



John 12:9-11
The Plot to Kill Lazarus

9 Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead.

10 But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also,

11 because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

There is a common belief that if someone would simply come back from the dead and tell us what they had experienced, then we could know for certain that there is an afterlife. They could tell us all about heaven and what they had experienced, and then even the most entrenched atheist would have to finally accept that they were wrong.

But friends, the Bible tells us that simply isn't true. Here in fact we have a graphic demonstration of that fact. In the person of Lazarus we have a man who was incontrovertibly dead for four days, who had been brought back from the dead in front of many witnesses. Both supporters and foes of Jesus had spread the story of his resurrection throughout Jerusalem, and he had become the object of pilgrimages as curious Jews came to the nearby town of Bethany to see him and Jesus the one who raised him.

But what is the response of the Jewish authorities to this walking and talking evidence right on their doorstep? Are they overjoyed? Do they smack their heads and say "**We have been so wrong for so long!**" Do they send a delegation to Jesus to come preach the good news before them and tell them how to be saved? No, they view Lazarus in the way that say a crooked politician views an incriminating document. This is evidence they don't want around. Lazarus is something to be shredded, disposed of, before he can do them further harm. Like the Atheists today who make millions peddling books attacking Christianity the last thing they want is evidence that might derail their train.

Jesus had already taught that physical evidence like Lazarus, in and of itself, would never be enough to change an unbelieving heart. At the end of the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, which showed the foolishness of pursuing riches and power and neglecting the things of God, we see the rich man crying out from the midst of the flames of Hell:

Luke 16:27 "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house,

28 'for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'

29 "Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'

30 "And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'

And the truth of that was confirmed. These chief priests had one risen from the dead on their doorstep and the would not repent. They had Moses and the Prophets too, and they would not hear them. But worse they refused even to listen to the testimony of God's own Son, whom the miracle of the raising of Lazarus had confirmed.

Lazarus was a double embarrassment to these Saducees, He was not only living evidence of the Messiahship and Deity of Christ, He also proved that their beliefs regarding the resurrection were false. If Lazarus had come back from the dead, all their claims that their was no afterlife, no resurrection were obviously wrong. Lazarus was to them a walking billboard that read **"JESUS IS LORD! And by the way, THE SADDUCEES ARE WRONG ABOUT EVERYTHING"** And it's not like he was a billboard on a sideroad tucked out of the way advertising a motel that went of business in 1976. Nope, Lazarus was on the doorstep of Jerusalem, he was a one of those awful *you just can't avoid reading every stupid pun* South of the Border signs on route 95.

And so they would rather murder this man than admit they were wrong. And why? Why were they so afraid of being wrong? Because if they were wrong, that had serious consequences. Not only was everything that they had been teaching wrong, and everything that Jesus had been teaching right, which would be a mighty blow to their pride, it meant there was an afterlife, there was a final judgment.

You see brothers and sisters, if there is no afterlife, then I doesn't ultimately matter how I live my life does it? Someday soon and I can't tell when, I'm just going to wink out of existence. Whether I did good or evil won't matter one wit. It won't matter when my heart stops beating whether I was Josef Stalin or the Apostle Paul, I end up in exactly the same place. And when the universe finally dies of entropy, whether I suffered for the faith, or made others suffer for it will be equally meaningless. The Apostle Paul recognized that:

1 Cor. 15:19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. 32 If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

But you see Lazarus tells the world there is an afterlife and that the Romans are the least of our worries because what we do here matters quite a bit. So he must die as well as Christ. **Funny isn't it?** It started out in John 11:50 with the High Priest saying that it was expedient "that **one** man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." Now it's two men. When they martyr Stephen it will be three, then James four.... How many is it really? Well the answer is as many as it takes. How many millions of witnesses to Christ have they killed so far? But each time they find that the blood of the martyrs really is the seed of the church.

