

You are leaving the church building. The funeral is over. The burial is next. Ahead of you walk six men who carry the coffin that carries the body of your son. Your only son. You're numb from the sorrow. Stunned. You lost your husband, and now you've lost your son. Now you have no family. If you had more tears, you'd weep. If you had any more faith, you'd pray. But both are in short supply, so you do neither. You just stare at the back of the wooden box. Suddenly it stops. The pallbearers have stopped. You stop.

A man has stepped in front of the casket. You don't know him. You've never seen him. He wasn't at the funeral. He dressed in corduroy coat and jeans. You have no idea what he is doing. But before you can object, he steps up to you and says, "Don't cry." Don't cry? Don't cry? This is a funeral. My son is dead. Don't cry? Who are you to tell me not to cry? Those are your thoughts, but they never become your words. Because before you can speak, he acts. He turns back to the coffin, places his hand on it, and says in a loud voice. Young man, I tell you, get up!" Now just a minute, one of the pallbearers objects. But the sentence is interrupted by a sudden movement in the casket. The men look at one another and lower it quickly to the ground. It's a good thing they do, because as soon as it touches the sidewalk the lid slowly opens.

Sounds like something from the sci-fi channel. It's not. It's right out of the Gospel of Luke. It says there, "He went up and touched the coffin, and the people who were carrying it stopped. Jesus said, "Young man, I tell you, get up!" And the son sat up and began to talk."

What's odd about that verse? You got it. Dead people don't sit up. Dead people don't talk. Dead people don't leave their coffins. Unless Jesus shows up. Because when Jesus shows up, you never know what might happen. In fact, it is no longer a grave situation.

Jairus can tell you. His daughter was already dead. The mourners were already at the house. The funeral had begun. The people thought the best Jesus could do was offer some kind words about Jairus's girl. Jesus had some words all right. Not about the girl, but for the girl. My child, stand up!" The next thing the father knew, she was eating, Jesus was smiling, and the hired mourners were sent home early.

That brings us to today's story. A woman named Martha hoped Jesus would show up to heal her brother Lazarus. He didn't. Then she hoped he'd show up to bury Lazarus, at least show up for the funeral. He didn't. By the time he made it to Bethany, Lazarus was 4 days buried and Martha was wondering what kind of friend Jesus was. When death strikes a family member today, are we like Martha? Do we sometimes question where are you Jesus? What kind of friend are you anyway? Today, it is time for all of us to see Jesus is right here with us, and even death is No Longer a Grave situation.

Jesus is now approaching the village of Bethany. Lazarus has been dead for 4 days. Martha hears that Jesus is at the edge of town, so she storms out to meet him. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Can you hear the hurt in those words. Hurt and disappointment. The one man who could have made a difference didn't, and Martha wants to know why.

Maybe you do, too. Maybe you've done what Martha did. Someone you love ventures near the edge of life, and you turn to Jesus for help. You, like Martha, turn to

the only one who can pull a person from the ledge of death. You ask Jesus to give a hand. But No response. Your loved one gets worse, and then dies!

Martha must have thought. Surely, he'll come. Didn't he aid the paralytic? Didn't he help the leper? Didn't he give sight to the blind? And they hardly knew Jesus. But Lazarus was his friend. We're like family. Doesn't Jesus come to Bethany now and then and spend the weekend? Doesn't he eat at our table? When he hears that Lazarus is sick, he'll be here in a heartbeat!

But the knock at the door never came. Jesus never appeared. Not to help. Not to heal. Not to bury. And now, four days later, he finally shows up. The funeral is over. The body is buried, the grave is sealed. And Martha is hurt. Her words have been echoed in a thousand cemeteries. "If you had been here, my brother would not have died."

If you were doing your part God, my husband would have survived. If you'd done what was right, Lord, my baby would have lived. If only you'd heard my prayer, God my arms wouldn't be empty. The grave unearths our view of God. When we face death, our definition of God is challenged. Which, in turn, challenges our faith. Which leads me to ask the grave question. Why is it that we interpret the presence of death as the absence of God? Why do we think that if the body is not healed then God is not near? Is healing the only way God demonstrates his presence?

