

## The Raising of Lazarus

by Bayless Conley

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Hello, my friend. I am very glad that you have joined me. I'm going to ask you a couple of things. Number one is after you hear the message, I would really encourage you to get a Bible and read John 10 and 11. I'm going to be speaking to you from John's Gospel, the 10th chapter, and the 11th chapter. The reason I'm going to ask you to read it after is you need to confirm for yourself that the things that I'm saying are in there. I wish I had time to read the last half of the 10th chapter and the entirety of the 11th chapter, which is what I'm going to be speaking from in this message. It is an amazing, amazing story. We find here the story in the 10th chapter where the Jews once again are trying to kill Jesus. They pick up stones to stone Him. They're angry with His claims. Jesus escapes from them and goes away to a place called Bethabara, where John first baptized. Then, it's very interesting. Jesus escapes, and the Jews are just kind of in this boiling frenzy of hate and anger, and they want to murder Jesus. Jesus gets away. And then the very next thing we read while Jesus is in this other area is He suddenly receives a message from His friends who happen to live right in the area where the Jews of late were seeking to murder Him.

He receives this urgent call that says, "Lord come back. The one that You love is sick." The message came from Mary and Martha. Their brother Lazarus, interesting timing, becomes deathly ill. And in the Greek, he's sick, and he's getting sicker. There's not a turnaround. He doesn't have a cold. He didn't just have the flu. This guy is dying. "Jesus, please come back now." So, Jesus has just escaped, and now, He gets this invitation that's calling Him to urgently come back into this very dangerous arena where they were just trying to murder Him. And when Jesus receives the call to come back, He stays several more days, and He says some of the most interesting things that we'll talk about. Then, finally, He tells the disciples, "Look, we're going to go back." They go, "Lord, the Jews of late sought to stone You, and You're wanting to go back there?" And truthfully, they weren't just worrying about Jesus. I'm quite sure they were thinking about their own skins. Then, Jesus says some interesting things. "Are there not 12 hours in the day?" And it's like, "What does that have to do with anything?" Well, we're going to look at those things. He goes back and has this interaction with Martha and Mary and then raises Lazarus from the dead. So, I want to encourage you to go back and read John 10 and 11. Once we're done in its entirety, it will bless you. The second thing I just want to encourage you in, and we're about to get into the message, is give your attention to God's Word right now.

If you're like me, it's very easy to get distracted. I mean, I can even be in church, and sometimes it's during worship time. My hands are clapping, but I'm mentally somewhere else. I'm thinking about fishing, or I'm thinking about something I saw on television, or I'm thinking about some political thing, and I have to go, "Oops, Lord. Sorry. I'm back. I'm back." I think people can sit in church and listen to a message, and they're thinking about what they're going to do in the afternoon. Or they're thinking about their favorite TV program and the drama that just happened when they watched it last night, or whatever. It's just easy for us to become distracted. But right now, the most important thing for us is God's Word. I just want to encourage you. Just marshal all your resources, spirit, soul, and body, and lean into this word that I'm going to share with you. Give the Lord your undivided attention because when it comes to receiving the Word of God, Jesus said this, "The measure you use is the measure you'll receive." In other words, what

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you put into it is kind of what you're going to get out of it. If you're just half-hearted, and half-in, half-out, you're not going to get a lot out of it. But if you have high esteem for God's Word and the teaching of God's Word, and you really lean in, you're going to get some things. I think that you're going to be blessed by this, you're going to be encouraged, and perhaps you're going to hear something you've never heard before. So, let's get into that message right now. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, as far as the biblical record goes, He only raised three people from the dead: the 12-year-old daughter of Jairus, the widow's son at Nain, and Lazarus. One had just died. One was on the way to be buried, and the other one had already been buried. Death and life had three clashes, and life won every single battle. Jesus is the resurrection, and He is the life. John was present in all three of those resurrections, but he only chose to give us the story of Lazarus in order to teach us. Jesus had a deep friendship with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. They were sort of the New Testament singles group. Jesus loved them. He stayed in their home often. It was a place of rest for Him, and it was just two miles from Jerusalem.

