

## JESUS RAISES THE DEAD

The Encyclopaedia Britannica records almost casually one of the saddest and possibly the most discouraging characteristics of the modern church. In their Macropaedia the writer for the encyclopedia said this,

“For the most part, the churches of the latter part of the 20th Century no longer have the courage to uphold the Christian teaching of life after death.”<sup>1</sup>

The loss of courage to tell the despairing of the world about the central doctrine of Christianity speaks volumes about a church that has lost its way amid the opposition and contradictions of the opponents of God. It’s as if someone aboard a sinking ship knew the way to a lifeboat and was unwilling to tell the other passengers.

The evidence for the resurrection is abundantly available. Yet, while opponents mock the testimony of scripture, Christians blush to raise the subject. The latter because they fear ridicule, and the former because they have set their hopes to low. So it is that in all this scoffing and embarrassment—despair rules, and the ones who have lost their dearest are left with naught of hope.

The spirit of the world opposes the idea of a resurrection. From youth up people are taught that death is a natural thing. It always happens. Get used to it. You go around once and then it’s over. Oblivion awaits.

But we know that what the spirit of the world says is not true. We have other evidence to consider.

In a cemetery in Hanover, Germany, lies the grave of a woman who did not believe in the Resurrection. So opposed to the idea was she that she directed in her will that her grave was to be made

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<sup>1</sup> Britannica. Macropaedia, Vol. IV, p. 508.

so secure that if there were a resurrection from the dead, it could not reach her. On her grave she had them place huge slabs of granite and marble. Then she ordered them to fasten it all together with heavy steel clasps. On the marker she had them inscribe these words: “This burial place must never be opened.”

In time, a seed, which had been covered by the stones, began to grow. The tiny plant probed and found a crack in the concrete. Slowly it pushed its way upward, out of the soil, and through the tiny crack in the sepulcher. It continued to grow, and eventually the plant became a small tree. As the trunk enlarged, the great slabs of stone were pushed aside. The steel clasps were wrenched from their sockets. In time, a mighty tree stood over the grave site.<sup>2</sup>

The moral of this story is: God opens tombs. This time he did it with an acorn. The next time He will do it with a word.

The power contained in a seed is mightier than the sepulcher. It is stronger than anything man might devise. God's power calls to life where there was no life. Someday he will speak and the graves will open. The sea will give up its dead, and death and Hades will give up the dead which are in them. Unbelief cannot deter God from his purpose. Not the unbelief of a woman in Hanover, Germany. Not the unbelief of the timid church of the 21st Century.

John told us in his gospel that, “An hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth.” John 5:28, 29

The great and awesome day of the resurrection is yet future, but the Bible tells us about events in ancient Palestine that foreshadowed that Great Day. In Luke, Chapter Seven, we are told that Jesus once visited Capernaum. There, he listened to the entreaty of the Centurion; afterward, he healed the Centurion's servant.

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<sup>2</sup> Macartney, C.E., *Macartney's Illustrations*, p. 185.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> verse of that same chapter Luke wrote concerning Jesus,

11 And it came about soon afterwards, that He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going with Him, accompanied by a large multitude.

Nain was about 25 miles from Capernaum. On foot, Jesus could have made the trip from Capernaum to Nain by evening. Evening was when the Jews conducted their funerals.

Alfred Edersheim says that from the elevation on which the city stood we can look northward across the plain to the wooded mount Tabor. In the distance, stands the snow-capped Mount Hermon. In the west, beyond the rising hills, lies Nazareth. To the east is Endor. The Lord would have approached Nain from Endor.<sup>3</sup>

So, on this day two processions approached one another—two processions with altogether different purposes. Luke wrote,

Luke 7:12 Now as He approached the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and a sizable crowd from the city was with her. 13 And when the Lord saw her, he felt compassion for her, and said to her, “Do not weep.” 14 And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise!”

15 And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother. 16 And fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!”

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<sup>3</sup> Edersheim, A., *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. S. 1:553.