The world will put as many Christians as they think necessary to death, and they are always saying "that's that" its all over. The embarrassment is gone. For instance, in Scotland, once the beating heart of Presbyterianism they are so embarrassed by John Knox that they paved over his grave. But friends, they can pave over his grave, but they can't pave over his faith, because Jesus has promised that not even the gates of HELL will prevail against that! And you know they can take away his earthly memorials, but they can't rob faithful Knox of his reward, because that was laid up for him in heaven, in heaven, ***where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.*** And while the world may hate them, Jesus calls them blessed - Luke 6:22 ***:Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of***

Man's sake. 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.

Well a few applications:

1) What sent the authorities in that day up the wall was that “many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.” Belief in Jesus still sends a chill down the spine of the authorities... And they will do whatever is necessary to eliminate it. We see in all sectors, government, education, entertainment, science, even our awful civil religion wants to nothing to do with the objective Christ who is Lord of all. So we should expect the same kind of evidence destroying exercise.

I was debating whether life really was created a while back online, and a biochemist sent me a private email. *I don't believe the way you do...*

The more obvious it is, the greater the desire to get rid of it. Be aware of that, and be prepared.

2) It's Funny isn't it, that Lazarus and not the Apostles is the focus of their hatred? You'd think if they were going to kill anyone, it would be the guys who were going from town to town preaching in his name but it wasn't it was Lazarus. And he never said or did anything of himself that the gospel writers thought was worthy of being recorded. I mean think about it, we know far more of what his sisters said and did. I've heard people all the time saying things like “I'm sort of a Martha” but I've never heard anyone say “In my ministry I'm more like Lazarus.”

But brothers and sisters, this should point out two things to us – first what is most important is not what we do for Christ, but what Christ has done for us. And the most important of those things is to give us new life. As Ravi Zacharias puts it, "Jesus did not come into this world to make bad people good. He came to make dead people live." - Ravi Zacharias

If we truly have that gift, if we have been born again through faith in Jesus Christ, then that very new life will be evidence pointing to the deity of Christ and the truth of the Gospel. Let me put it to you this way, I can talk to you all day about the effectiveness of a medicine, I can explain to you how it works, I can show you charts and studies, I can give you pens and rubber balls with the name on it, I can tell you 4 out of 5 physicians recommend it. But friends, the most potent argument for that medicine is if I give it someone and it cures their disease. It used to be that apologists for the Christian faith had one golden argument, that not even the greatest rhetorician could answer effectively, and that was Christians. They could hate the faith, but they couldn't deny the difference in their lives.

They couldn't argue that Lazarus, who had been dead, was now alive. And for a Christian that new life is often the most unanswerable of arguments. Can you make that argument? Is your life different, I don't mean just because of where you go on Sunday, but because of who you are? You may not be able to tell whether someone is alive or dead at a distance, but a dead man doesn't pass a close inspection. What about you, would someone giving you that inspection find you to be vibrant and alive in Christ.

3) What books do we have from Lazarus? None. Hymns sermons, speeches? None. What do we know about him, that He Loved the Lord, that He stayed close to Him, that He was a testament to Christ's life giving powers.

Too many people think that if they aren't gifted to do anything great then they are of no use to the Kingdom. And I understand that, it was a shock to me when I realized, unlike Watts they won't be singing my hymns 300 years after my death or unlike Augustine, they won't be reading my books 1700 years later.

But think it was any great gifts of Lazarus that made him so useful. Just as most armies are not made up of super heroes the faith advances largely because of ordinary Christians who stayed close to Christ.

Have you ever thought of the countless soldiers who did their job but no one remembers them. I am a sinful man, I will not be one of those giants of the faith whose deeds are long remembered. The most important thing about me is not what I have done, or will do, it is what Christ is done in me.

Let us thank God if we know anything of faith, and can say, with all our sense of weakness and infirmity, "I believe." Let us pray that our faith may be real, true, genuine, and sincere, and not a mere temporary impression, like the morning cloud and the early dew. Not least, let us watch and pray against the love of the world. It ruined one who basked in the full sunshine of privileges, and heard Christ Himself teaching every day. Then "let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12.)