As the drama unfolds, we find six figures involved in the drama or six different groups. We are going to talk about each one in turn, and see how they fit into this drama, and see what we can learn from them. We are going to begin with the Jews. We find out that they actually quickly divided into two camps. The Scripture said that many of the Jews came to comfort Martha and Mary concerning their brother. That is a commendable thing, but it wasn't long until they divided into those two camps. All of them were there and witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus. They knew he had been in the grave for four days. They realized the magnitude and the staggering glory of this miracle. Eyewitnesses, and we read in verse 45 NKJV,

<sup>45</sup> Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.

But the next verse begins with the word but.

<sup>46</sup> But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did.

They didn't go to the Pharisees to get them to try and believe. The idea of the verse is they went and told on Jesus. Like basically, "Hey, this thing is getting out of hand, and if you are going to stop it, you better do something quick." Jesus, actually, talked about people like this. He shared in Luke's Gospel this parable. It's this story of a rich man and, interestingly enough, a beggar named Lazarus. Jesus is quite descriptive in His storytelling. There is this rich man who fares sumptuously every day and has a big banquet. A beggar named Lazarus is laid daily at his gate. Jesus, in His details, said that even the dogs came and licked his sores. They both die. Lazarus is carried by the angels into a place called Abraham's bosom.

Before Christ was raised from the dead, heaven was not open to people. The Old Testament saints, those who served God and loved God, went to a place called Abraham's bosom, which is also known as paradise. A compartment, if you would, in the earth, a place of bliss, a place of rest. There was another compartment across the great gulf called Hades, or hell. Lazarus comes to Abraham's bosom, but the rich man, in Jesus' story, lifts up his eyes, being in torment, and cries out to Abraham. "Father Abraham, please send Lazarus across so he can just dip the tip of his finger in water and put it on my tongue. I'm tormented in this flame." Abraham said, "Look, there is a great gulf between us. Those who want to pass from here to there can't, and you can't come over here." Then, the rich man says, "Well, look, I have five brothers. Send Lazarus to them so he can warn them lest they come to this place of torment."

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Listen, everyone in hell believes in evangelism. Everyone. Abraham said, “Look, they have Moses and the prophets. They have the Word of God, and if they won’t hear that, they will not believe, though one be raised from the dead.” We see it played out in the story of the actual Lazarus. He was raised from the dead. They see it, but there is a group of them who willfully close their eyes, harden their hearts, and reject Jesus, even though they have seen the miraculous. They don’t want a Lord over their lives telling them what is right and what is wrong. There are people like that today. It’s not for a lack of evidence that they don’t believe. They willfully choose not to believe. They willfully choose to reject the truth, and they harden their hearts against it.

I talked to one of my friends when I had been saved for maybe a month or two months. I talked him into coming to church with me. He reluctantly agreed but told me I was out of my mind. So, he comes to this little Pentecostal church that I’m going to. To his chagrin, I led him up to the second row. So, we sit in the second row. Suddenly, in the middle of that service, a tangible, recognizable presence of God filled the building, and I began to weep. I’m there crying and crying. I thought about my friend. I looked up at him, and the look on his face said it all. He looked at me, and his look said, “I realize it is all true, and you are not out of your mind.” Somebody says, “Did he believe?” No. He knocked me and about three other people over getting out of the row. He literally ran down the center aisle out of the church.