As the only son of his mother the young man was the widow's sole means of support. Jesus felt compassion for this widow, so He consoled her, and then gave her son back to her.

Hope now replaced despair. Consolation and joy came to replace grief. The risen son could now look after his mother—he could serve her. This resurrection was the gift of life to a young man who had died young, but it was also a resurrection unto service.

Note also, that the people in the funeral procession went from grief to fear and to joy.

A number of years ago in Michigan, a little child of great promise died. As she lay in the tiny casket someone placed in the child's lifeless hands a beautiful bouquet. In the center of the bouquet was an unopened bud of the Rose of Sharon. The bud symbolized the beauty of what might have been.

At the close of the services, and before she was taken to her final resting place, the loved ones gathered about the coffin for their farewell. But as they looked on they discovered that a wonderful thing had happened. The bud of the Rose of Sharon had become a flower in full bloom while still in the child's hand.

The hope of life is that it will come to full bloom in the power of maturity. This is why we feel such a greater sense of loss when a child dies. They, and we alike, are cheated by death. Yet in the face of this most dismal of partings rises the hope of the resurrection. The resurrection is the fulfillment of all the failures, losses and shortcomings of this life. In the resurrection we expect to see lives that have been cut short here to bloom in the full power of everlasting life.

The Lord told the widow—the mother of the young man of Nain—“Do not weep.” All is not lost.

In Mark, Chapter Five, Mark says that Jesus was beside the sea, and a great multitude with Him...

5:22 And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet <sup>23</sup> and begged Him earnestly, saying, “My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live.”

35 While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, “Your daughter has died; why trouble the teacher anymore?” (Mark 5:22-35).

In this message we can hear the typical human attitude. Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher with something that cannot be remedied? There is nothing left but mourning, despair. It is futile to press the issue any more. No one can overcome death! Can he?

But Jesus knows nothing of futility and despair. He can overcome death. Mark continues,

Mark 5:36 But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, “Do not be afraid any longer, only believe.”

37 And He allowed no one to follow with Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. 38 And they came to the house of the synagogue official; and He beheld a commotion, and the people loudly weeping and wailing. 39 And entering in, He said to them, “Why make a commotion and weep?” The child has not died, but is asleep.”

40 And they began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, he took along the child's father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was. 41 And taking the child by the hand, He said to her, “Talitha cum!” (Which translated means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise!”)

42 And immediately the girl got up and began to walk; for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded. 43 And He gave them strict orders that no one should

know about this; and He said that something should be given her to eat.

With two words Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead and gave her back to her parents. The people who were there went from fear and futility to being astounded.

The writer of Hebrews said,

Hebrews 2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

Satan does indeed have the power to slay, but Jesus has the power to raise from the dead.

In John the Eleventh Chapter we read about an even more astonishing event that occurred near the close of Jesus' ministry,

11:1 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. 3 Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."

Jesus was in Perea when the message came to Him.

11:4 When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. 7 Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

8 The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?"

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11:11 These things He said, and after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.” 12 Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.”

Edersheim says that the rabbis—the Jewish teachers of that time—frequently used the term “to sleep” instead of “to die.” The word “demakh” meant “to sleep” in the sense of an overpowering and oppressive sleep.<sup>4</sup>

11:13 However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. 14 Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. 15 “And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.”

The village of Bethany lay on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, not far from where the road to Jericho descends to the Jordan valley. The name of the town today is called El-Azariyeh, from Eleazar, or Lazarus. The meaning of Bethany has been given as the “House of Dates,” but more likely it means, “House of Misery.” For so it was on the day Jesus returned.<sup>5</sup>

11:17 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. 19 And many of the Jews had joined the women

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<sup>4</sup> Within, ‘the tumult’ and weeping, the wail of the mourners, real or hired, and the melancholy sound of the mourning flutes—sad preparation for, and pageantry of, an Eastern funeral—broke with dismal discord on the majestic calm of assured victory over death, with which Jesus had entered the house of mourning. But even so He would tell it them, as so often in like circumstances He tells it to us, that the damsel was not dead, but only sleeping. The Rabbis also frequently have the expression ‘to sleep’ (*demakh* דמך, or דמך, when the sleep is overpowering and oppressive), instead of ‘to die.’ It may well have been that Jesus made use of this word of double meaning in some such manner as this: *Talyetha dimkhath*, ‘the maiden sleepeth.’ And they understood Him well in their own way, yet understood Him not at all. Edersheim, Alfred: *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. S. 1:630.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, William, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, “Bethany.”

