarus. John 20:30-31 says, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” We see that Jesus was going to raise Lazarus from the dead as a sign to the disciples. Jesus knew that this particular miracle would do more than any other miracle to cause the disciples to believe and to understand the fact that Jesus has all authority over all things.

Thomas heard the words of Jesus and immediately spoke to the rest of the disciples. He realized that the Jews wanted to kill Jesus and that could happen if they went to Bethany, as that town is very close to Jerusalem. However, the words of Thomas show the commitment that Thomas had to Jesus. His words, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him,” showed that Thomas realized there would be a great risk to all of them. His words showed that he was willing to die with Jesus if that was necessary. Thomas’ words show us that he realized that death could be the cost that they would pay for being disciples of Jesus. The words of Thomas gave all the disciples an example to follow. In future years, nearly all of the disciples did die for their faith in Jesus.

We see that the disciples did travel to Bethany with Jesus. It was only a few weeks later that Peter made a similar statement about his willingness to die for Jesus as the disciples ate the Passover with Jesus the night before He was crucified. Luke 22:31-34 says, “And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.’ But he said to Him, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.’ Then He said, ‘I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me.’” Peter did fulfill the words of Jesus that night and deny that he knew Jesus three times.

However, once the Holy Spirit came to empower the disciples, we see that he became a bold witness even when he faced these same religious leaders that condemned Jesus to death. Acts 4:5-6 says, “And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.” Acts 4:8-10 then says, “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.’” Finally Acts 4:13 says, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.”

Jesus and the disciples traveled together to the city of Bethany. Here, we see that Jesus wanted to comfort the sisters in their time of sorrow. However, we will see that Jesus planned to do much more than just provide comfort. John 11:17-19 says, “So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.” When Jesus and the disciples arrived at the town of Bethany, they were told that Lazarus had died and been buried four days earlier. This meant that his body had already started to decay and the smell of death would certainly be smelled if the rock was removed from the tomb.

Jesus and the disciples received the information about the death and burial of Lazarus even before they got to the home of Mary and Martha. John 11:20 says, “Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house.” Here, we see that someone hurried ahead of Jesus and the disciples and told Martha that Jesus was coming. We will see what Martha did in our next topic.

Many Jews that lived in the city of Jerusalem knew Lazarus and his sisters. Since Jerusalem was only two miles from Bethany, many of these Jews had come to Bethany to comfort Mary and Martha after the death of their brother. Many of these Jews from Jerusalem were still at the home of Mary and Martha comforting the sisters as they grieved the loss of their brother. The fact that many Jews knew this family and came to comfort the sisters shows that this family was a well known family. These people wanted to comfort the sisters in their sorrow.

However, the Lord also had a much greater plan for these people who came to give comfort to Mary and Martha. John 11:45 says, “Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.” Here, we see that the miracle Jesus would do when He raised Lazarus from the dead caused many of these Jews from Jerusalem to believe in Jesus. They came to give comfort to Mary and Martha but also were led to place their faith in Jesus as a result of seeing that Jesus was from God by raising Lazarus from the dead.

We saw earlier in this topic that the signs that are written in the book of John were written for a purpose. That purpose was to cause many people to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. We also saw that the Word of God promised that all those who do believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, will see their belief results in having life in His name. That promise is still true today. Any person who will place their belief in the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that God raised Jesus from the dead will also receive eternal life. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to share that message regularly with others so that many other people living today will also have the opportunity to receive eternal life. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to share the message that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.