

**Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse –  
Easter Sunday March 23rd 2008 The Raising of Lazarus John 11:1-44**

Jesus needed friends just as much as you or I. Apart from the 12 disciples and within that the inner circle of 3, He also had Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha who were among his closest friends. It seems that Lazarus was well-connected judging by the prominent Jews who attended his funeral, and Jesus would have been treated to some sumptuous hospitality when He stayed with them. The house in Bethany was something of a bolt-hole for Jesus where He could receive after He had been constantly giving out.

So it is surprising that when He received the message from the two sisters that Lazarus was sick He did not rush off to his bed-side.

So what was Jesus doing for those two days? Why didn't He come to the aid of his friend immediately and heal him? We can surmise that He was praying and thinking - for wisdom and guidance knowing full well that this journey to Bethany, just outside Jerusalem would be his last. Even though raising someone from the dead is a fantastic sign that would stimulate faith, it would also stir up opposition from the authorities. So Jesus was asking the Father whether this was indeed the time and the hour He had spoken of. So He announced to His disciples 'let's go!' They thought He was crazy, except Thomas who realised that even if we die with Jesus we will be walking in the light rather than press ahead with our own plans and ambitions.

For the cross of Jesus is not Satan's victory but the glory of God, as it turns out; not the death of God, but the defeat of darkness; not the end of the world, but the beginning of a new one; not the loss of hope but the arrival of faith. On the cross Jesus' last words were: 'It is finished!' – the debt of our sin has been paid for. So whoever believes in Jesus shall not perish but have everlasting life. This story teaches us that resurrection is not an add-on, one of those embarrassing concepts that we try to fit into our rational world, but the first thought that makes sense of everything else.

So, as Jesus asked Martha, we have to ask the question of ourselves, as we face our own death, not about the size of our bank balance or our achievements, but whether we believe that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. And that believing does not mean we are not allowed to cry. Jesus Himself was deeply moved at the death of His friend. But we grieve, as Paul says, not as those without hope; because once you believe, then even death is not a threat but an anticipation of something even more wonderful. Because for the one who dies in Christ death is no more than sleep, as Jesus said of Lazarus.

So Jesus goes to the tomb of Lazarus and shouts 'Lazarus, come out!' And the dead man came out with his hands and feet and face still wrapped in the burial shroud. Eventually of course Lazarus grew old and died again, but this time it was different because this time he knew the One who didn't just come back from the dead but passed through death. Jesus emerged completely free from the trappings of death, and stands before us now with the power of an indestructible life, offering us life.