

Lazarus Is Asleep
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Lorain Avenue Church of Christ (10-20-2024)

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The title of our lesson is ... "Lazarus Is Asleep"

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You understand ... don't you??

What a blessing it is? ... to have close friends that you trust?

Friends with shared beliefs ... concerning Christ and eternal life?

To be with them where you can relax ... in peace and safety ... and gather strength.

No pretense. No games.

Just a family ... that can be closer than blood.

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Martha ... Mary ... and Lazarus (sisters and brother) ... they were friends like this.

They lived in Bethany ... a small village ... about two miles from Jerusalem.

Jesus and His disciples ... often stayed in their home ... resting ... finding comfort.

Sometimes teaching friends and neighbors.

It was a safe place.

Luke 10:38 says ... "Now it happened as they went ... that He entered a certain village ... and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house."

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We read about Mary and Martha and Lazarus ... a few times in the Gospels.

It's a beautiful picture. Followers of Jesus. Passionate and faithful.

A close friendship.

John 11:5 says ... "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."

One time ... Martha was upset because Mary was not helping her with hostess duties.

She complained to Jesus. No reservation. Just talking with a trusted friend.

And then the time Mary anointed Jesus' feet with perfume ... and dried them with her hair. She wasn't being forward. Instead ... she was loving and respectful.

Reminds you ... doesn't it ... of how Moses spoke with God ... "face to face ... as a man talks with his friend."

The three were as close to Jesus ... as close friends can be.

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After healing a blind man on the Sabbath ... Jesus declared Himself to be the Good Shepherd ... and ... accused the Pharisees of NOT being His sheep. They tried to stone Him.

With His disciples, He traveled to safety ... "beyond the Jordan river" ... where John had first baptized.

John 10:42 says, "Many believed on Him there."

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About this time ... Lazarus became gravely ill."

John 11:1 ... "Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha."

The sisters sent word to Jesus.

John 11:3 ... "Lord, behold ... the one that You love is sick."

When Jesus got the news ... He told His disciples ... "the sickness is NOT unto death. It is for the glory of the Lord."

Here ... with these words ... we begin to understand a new language that Jesus was speaking ... an unfamiliar language.

Jesus spoke ... from the eternal perspective ... not the earthly perspective.

He had come to earth ... to make it possible ... to live forever.

The earthly body may die ... yet the soul will live on forever.

And to top it off ... that earthly body will rise again ... and be changed into an immortal body.

An eternal soul ... in an eternal body.

The 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians and the 4th chapter of 1 Thessalonians paint this wonderful picture.

We sing ... "To Canaan's land I'm on my way ... where the soul never dies."

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If you or I were to get a message like the sisters sent ... we'd jump in the car and drive all night.

Or we'd book the first flight out ... and head for the airport.

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Did Jesus do that? NO!

He waited a couple more days.

His disciples tried to hurry Him up.

The sisters knew ... the disciples knew ... Jesus could heal Lazarus ... if He got to Bethany in time.

He was about 20 miles away. Maybe a couple days?

It had taken just as long ... for the sister's message ... to reach Jesus.

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Why did Jesus seem to drag His feet?

Was it because returning to Bethany ... was risky?

No. That wouldn't stop Jesus.

Why, then?

Because ... He was about to demonstrate the hope ... that must lie within each of us.

The hope of eternal life.

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Jesus said that Lazarus was NOT sick unto death.

"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep," Jesus said. "But I go ... so I may awaken him out of sleep."

The disciples were confused. If He's just sleeping, he'll be okay. He'll get well.

But ... Lazarus DID die.

Jesus clears things up ... "Lazarus is dead."

Okay ... we're confused.

But there's no contradiction here.

As we experience it, Lazarus was dead. His lifeless body was about to be placed in the tomb ... if it wasn't there already.

But in Jesus' way of thinking and understanding ... Lazarus was ... just ... asleep.

And for the glory of His Father ... Jesus was going to Bethany to wake Him up.

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You've been there. I know you have.

You go to the funeral home. You see the departed one's physical body in the casket.

You hear people say ... "He looks like he's just sleeping." "She looks like she's taking a nap."

Part of this ... is how we deal with the loss of a friend.

It's so very much harder ... when we deal with the loss ... of one we love dearly.

Husbands and wives ... holding hands for the last time.

One living. One asleep. A mom or dad. A child.

Saying "it's hard" ... is ... an understatement.

When the casket closes ... our breath catches in our throats.

I'm sure the exact same scene played out in Bethany.

The sisters preparing Lazarus' body for burial.

The stone being rolled over the tomb.

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We ask ... "Where Is God when I hurt?"

The answer always is ... "RIGHT HERE" ... "With you."

Trust Me, God says ... "It's like My Son told Mary and Martha ... and His disciples ... your loved one is not gone ... he's asleep ... she's asleep."

This is not a euphemism. It's not a merciful spin on words. It's the truth.

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In the 16th chapter of Luke's Gospel ... there's an account of a different righteous man ... but with the same name ... "Lazarus."

Luke tells us that Lazarus died.

His body was buried ... and his soul was taken by Angels to Hades.

Hades is the unseen place ... where God keeps the souls ... of those who have departed this life ... until Christ returns on Judgement Day.

