

**TUTORIAL**  
**1.48**

# Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead

See Tutorial 1.6 notes for overall instructions.

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: **John 11:1-54**.

## Last time

Jesus used an extensive illustration about sheep that would have conjured very familiar images for His audience. He said that He is a good shepherd, one who cares for the sheep, protects them...indeed, gladly lays down His life to save them and offer them a rich and fulfilling life. This is in contrast to others who make false claims but who are really thieves and who ultimately want to destroy the sheep. In another statement He made some remarkable and very exclusive claims about who He is: the way, the truth and the life.

## Jesus has some friends and followers in

### Bethany

By now, opinion about Jesus has become very divided. The authorities are increasingly antagonistic and are obviously waiting for an opportunity, any excuse they can find, to arrest Him. There are not many places where He is safe, very few family homes - certainly not in the southern areas near Jerusalem - where He is welcome. An exception is in the town or, more accurately, village, of Bethany.

Just a few kilometres' walk from Jerusalem, on the slopes of the Mount of Olives (in today's West Bank) there two sisters and their brother who are only too glad to have Jesus visit their home. Luke introduces them earlier in his account, focusing on the sisters, Mary and Martha. They are very different in character from each other, but Jesus obviously counts both as dear friends as well as followers. Despite the storm of controversy and danger gathering around Jesus, these courageous ladies are devoted to Him, and their home provides something of a base for Him and His disciples when they are in the Jerusalem area. Now John records an incident that involves their brother Lazarus, and which will prove to be one of the truly outstanding events from Jesus' time on earth.

## **Lazarus becomes sick and then dies**

The two sisters have sent word to Jesus, "Lord, your dear friend is very sick". Jesus, who of course knows exactly how things are going to work out, makes the observation that this has happened so that God and His Son will receive glory. (John 11:1-16) Knowing the danger that awaits them anywhere near Jerusalem - in the province of Judea - the disciples are no doubt a bit surprised but also relieved that Jesus does not immediately head down to Bethany at the news of His friend's serious illness. So why now, after two days have passed, does He suddenly want to go? "Teacher, we're only thinking of you, but it would be crazy to go to Judea now. Only a few days ago people there were trying to stone you to death." "What's that you say Lord, Lazarus has fallen asleep? Surely you don't need to go and wake him. If he's having a good sleep, no doubt that means he's on the mend."

But Jesus tells them straight out that Lazarus is dead. He also adds that He's glad He wasn't there, because the way things are going to happen will help them to believe. This is all very disturbing...does He mean to go down there and let the authorities kill him so He can join Lazarus? Thomas, always the pessimist but also loyal, says, "Well, if He's going down there to die, I guess we might as well go too."

## **Jesus speaks with Martha and Mary after their brother's death**

By the time they get to Bethany, it's already four days after the burial. There are still quite a lot of people hanging around who've made the short walk from Jerusalem, supposedly to comfort the sisters after their loss. As the story unfolds, it's questionable how close many of them were to Martha and Mary, or how genuine their concern. But one thing is for certain, the events that take place will be seen by a lot of eyewitnesses, and their account cannot help but spread like wildfire in the nearby capital. (John 11:15-32)

Hearing that Jesus is on His way, Martha goes out to meet Him, no doubt in tears, "Oh, we kept waiting, and waiting, hoping you'd arrive. Right up to the end... Now...well God would give you whatever you ask...but, no of course it's too late, isn't it, Lord?"

"Martha. Your brother will be brought back to life."

"Yes I know...it will be some day far in the future - at the end of time, when God raises everyone for the final judgment."

"Martha, listen. / am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after they have died. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe that?"

“Yes, Lord, I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God.”

At this point Martha goes and finds Mary and discreetly lets her know that Jesus wants to see her. Mary immediately comes to where He is but her first grief-stricken words, like her sister's, are about what might have happened... “Lord, if only...” Even though they believe in Jesus, their earth-bound, time-restricted, human view, limits their understanding of how and towards what objectives He is moving events.

## Jesus calls Lazarus back to life again

John now records something that must have impacted he and the other disciples deeply as they later recall this whole remarkable incident. He describes how Jesus is very obviously distressed, even angry in some sense, as He sees Martha and her friends crying in their grief.