From that day on, he distanced himself from me. He hardened himself to the gospel and to me as well. I was no longer really a friend of his. It just shows what people can do. We both experienced the power of God. I accepted it. He rejected it. Something else of note here is, did you know all of these Jews are doing a good work? They have all come to comfort Martha and Mary. They are all involved in doing a good deed. Some of those who are doing the good deed believed in Christ. The others rejected Him and wanted to see an end to Him. I hear people argue sometimes, maybe about someone who’s passed. “Well, certainly they are in heaven because they did so many good deeds.” Listen, it’s not about how many good deeds you do. The question is, what have you done with God’s Son? We are not saved because of our good works. We are saved by putting our faith in Jesus Christ and the work that He has done on the cross. Then, we come to the second group in our drama, and that is the disciples. They were committed. They were courageous. They were obedient, but they were bleak and fatalistic. The Jews in Judea had just been trying to murder Jesus. So, they escaped Jesus and the disciples out beyond Jordan to a place called Beth Arbor. He gets the news about Lazarus. Then, after a couple of days, He says, “Let’s go back.” The disciples remonstrated and said, “Lord, the Jews in Judea were going to stone you.” I’m sure they weren’t just worried about Him. When they saw that Jesus wouldn’t change His mind, Thomas pipes up and says, “Okay, let’s all go so that we can die with Him.” They fully expected to be killed, yet they went anyway. So, they’re courageous, they’re obedient, and that is good. Revelation 12:11 MSG says,

<sup>11</sup> They defeated him (or overcame him, that is the devil,) through the blood of the Lamb and the bold word of their witness. They weren’t in love with themselves; they were willing to die for Christ.

It’s an attitude that every Christian should have. If the will of God brings me into danger or even to martyrdom, I am fully committed. My friend, we can hold that perspective and be obedient without being bleak and fatalistic. If our obedience to Christ costs us our lives, we are still ultimately overcomers because we are present with Him. To depart and be with Christ is far better. To live is Christ, to die is gain. This fatalistic, depressing outlook the disciples have was wrong. Number one, because it is an honor to obey Jesus, wherever that takes you. Secondly, they weren’t going to their deaths. They were actually going to witness one of the greatest

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miracles of Christ's ministry. Just like the disciples, there are some followers of Jesus in our ranks who are committed, absolutely committed but are always looking on the dark side of things. They are always expecting the worst. They are family, but it is a drag to be around them.

I had someone years ago ask for some counsel. He said, "Look, I have this friend, and he is loyal. No matter what happens, he has your back." I said, "Well, what's the issue?" He said, "He is so morose and down in the dumps all the time. I can't stand to be around him." There are people in the church like that. I know quite a few believers like that. Yes, I know we are living in a fallen world. There are going to be distressing circumstances. There are going to be difficulties, but even then, we can have an overcomer's perspective. Listen to these verses from Romans 8:35–37. They ask the question, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, 'For Your sake, we encounter death all day long. We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things, we have complete victory through Him who loved us." That is the kind of attitude the believer should have. We're going to have some difficulties. We're going to have challenges. We're going to have battles. But you can have a victorious attitude through it all.

Then, we come to the third figures in our story. That's the sisters, Martha and Mary. Did you notice in verse three, it said, "They sent to Jesus saying, 'Lord behold, he whom You love is sick.'" They sent their plea not based on their love for Him but on His love. Not based on the fact that they'd served Him or that they had supported His ministry, but solely on the Lord's love alone. That is very, very wise. Yet, many people come to God and say, "Lord, I have served You. I have given sacrificially. You should do this for me." Or they try to make a deal with God, "Lord, if You heal me, I will walk up and down the streets of this town, and I will tell everyone how wonderful You are." No, friend, come to Him based on His love and His mercy alone, not on your good works or on your personal merits.

So Jesus sends back word and by the time the messengers arrive, Lazarus is at the final stages of death. He may have already died, but let's just assume that he's in the final stages. Martha has no doubt nursed him. Mary has wept and prayed and probably fasted. Then, the messengers arrive in the house. They said, "Jesus says, 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God that the Son of God may be glorified through it.'" They are relieved. And then, suddenly, Martha's holding her brother's hand and it goes limp. They realized he stopped breathing. Lazarus is dead. Martha says, "I thought He said it wouldn't end in death. I don't understand." Mary would have said, "Well, remember He raised up the little girl. He raised up the widow's son at Nain. Martha, have faith. He will raise up Lazarus soon enough." But it didn't happen.