Sometimes we think so. And as a result, when God doesn't answer our prayers for healing with a yes, we get angry. Resentful. Blame replaces belief. If you had been here doing your part, God, then this death would not have happened. It is distressing that this view of God has no place for death.

But don't be tricked friend. At the death of a Christian, Jesus is very near. He has a heart for your hurt. Please understand too, he didn't raise the dead for the sake of the dead. I sometimes have wondered in Jesus ministry why he only raised three people from the dead. Could it be because he got no volunteers. Could it be because he knew he was doing them no real favors by bringing them back to this earth. Could it be the last place you'd want to be after spending time in heaven is to come back to this earth?

Jesus raised the dead for the sake of the living. And thus he says in our text, "Lazarus, come out!" Martha was silent as Jesus commanded. The mourners were quiet. No one stirred as Jesus stood face to face with the rockhewn tomb and demanded that it release his friend. No one stirred, that is except for Lazarus. Deep, within the tomb, he moved. His stilled heart began to beat. Wrapped eyes popped open. Wooden fingers lifted. And a mummied man in a tomb sat up. And want to know what happened next? Let John tell you in verse 44, "The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with pieces of cloth, and a cloth around his face. There it is again. Did you see it? The dead man came out. What's wrong with this picture? Dead men don't walk out of tombs. What kind of God is this? He is the God who holds the keys to life and death. The kind of God you want present at your funeral. All power is given to him in heaven and on earth. At the gravesite he won't let you down. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Yes friend, like Lazarus, the dead will rise again. The Sadducees who lived in the days of Christ denied the resurrection. They held that there was no life after death and that death was the end. Even so today there are groups of individuals who seem to

think that man is nothing more than an animal-that there is no life beyond the grave, that death is simply the end. Our risen Lord gives us a blessed assurance, "He that believes in me though he were dead yet shall he live." On another occasion Jesus announced: "The hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth;

Even the believers of the Old Testament had the assurance of a resurrection, for Job exclaimed: "I know that my redeemer lives, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another." Christians will live again. As glorious as it is, Christ not only promises his believers a resurrection; He even goes a step further in our text and asserts that Christians never really die. "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." This is no just beautiful poetry. Our blessed Savior meant every word. Those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin and have put their hope in him never really die. Didn't your loved one, really die? No. Not really.

We have to remember that man is made of two parts. When God created Adam He first formed his body out of the dust of the ground. That was one part. Then He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he became a living soul. That was the second part. Every man born into the world is made of these two parts, body and soul. Death is nothing more nor less than the separation of the two-the time when the body returns unto the dust from where it came and the soul returns to God who gave it. The soul never dies. The soul of the unbeliever goes to eternal damnation in hell, the soul of the believer to the eternal glories of heaven. Death for the believer is simply a change of place-a most wonderful experience. As soon as a believer closes his eyes in sleep here they are already open on the other side, beholding the Lamb of God on the throne and all the holy angels surrounding Him.

Faraday, a renowned scientist of some years past, had a young man working for him in his laboratory. By accident this young man knocked a golden goblet off a shelf into a vat of acid. Before he could rescue it, it had completely disintegrated in the acid. Almost at the point of tears the young man confessed what had happened to this great scientist. Faraday begged him not to worry and poured some chemicals into the vat. The particles of gold settled on the bottom, the acid was poured off, and another golden goblet was formed much more beautiful than the first because all the dirt and impurities had been removed in the process. Martha knew what would happen on the last day. The body of her brother would rise from the dead and be reunited with his soul in heaven. She says, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." As the Bible says, it is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."

The same voice that awoke the boy near Nain, that stirred the still daughter of Jairus, that awakened the corpse of Lazarus-the same voice will speak again. The earth and the sea will give up their dead. There will be no more death. Jesus made sure of that. Thank God, we understand the grave fact! Amen....