

More Powerful than Death

He's dead. She has died. Those are the words we dread to hear. They are especially painful when someone close to us, someone who has meant a lot to us has died.

How are we expected to cope when the hurt that comes with death hits us and knocks us for a six?

How can we deal with the pain, the emptiness, the questioning, the helplessness, and the yearning for things to be different?

A father tells of his experience. This is what he said, The rays of a late morning sun struck me full on the face as I stepped through the door of the hospital. I had spent several hours with my sobbing wife. Now I was about to keep the appointment that would prove to be the emotional climax of the day my world collapsed.

I made my way to a large white house. I followed the owner into a large room, where he soon left me alone. I slowly made my way across a thick rug on the floor to a table on the far side of the room. Upon that table was a white box. I stood before that white box for endless eternities before I finally summoned enough courage to look over the top and down into the white box, at the lifeless body of my son.

I'm sure that Mary and Martha must have experienced something like this when Lazarus died. He had been sick. They had sent a message to tell Jesus that Lazarus was ill.

But Jesus didn't come straight away.

There is no doubt that Jesus loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus dearly, but he deliberately stalls for two days, and so by the time he gets to Bethany, Lazarus had already died. In fact the funeral has already happened, and the body of Lazarus has been the grave for **four days**.

Death brings an end to life in this world.

I believe there is a tinge of rebuke and regret in Martha's words that Jesus had taken so long to get there. She said, "**If you had been here, Lord, my brother would not have died!**"

Jesus sees the tears and the grief, and he weeps with them. Jesus weeps **not** because he is sad that Lazarus has left this life. He made a point earlier to his disciples that death of Lazarus was only **temporary**.

He had told his disciples that there was a purpose behind the death of his good friend. Through this tragedy, he wanted them to realise that he really is the Son of God and so believe in him.

Jesus weeps with Mary and Martha because he knows what **pain** and **sense of loss** death brings. His tears are tears of compassion – he can see how much the two women are hurting and how deeply the death of Lazarus has affected them.

He is saddened at the power that death has and the terrible suffering it causes.

Jesus weeps because it's not right that a life is suddenly cut short because of illness or an accident. He hates death as much as anybody else.

- He weeps because he knows that that raising of Lazarus will lead to his own death.
- He weeps because of the grief and pain that his own death will bring into the lives of those whom he loves, his own mother and the disciples.

Perhaps he is also saddened by the **lack of trust**.

Yes, they believed he could heal the sick, the blind and the paralysed and feed a large crowd of people from a boy's lunch box, but death – that was another thing.

Death is so final.

Jesus may have brought the daughter of Jairus back to life and raised the widow's son at Nain – they were brought back to life soon after their deaths.

But Lazarus has been dead in the grave for four days.

He was already decomposing.

It was beyond their wildest imaginations to think that Jesus could raise a person in such a condition.

Even Martha must have been surprised.

She had earlier confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, but had no idea that Jesus had such power **even over death**.

As far as those gathered at the grave that day were concerned, death is death. When it comes, it is final - absolute - **the end**.

Jesus shouted, **“Lazarus, come out”** and a dead man – a once dead man - walked out from the tomb; his hands, feet and face still bound up with the linen burial cloths.

A few years ago, a letter was sent to a deceased person by a Department of Social Services. It read as follows:

“Your social security cheques will be stopped in March because we received notice that you had passed away. May God bless you. You may reapply if there is a change in your circumstances.”

Unless your name is Lazarus, there haven't been too many who have seen a change in those circumstances!

Lazarus was dead.

At the command of Jesus, he is reunited with his sisters, and friends and Jesus. Death had done its worst but Jesus changed their mourning into dancing and joy.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem where he will experience the fear and dread, the pain and suffering that death brings.

Straight after this incident at Bethany, we hear of Caiaphas and the Council plotting against Jesus to find a way to kill him without causing too much of a disturbance.

Jesus is sentenced to death and - on the cross – He deals with the cause of our death – our sin.

Jesus died. But he came alive again. His resurrection was an announcement to the whole world that,

death has been swallowed up in victory.

There is now nothing to be afraid of. Now on the other side of death there is the glorious hope of life, eternal life, life in heaven, a **blissful life, a perfect life**. This life is something to look forward to, not with fear, but with confidence.

Death is a very powerful force in our world and in our lives. When it strikes close to us, it's dreadful power is felt to the very core of our being. But as powerful as death might be, there is one who is even more powerful – **the risen Jesus**.

One day he will call to us as he called out to Lazarus, and we too, will walk out of the tomb. Lazarus would eventually die again, but we shall be raised to life forever in heaven. **This will be a new life**, a life without the present hurts and hindrances, a life with all those saints who have gone before us.

When Martin Luther's daughter, Magdalena, was fourteen years old, she was taken sick and lay dying. Luther prayed, **"O God, I love her so. But nevertheless, your will be done."**

As they laid her to rest, he said, **"Oh my dear Magdalena, you will rise and shine like the stars in the sun. How strange to be so sorrowful, and yet to know, that all is at peace - that all is well."**

In our hour of need, when death causes us pain and grief, God's Spirit reminds us through the promises of the Scriptures that we have a Saviour who is ready to comfort us, make us calm and sympathise with us. And when our last hour comes, we are sure that we will not walk alone but walk in the presence of our loving Saviour.

Jesus assures us,

"Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; and those who live and believe in me will never die".