

Sunday School Notes for 19 March 2023: I am the Resurrection and the Life – John ch 11.

When Jesus was on earth, there were two sets of leaders in the Jewish faith: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They disagreed about what happened after one died. The Sadducees didn't believe there was any life after death - when you died, you died and that was that! End of story!

In today's story Jesus is showing everyone that this was nonsense. If you have a very good memory, you might be thinking that he had already raised people from the dead – Jairus's daughter and the son of a widow from Nain. You would be correct, but perhaps people who heard about those events pooh-poohed the idea that these two young folk were actually dead. Perhaps they suggested that these two had just been in a deep coma from which Jesus had just wakened them! But they were about to be proved wrong!

The story starts with a messenger, rushing 29 km to find Jesus and to tell him that in the village of Bethany his good friend Lazarus was dangerously ill. Mary and Martha pleaded with Jesus to come and heal him. Weirdly, Jesus seemed to ignore this cry for help for two whole days.

The family must have been really upset. Waiting and waiting for Jesus to arrive must have been stressful. Meanwhile Jesus' disciples were confused about why he didn't go. Perhaps the disciples thought that, for once, Jesus was being sensible and was steering clear of his enemies in Jerusalem which was just about 3 km from Bethany.

If so, they were disappointed. Then another message arrived to say that Lazarus had died. Jesus told his disciples but he referred to death as falling asleep and the disciples thought this meant Lazarus was getting better – a good sleep often marks the end of a fever. When Jesus told them that he was going to Bethany although Lazarus was dead the disciples thought he was crazy! It would take them 2 days to get there, they would be too late for the funeral and Jesus might be walking into danger. However in the end Thomas sums up the mood, saying "Let us also go that we may die with him." (v 16)

When Jesus arrived on the outskirts of the village of Bethany, Martha bustled out to meet him with words which she and Mary both repeat so they must have talked about it. "If you had been here, our brother would not have died." She realized Jesus could heal and that he was the promised Messiah, but not surprisingly she didn't understand about his power over death.

Then Mary came to Jesus. Weeping, she knelt before him, acknowledging his greatness, but heartbroken that he had not come to help them. Then comes the shortest verse in the Bible (11:35): Jesus wept! Not because of his own sadness – he knew what would happen next. I think he wept because he saw how sad everyone is when someone dies and he knew that this wasn't necessary. Some of the other people there though wondered what the use of sympathy was, when he could have prevented this problem!

On being shown the grave, Jesus asked for it to be opened. Martha is horrified! Lazarus had been dead for four days and the body would have been beginning to rot and to stink. In the end some strong people edpush the big stone away. After praying that people would learn about God's power and love, Jesus called Lazarus out and miraculously the dead man heard and shuffled out in his grave clothes.

Imagine the celebration in that home!

But we are told that this miracle scared the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. People would flock to Jesus when they heard about this¹ He must die to prevent chaos in the country! So instead of celebrating that God could cancel death, from then on they planned to put Jesus to death.

But the seed had been sown. People knew that Jesus had the power to deal with death. Lazarus was raised to die later; but Jesus would rise to live forever. And he promised that the same would be true of us. Those who believe in him will live forever in his home. The Sadducees were wrong!

How? We don't know, but this is what he promised. Hallelujah!

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