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You're a righteous person. You die. That is, your body dies. Old age. Sickness. An accident.

Your body, as we say, goes into the ground.

But where are you?

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Luke 16 says ... our body goes to the grave ... and our soul enters into Hades.

Our body goes to the grave and we ... I ... you ... go to Hades.

You and your soul are the same. It's who you are.

When you die ... "you" leave your body and go to Hades.

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This is where Lazarus in Luke 16 went ... to Hades.

This is where Martha and Mary's brother, Lazarus, went ... to Hades

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This is what Jesus meant when He said Lazarus is asleep.

Jesus was going to Bethany to awaken his body from the tomb ... and his soul from Hades.

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Jesus' new language appears a few special times in the New Testament.

In 1 Thessalonians 4 ... the Apostle Paul refers to the souls of departed Christians ... as those who have ... "fallen asleep in Jesus."

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When the mob stoned Stephen ... Luke 7:60 says ... that ... Stephen "fell asleep."

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When Jesus brought Jairus' daughter ... back to life ... He said to the family ... "she is sleeping."

They were skeptical.

Jesus took her by the hand and called ... 'Little girl, arise.' ... Her spirit returned, and she arose immediately."

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When Jesus died ... the veil of the Temple was torn open ... the sky blackened ... the earth shook ... tombs were opened.

And after He rose from the dead ... bodies of saints who had fallen asleep were raised ... and coming out of their tombs ... they entered Jerusalem."

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Jesus told the repentant thief crucified beside Him ... "today you will be with Me in Paradise."

Our bodies will be in the ground. Yet ... your soul will be with My soul. You with Me. In paradise ... in Hades.

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David foretold that Jesus' body would rest in peace ... while His soul (while He) was resting in Hades ... awaiting the call from His Father ... to wake from the dead.

This comforted David ... knowing that he too ... could sleep the sleep of hope.

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As sad as a death is ... it's also a time of hope and joy. Christians trust ... that the sleep is a temporary sleep ... safe in the arms of God.

Not all that different than a child going to sleep in her mother's arms ... only to awaken later.

Luke tells us ... that the righteous Lazarus ... in Hades ... was comforted among the family of God.

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As Jesus finally arrives in Bethany ... Martha goes out to meet Him.

In her despair ... she says ... "If you had gotten here sooner ... my brother would not have died."

Can you ... understand ... can you "feel" ... how deeply that must have touched Him?

Full of hope ... God on earth ... yet full of grief ... in a human body.

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John 11:22-27 ... "[Martha said] 'Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.'

Jesus said to her, 'Your brother shall rise again.' Martha said, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.'

Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies ... and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?'

Martha said, 'Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.'

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Martha trusted beyond doubt ... that her brother would rise from his sleep in that final day.

But she likely didn't expect the miracle she was about to witness ... a miracle that would strengthen her faith.

Jesus was teaching an important lesson. And the lesson was painful.

Can't you hear a parent saying ... "this is going to hurt me more than it does you?"

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Martha heads back to the house and tells Mary ... "The Teacher is here and He's looking for you."

Mary runs to Him and says ... just as her sister had ... "If you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Lazarus had been dead ... four days now.

Distasteful as it feels to say it ... his body had started to decompose.

This ... this is why Jesus had waited. There had to be no doubt ... that a miracle was happening. There could be no doubt ... that Jesus was the Son of God.

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Friends had seen Mary run from the house. They followed her ... thinking she was heading to the tomb to weep.

They caught up with her ... just as she and Jesus were talking.

Jesus saw their grief ... and He was deeply moved ... and troubled.

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Jesus asked ... "where have you laid Him?"

And they said ... "Lord ... come and see."

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Jesus wept.

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Seldom ... in the history of mankind ... have two single words ... carried so much impact.

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Jesus wept. He loved them all ... so very much.

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He would soon lay down His own life for them ... for us. To bring an end ... to such grief and suffering among mankind.

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Now ... we turn the page ... and Jesus tells them to remove the stone from the tomb.

And He calls out ... "Lazarus come forth!"

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And do you know what?

He came.

Lazarus came from the tomb ... wrapped in his grave clothes.

He was just sleeping.

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One day ... Jesus will return.

He will not step foot on the earth ... but will appear from the clouds.

And He will call you ... and me everyone who ever lived ... back to life.

Come forth! And we will ... come forth. Our sleep will be over. New bodies from our graves. We, ourselves ... from Hades.

The righteous will rise up to meet the Lord in the air ... and accompany Him to Heaven.

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There's a hymn we sing that always gives me comfort ...

Asleep in Jesus! Blessed sleep, From which none ever wakes to weep;

A calm and undisturbed repose, Unbroken by the last of foes.

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Where do we want to be ... when we fall asleep? IN JESUS!

John wrote ... in Revelation 14:13 ... "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors ..."

How do we make that happen? How can we fall asleep in Jesus when we die?

The Bible gives us a simple answer ... by being baptized into Him and living righteous lives.

When we hear Jesus calling ... "come forth" ... we want that call ... to be the wake-up call to life eternal.

John 5:25-29 ... "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live ..."

"Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth ... those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life ... those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment."

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Lazarus is asleep. Lazarus, come forth.

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