around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. 20 Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. 21 Then Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 “But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”

What Martha said to Jesus is puzzling. Was she saying, “You could have prevented his death, but now it’s too late”? Then she expresses confidence in Him, although she must have placed limits on what she thought He could do.

11:23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

24 Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Here Martha shows that her expectations of rising from the dead are distant, in the future, not on the day that Jesus came to visit. Yet Jesus had other thoughts.

11:25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 “And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

27 She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

Is Martha surprised? Rebuked? Corrected? Whatever she may have thought her answer still does not show that she expected what was to follow.

11:28 And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, “The Teacher has come and is calling for you.”

29 As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him.

30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him.



- 31 Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, “She is going to the tomb to weep there.”
- 32 Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”

These were also Martha’s words! It’s like saying, “You can prevent, but you cannot remedy.”

- 11:33 Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.
- 34 And He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.”
- 35 Jesus wept.
- 36 Then the Jews said, “See how He loved him!”
- 37 And some of them said, “Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?”

Even the bystanders held the same opinion. Jesus can prevent, but he could not reverse the condition into which Lazarus had fallen. Who could do that? Lazarus was dead, and had been dead for four days.

- 11:38 Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.”
- 40 Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”
- 41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 “And I know that You always

hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.” 43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!”

44 And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.”

Jesus had freed Lazarus of the fetters of the grave, and He had but called to him. Where before there had been weeping, there is now joy and exulting. Jesus had called to a dead man who had been buried in his tomb for four days, and the dead man had heard his voice. Lazarus arose because even Death cannot resist its Master.

In the Gospel of Mark it is written of the crucifixion,

Mark 15:46 Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were looking on to see where He was laid.

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. 2 Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. 3 They were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” 4 Looking up, they \*saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. 5 Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. 6 And he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him.

Not many days later, Peter spoke the following to the men of Judaea,

**Acts 2:22** “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— 23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

It is impossible for death to hold Jesus in its power.

In the gospels the writers have preserved for us the records of people whom Jesus raised from the dead. Among them were three,

- 1) The son of the widow of Nain, a dead man on his way to the cemetery.
- 2) The daughter of Jairus, a girl who had just died.
- 3) Lazarus of Bethany, a man who had been dead four days.

Their loved ones and the ones who looked on thought Jesus could prevent death, but could not overcome it. The truth is He can do both, and at any point; He can raise the newly dead, and He can raise those dead for a day but not yet in their tomb. Greater still He can raise those whose bodies have lain in the tombs for many days. And He will.

In the buried and forgotten world of the catacombs of ancient Rome, where the early Christians buried their dead, there are chambers where services for the dead were held, and where we can see inscribed on the walls and ceilings scenes from the Old and the New Testament. Among the most frequent are Noah and the Ark, Jonah and the sea monster, the sacrifice of Isaac, and Christ the Good Shepherd, with the lamb in His arms.

On each side of the narrow passages that lead to the chambers are the niches into which the bodies of the dead were pushed; and on the stone or

cement that seals the rough tombs we can still read the names in Latin and Greek. One inscription reads: “Gordian, the courier from Gaul, strangled for the faith. Rests in peace.” Another says: “Victoria, in peace and in Christ.” Then we see an inscription in Latin that reads: “Tentianus vivit” –that is, “Tentianus lives!”

This is an inscription that has survived the centuries for a Christian who will survive in eternity. Tentianus will outlive his inscription. Tentianus lives!<sup>6</sup>

Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

1 Corinthians 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory. 55 “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are reminded once again of what Jesus said to Martha,

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 “And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

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<sup>6</sup> Macartney, “hope.” And another unknown author.

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