After a day, the body begins to give off an odor. All the friends are saying, "Look, you have to bury him." And finally, they wait and wait reluctantly. They bury Lazarus. "Where was Jesus? Why didn't He come? We know He got the message. He said Lazarus wouldn't die. I don't understand. Doesn't He love us?" Well, Jesus' statement meant that the end result would be life. He was looking through the eye of faith to the end result. He waits several more days before making the journey. A journey which on foot would have taken Him at least a minimum of a day. When Martha gets word that Jesus is coming, she rushes out to meet Him. And you can hear the anguish in her voice. "Lord, where were You? If You had been here, my brother wouldn't have died." Jesus said, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said, "I know at the resurrection of the last day he is going to rise."

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Martha is like so many people. They have faith for the past, and they have faith for the future, but very little faith for right now. “Lord, if You had been here,” or, “Lord, I know in the future,” and you hear people talk, “Oh man, you should have heard about the revival. Oh, God really did some things in past days. Oh, I know God is going to do things again in the future. We’re trusting He is going to move.” Thank God for what He has done in the past, and I believe He is going to move in the future. But what about right now? Jesus said, “I am the resurrection. I am the life.” Where He is, there is life. Where He is, there is potential. Where He is, there is possibility. Jesus is looking for right now faith.

Now, just an interesting note. Martha was not theologically ignorant. She had a grip on the Word. We know from another story, in Luke’s Gospel, that when Jesus is in their home, Martha is busy serving, and Mary is sitting at Jesus’ feet. And interestingly enough, three times Mary is spoken of in the gospels. Every time she is at the feet of Jesus. That is the only place we ever find Mary. Martha is serving. Martha is cooking. So, we know Martha. She knows how to work. She knows how to cook. She can put the pots and pans on, but she can talk biblical truth as well. When Mary comes to Jesus, she falls down at his feet and says the same words as Martha. “If You’d been here, my brother wouldn’t have died.” But she has a different posture and a different tone. Mary knew how to worship. It didn’t seem that Martha really did. Martha knew how to work. We need both. Martha worked, and she knew of spiritual things. Mary worshiped, and she knew of spiritual things. Now, if I had to make a choice between getting married to either Martha or Mary, I’d take Martha 100%. You’d never get anything to eat if you’re married to Mary. They are both spiritual. But Martha knows how to work and knows how to cook. The best combination is you get both. Somebody who can work, worship, and who knows spiritual truth. If you can find a girl like that, marry her quickly.

We come to the fourth figure in our drama, and that is Lazarus. Lazarus has died, and he has been carried into Abraham’s bosom. Imagine the stir when he arrives. Moses comes up and says, “Is it true that you knew Him? The Messiah has come?” Lazarus says, “Yeah, He was like my best friend.” Moses said, “Has He fulfilled the law, all of it?” He said, “Yes, Moses, He fulfilled all of the law.” Micah comes up and says, “Lazarus, was He born in Bethlehem like I prophesied?” “Yes, He was born in Bethlehem.” Isaiah walks up and says, “Was He born of a virgin?” “Yes, Isaiah, He was born of a virgin. Wonderful counselor, the mighty God. Yes, all of those things, Isaiah.” “Did He open the eyes of the blind and unstop deaf ears like I said He would?” “Yes, Isaiah, He did all of those things.”