For a moment He allows His true emotions to well up and be seen. There's no indication that he's directly angry with them...although perhaps He is frustrated in some ways at their lack of faith in Him. But mostly it seems He's angry about death itself and the despair it brings to humans who were not originally created to die. Jesus asks them to take Him to where Lazarus is buried. As they head towards the grave, their emotion touches His heart again and everyone can see that He is crying. (John 11:33-44)

When they arrive, much to their alarm, Jesus wants them to roll away the large stone that is used to block the small cave that is the family tomb. Martha protests but He reminds them how He'd promised that they would see God's glory if they would believe. After they've rolled the large stone disc away Jesus prays to His Father. Then He stands and shouts into the dark mouth of the cave, “Lazarus, come out!” Everyone holds their breaths...they're frozen, watching.

No way, this is impossible. It cannot happen. But wait, what's that? Was that a noise from inside? They crane their necks to see, crowd in behind Jesus. And there is Lazarus - it has to be him of course. He's feeling his way out because he can't see - his head is wrapped up...and he's stumbling a bit from the cloth all bound around his legs. For a moment no one knows what to do. Jesus has to tell them, “Come on. Unwrap him and let him go!”

In the most dramatic and emphatic way Jesus has further defined who He is. He has said He is *Life*...also that He is *The Resurrection* - the one who brings people back to life from death.

And He's proven those things to be true with overwhelming evidence for the first-hand witnesses and those who accept their account by faith. The way in which it happened is a vivid reminder of Creation.

In the beginning, God spoke into the dark chaos and called all things into existence, to life. Now, into the darkness of the cave mouth with death inside, and into the dark despair of human beings as they try to deal with death, God's

Son in human form speaks. With the same authority and power with which the One-God-Who-Is-Three created originally, Jesus calls someone out of death and back to life.

## Opinions about Jesus polarise even more

John goes on to describe how those who've been there with the sisters through these events and who know what actually happened - from that moment believe in Jesus...that He truly was the long-promised Messiah. Others, even though they can't deny what they've seen, incredibly, refuse to believe in Him. Some go to the religious leaders and tell them what they've witnessed. (John 11:45-54) At a crisis meeting of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling elite are increasingly desperate and vehement. "Something must be done! If stories like these about this Jesus of Nazareth continue to grow and circulate, it's inevitable, the people are going to declare Him king. There's already lots of talk on the streets about it. And then what? The Romans will call it a rebellion, they'll send in the troops. There will be violence...and who knows, they might destroy the temple. One thing's for certain. Our role of wisely leading the nation on God's behalf won't survive something like that. The Romans will take the opportunity to do away with this Council and run everything themselves. We owe it to the nation, to God, to do something about this Jesus. Better for Him to die than for the whole nation to be destroyed, right?"

Jesus, knowing what they are saying, at least for a time steps back from public prominence and leaves the Jerusalem area.



### DISCUSSION POINTS

*Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead*

1. Put yourself in the place of the disciples. Based on what they knew from the Old Testament and what they'd heard and seen from Jesus up to this point, what principles should be guiding them in thinking about caution and safety vs. risk and danger? Were there unique elements to their circumstances as they followed Jesus then, or can those principles be applied in exactly the same way for us today?

2. How do you think you would have felt if you were Martha or Mary as you waited for Jesus to arrive while you watched your brother dying? How would you have prayed to God? Faced with similar circumstances a few years later, do you think your prayer would be fairly much the same, or would your perspective have changed significantly?
3. Some estimates say that by the time someone is 18, they will have viewed 40,000 murders on TV. (Note that this is only violent deaths in one medium.) What impact, if any, do you think this massive exposure to images of death has on the worldview of our society...and therefore on people's ability to understand Jesus' view of death?
4. Think back through the Narrative and identify any principles that have emerged which can help to guide the way we view the government and the laws of this country. Are they universal principles or might they not apply in another place? Are there circumstances under which it is okay to go against the laws of the government? (As much as possible base your response on what has been covered in the Narrative so far.)