Then, David pipes up and says, “The Good Shepherd who leads us beside still waters makes us lie down in green pastures?” “Yes, David, yes, that was Him.” Then somebody says, “Yeah, yeah, the new guy’s been talking about Him.” And they said, “John, the baptizer just got here recently.” John says, “I told you. I prepared the way before Him. He was my cousin.” Then, Malachi says, “John, I was the last one to prophesy about Him before you came on the scene 400 years ago. Now Lazarus, the Spirit came on me, and I said that the Son of righteousness would arise with healing in the hem of His garment. Did it come to pass like I said it?” Lazarus said, “You have no idea, Malachi. Multitudes came and touched the hem of His garment, and they were all healed. In fact, there was this one lady who had a flow of blood for 12 years. She literally crawled through a crowd of people and came and gripped the hem of His garment. Did you hear that?” “What? We didn’t hear anything.” “I have to go. He’s calling me. Jesus is calling me.”

He disappears and wakes up in his body, in the tomb, wrapped in grave clothes. There is a lesson for us even in that. Lazarus had been brought back to life, but he was bound. He is alive on the inside, but he is bound outwardly. There are many people within our house who



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have been born again, who have received eternal life, but they are still bound by the grave clothes of their old life and old sinful habits. Some would be quick to judge them and say they are not saved. Friend, you better be careful in judging folks, especially those who have newly come to the faith. They may very well have the lamp of eternal life burning in their breasts. They just have grave clothes on. They're still bound with some of the grave clothes of their old life, but they're thoroughly born again inwardly. They're coming to church, but they're struggling. They're bound by some unclean habit. They want to walk in freedom, but their feet are bound. They want to reach forth their hands and serve, but their hands are bound. They want to see and understand the glorious truths of the gospel, but there's a cloth over their face. Someone says, "Why doesn't Jesus do something?" Because it's our job. Jesus said, "You loose him and let him go. I've done My job. I've brought him back to life. You loose him and let him go." Someone says, "How do we do that?" First of all, by modeling a Christian life before him, by living it. They ought to be able to look at us and see what it means to trust God in the tempests of life. They ought to be able to look at us and see what it means to be a good father, a loving husband, and a loving wife, what it means to serve Christ with our all, and what it means to truly be on fire for God. There ought to be living examples all around every new convert. The second thing we need to do is teach them the Word of God. Jesus said, "If you abide in My words, you will be My disciples indeed, and the truth will set you free."

When I got saved, this might sound funny to some of you. I still had grave clothes on me. I was born again, but I was carrying around some grave clothes from the old life. The truth is, I was afraid of the devil. Because of the stuff I had been involved in, deeply involved in, before I got saved, I knew demons were real before I knew Jesus was real. It's true. I'd been introduced to the spirit world. And consequently, I mean, I got saved, but I had this fear that just clung to me. I was afraid of the devil. It was like a little yapping dog that would follow me. It was just like right on the edge of my consciousness all the time. It was the first thing I sensed when I woke up every morning. It was the last thing I sensed before I went to bed every night. But I did something right.

I bought a Bible for 35 cents at a yard sale. I was living above a bar. I didn't even have electricity. And by candlelight, I read, and I read, and I read, and I read. I read through Genesis and Exodus. It was thrilling. I got bogged down in Leviticus, but I kept going. I can't tell you when it happened, but it was like maybe two or three months in, and I just suddenly realized it was gone. The fear is gone. It's been about 50 years. It's never been back. But if you could have seen me in the spirit realm, I was dragging grave clothes around with me. I'm saved, but I have this stuff from the old life that's trying to cling to me. We need to give people the Word of God.

The third thing we need to do is we need to pray for new converts a lot. If you see people who are struggling, pray for them a lot. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, and he said these words to them. He said, "Since I've heard that you've come to the faith, I have not ceased to make mention of you in my prayers." A lot of times, when someone gets saved is when we stop praying. That's when Paul doubled up in his praying. We need to pray for the babes in our midst. It's our responsibility. Jesus said, "You loose them and let them go. You see that they are free. I'm going to use you to bring the truth to them. I'm going to use you to help them. I'm going to use you to deliver them." Imagine Lazarus shuffling to the front of that grave, and that's the way some of these new converts are. We don't realize some of the stuff that people have come out of in their lives, and God wants to use you to help them. God wants to use you to open their eyes and to set them free so they can serve God with their full lives. The fifth person in our drama is the devil. Somebody says, "Well, the devil wasn't mentioned." Well, actually, he's right in the middle of the story, and I want to prove it to you. We're just going to back up a little bit. In

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John chapter 8, Jesus is talking to some Jews who are trying to kill him. In John 8:37–41 NKJV, Jesus said,

<sup>37</sup> “I know that you are Abraham’s descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. <sup>38</sup> I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father.” <sup>39</sup> They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham. <sup>40</sup> But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. <sup>41</sup> You do the deeds of your father.” Then they said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God.”

Verse 44a NKJV, Jesus said,

<sup>44</sup> You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.

Jesus said, “The reason you’re trying to kill Me, the reason you want to murder Me, is because you’re being influenced by your father, the devil. He is a murderer. You’re doing the works of your father.” Jesus said it was the direct influence of the devil that caused them to want to kill him. Now, not only is the devil a murderer, not only does he lie, but there is something else that he does that’s within his power, and certainly in line with his character, and that is he causes sickness. Let me read the Scripture to you in Luke 13:11 AMPC says, that there was a woman there, that means in the synagogue.

<sup>11</sup> And there was a woman there who for eighteen years had had an infirmity caused by a spirit (a demon of sickness). She was bent completely forward and utterly unable to straighten herself up or to look upward.

Verse 16 Jesus said,

<sup>16</sup> And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?

Jesus said Satan was the one who had made her sick and kept her bound. Now, that’s just one of many examples throughout the Gospels where we find an evil spirit causing and enforcing a sickness and where sickness was attributed to the devil. In fact, the Bible says this in Acts 10:38 NKJV,

<sup>38</sup> How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

Now, certainly, not all sickness is the direct result of the devil’s work. I think we understand that, but to say none of it is to turn a blind eye to the truth of Scripture. Throughout Scripture, you will find him doing that, especially as we read in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. So, with that in mind, let’s draw back the curtain of the natural for a moment and look behind the scenes into another realm where there was actually a lot of activity going on. We opened up this morning, reading from John 10, and the Jews had become furious. They are trying to stone Jesus while He’s in Judea. Who is behind that? According to Jesus, it was the devil. According to Jesus, it was directly because of the devil’s inspiration that they were trying to kill him. So, Jesus leaves

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Judea and goes away beyond the Jordan to a place called Bethabara, where John at first baptized.

Listen, what I share next with you are just the thoughts from my own reflection, and I want to submit them to you. You don't have to receive them, but you certainly should consider them. So, imagine the devil thinking, "Oh, I was that close! Man, I had them stirred up into such a frenzy. I thought for sure I was going to be able to murder Him this time, but He got away again. If there was just some way I could draw Him back while they are so stirred up into this frenzy of hatred and murder. How could I? Wait a minute. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus live here. He has a deep love for them. I bet if He got news that one of them was sick and dying, He would rush back in order to help them." Then, suddenly, we read Lazarus becomes deathly sick, and the message is sent to Jesus. "Jesus, You need to come back. The one You love is sick."

In the Greek language, it's not just he's sick. It's like he's sick, and it's continuing. He's spiraling downward. It was a critical message. "Jesus, this is a crisis! You need to come!" Second Corinthians 2:11 says that we are not ignorant of the devil's strategies, and certainly Jesus wasn't. So, now we come to the main figure in our drama, Jesus Himself. The messengers arrived from Martha and Mary with a dire message. He immediately says, "This sickness will not lead to death but to God's glory that the Son of God may be glorified through it." That was the message that Jesus sent back with the messengers to Martha and Mary. Again, His statement meant that the end result would be life. Jesus does love Lazarus. He does love Martha. He does love Mary. They were some of His closest friends, and He knew they were counting on Him. Everything in His humanity was pushing Him and urging Him to go.

But my friend, Jesus, was never pushed or pulled by His emotions. He was not driven by fear or desperation or by what others might think of Him. So, He remains in Beth-Abrah for two more days. Suddenly, He says to the disciples, "We're going back." They remonstrate with Him and said, "Lord, the Jews were trying to kill You recently there. Do You really want to go back?" They weren't just worried about Jesus. We know that because when they realized that He will not change His mind, Thomas says, "Okay, let's go so we can die with Him. Jesus is going to die. We're going to die. We're all going to die. Let's go." They were fully expecting to be killed. This was Jesus' response when that was said to him. In verses 9–10 NKJV,

<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

"Okay, Jesus, that's great. But what the heck does that have to do with anything? What kind of response is that?" It's actually a perfect response. Jesus is speaking metaphorically. He's basically saying, "I've received light from the Holy Spirit. I've received illumination, and it's safe to go back now. If we would have gone back when My emotions were raging—when I got that message, and everything in my humanity wanted to go back—we would have been walking in the dark, and we would have gotten in trouble. But I've received light from God." Just like when you walk in the day, you're fine. You walk at night, you're going to stub your toe on the kitchen counter or whatever it is. Now, that same guidance is available to every believer. The Book of Romans says, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." Jesus said, "When the Holy Spirit comes, He'll guide you in all truth, and He will show you things to come." God wants us walking in the day as it were, but so many times we're so busy, or we're pushed and pulled by our emotions, or we're so worried about how we're going to appear to people, and we make rash decisions. We need to slow down and wait on God and pray. He will give us illumination that will keep us from stumbling.



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I remember, it was like the second date I ever had with Janet. I invited her to go to lunch with me at this place called The Silver Plow. It was a really nice place to have lunch, especially on my budget. It was about as good as I could do. The day I'm going to pick her up, I'm going to get her, and I have this desire come over me for Chinese food. I thought about this Chinese place that was in a local mall, and it wasn't great Chinese food, honestly. I remember it was so strange, I thought, "God, is this You? This is so weird. Why would You tell me to go get Chinese food?" So, rather than just making the decision and telling Janet, "We're going to go get Chinese," I wanted to score some points with her. I said, "Hey, do you want to go to the Chinese place, or would you like to go to Silver Plow?" She said, "I'd like to go to Silver Plow." I said, "Okay."

So, we went and had a nice lunch. I came outside, and I remember looking at my van, and I said to Janet, "I know I didn't park that crooked." We went out, and it turns out a beer truck had parked up the hill at a liquor store and forgot to put his parking brake on. This huge beer delivery truck rolled all the way backward down the hill, smashed into my van, and turned it around sideways. I go, "Yeah, I guess the Chinese food was You, God." Now, I could stand here all day and tell you story after story. There were a lot of times where I got it right and a few times like that where I didn't get it right. But I'm telling you, the Holy Spirit wants to guide us. God wants us walking in the light and not in the dark. So, His response to, "You're going to go back there now? They're going to kill You!" "Hey, there are 12 hours in the day. If you walk in the day, you're not going to stumble. If you walk at night, you're going to stumble." God wants to give us illumination, and it is so important. Then, when Jesus arrived, He wept. The Bible says He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He saw what the death of their brother had done to them. How Martha is broken, Mary is broken, and the Jews are weeping. Jesus wept. If you want a Bible verse to memorize, that's the shortest one in the Bible: Jesus wept. It says twice that He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. It's interesting.

I think as Jesus saw the devastation and the loss that death brought, He groaned deeply inside. The Greek word for that is a really interesting word. It's the same word used for a horse snorting. Literally, it's the word used for a war horse that snorts as it's eager to go into battle. The word where Jesus groaned internally. Jesus saw death as a call to war. Death was not a friend, and He won this skirmish by raising Lazarus from the dead and showed that He had power over death. But even then, Lazarus would grow old and die later on. Jesus won the ultimate war against death on the cross, and through it, He gained eternal life for all who would put their trust in Him. Ultimately, He will give us a glorified body like unto His own, not subject to sickness, not subject to weakness, and not subject to death. Thank God. Now, 1 Corinthians 15 says that the final enemy that shall be destroyed is death. Death is an enemy. It's alien. It was never a part of God's original programming, never a part of God's original plan, and never a part of our original DNA. That's why even if someone dies a good death and we know they're in heaven, something within us just recoils against us, the wrongness of it. It is just so wrong. It was never part of God's original plan. But thank God when Christ returns, even that final enemy that's already been conquered through His sacrifice is going to be put underfoot and destroyed forever. There'll be no more funerals. There'll be no more loss. There'll be no more weeping bitter tears.

And the good news for those of us who have lost loved ones is that they are present with the Lord in heaven, and we will be reunited with them again. They are very, very much alive, and I'd like to close by going all the way back to the words that Jesus spoke to Martha. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" I want to ask you: Do

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you believe it? It's not about how many good works you've done. Perhaps you should be commended for your good works and for your sacrifice. But the real question is, what have you done with God's Son? We're not saved by virtue of our good works. We're not saved by virtue of our own personal merit. It's only because of what Christ has done. And the question is: Have you made Him the Lord of your life? Have you relinquished the reins of your life into the hands of Jesus? Have you died to your rights of independent living and truly made Him Lord? Those are the conditions by which we must come.

I want to pray with you in just a moment. A couple of things, though. Before I got up to speak, I had the sense that someone's sitting here, and you know who you are. It's the only way I can describe it. It's like there's this huge weight on your chest. It's almost seeming to suffocate you. Well, just like that stone was rolled away, Jesus is going to remove that from you today. It's going to be gone. I'm telling you, it's going to be gone. Now, I don't know what your background has been or where you've come from. You may be a preacher's kid, and you saw Daddy one way in the pulpit, and he was an absolute tyrant at home. As soon as you could get away, you got away, and it just put a bitter taste in your mouth about the whole church thing. But here you are. Why is that? Because you know in your heart of hearts that Jesus is not that way. His servants can mess up. We all have feet of clay, but Jesus is perfect. You need to come back to the Jesus whom you loved as a little boy or as a little girl.

You may be a prodigal son or a prodigal daughter, and you know the truth. There was some moment in your life when you really gave your life to Jesus. You tenderly loved Him, and you were overwhelmed by His love for you. But for whatever reason, just hanging around with the wrong people, decisions that have happened, a loss that you've experienced, maybe trauma, I don't know, but you've drifted from Him. You know if the Lord came back today, you'd be ashamed. I have great news for you, prodigal son, prodigal daughter. God is not mad at you, but you need to come home. Don't delay. You need to come home. The Father is waiting for you. If you've never committed your life to Christ, He won't turn you away. And you might say, "Bayless, you wouldn't say that if you knew what I've done." Jesus died for every one of your sins. He loves you. And yeah, the Bible says to the one who's forgiven a lot, they love a lot. I suspect you're going to be a great lover of people when you consider the depths of God's forgiveness for you. But He does love you and does want to wash you clean. I want to lead you in a simple prayer. I can only give you words to pray. Words are important, but they really don't mean anything without a sincere heart behind them. If you'll tie your heart around the words and sincerely speak them to God, He'll meet you. If it helps you to close your eyes when you pray, you can do it. Out on the plaza or anybody who's watching right now, just pray these words after me. Again, tie your heart tightly around these words.

Say, Jesus, I come to You. I believe You love me. You love me so much that You were willing to go to the cross and die for me. My sins put You there. You willingly paid my debt. Thank You. I believe You were raised from the dead, and I give You my life. I give You my victories, and I give You my mess. I put everything in Your hands, Jesus. All I am and all I have, I give it to You now. From this moment forward, I call You, Lord. My life is Yours, Jesus. It's in Your name, I pray. Amen.

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