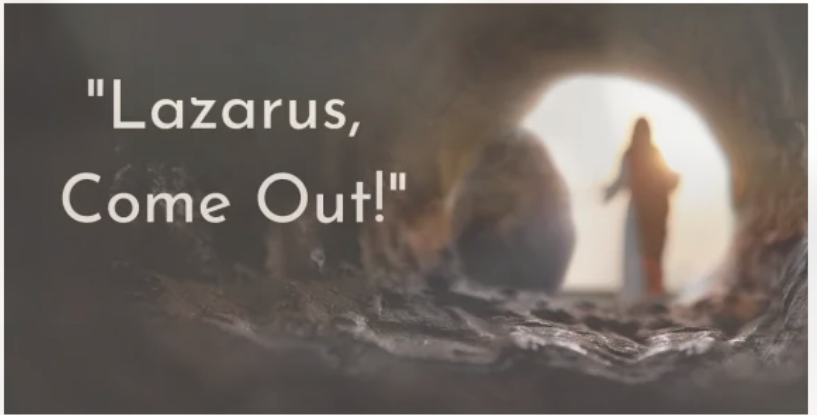


August 17-21, 2024 Edition

Following
The Year^(s) Of ^Jesus Part 241
Jesus & Lazarus

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

August 16, 2026



"Lazarus,
Come Out!"

When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday: So although Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, he stayed where he was for the next two days. Finally, he said to his disciples, "Let's go back to Judea." But his disciples objected. "Rabbi," they said, "only a few days ago the people in Judea were trying to stone you. Are you going there again?" John 11:5-8 (NLT)

Reflection: Now we start heading into the part of the story of Jesus' life that is moving very quickly toward His sacrifice on the cross. If you've been with us through this whole series you might remember that during His 3 1/2 year ministry on this earth Jesus would split His time between the southern part of Israel (the area around Jerusalem) and the northern part of Israel (the area where He grew up and where most of His disciples were from, the area around the sea of Galilee).

He would spend time in one area preaching and teaching and healing and feeding the hungry and casting out demons until He made the religious leaders so mad they wanted to kill Him, then He would go to the other area until they were spitting (and killing) mad and He'd go back to where they had been given some time to cool down til He made them mad again. He pretty much travelled back and forth during His entire ministry.

Until now.

Now His time has come. He knows it. He's been telling His followers that it's coming. They still don't understand but they will very soon. We looked last week at Jesus' diatribe against the Pharisees (if you want to get a really good idea of what that was like go to YouTube and search for "Woe to you pharisees Matthew Visual Bible" and watch all of Matthew chapter 23... it's an eye opening experience). No wonder they want Him dead. Jesus is a threat to their power and their way of life. Jesus is making them mad and He's not giving them time to cool down anymore.

But His followers don't know that yet. He seems to be following His normal pattern. They're mad in Jerusalem so Jesus goes north... but not very far this time. They hang out and wait. What are they waiting for? Turns out they were waiting for an opportunity.

When they hear that Lazarus is sick Jesus doesn't go anywhere... at first. I imagine the disciples are relieved. Finally He's showing some sense. But when after two days Jesus gets up and say, "let's go", everybody's anxious. They want to kill you down there. Not enough time has passed... they need a longer cooling off period.

But Jesus won't be dissuaded. And the disciples are so sure of what's going to happen that Thomas (the guy we now call "Doubting Thomas" because he had a tough time believing in the resurrection until he saw Jesus himself) says to everyone,

Come along. We might as well die with him. John 11:16 (NLT)

And what happens when Jesus gets back to Lazarus is pretty amazing. We see a story unfold that is a snapshot into the very heart of Jesus' mission on this earth (more on that tomorrow). But we also see an event that seals Jesus' death. He finally pushes the religious leaders to the point where they will do whatever it costs to kill Him.

And so we see... in spite of the stress, the fear, the danger and the hatred... Jesus pushes forward with His mission and so begins the week that would usher in His death on the cross. As we march toward Good Friday and then Easter ourselves spend some time thinking about what this must have been like for Jesus... and for the ones who loved Him deeply.

Tuesday: "Lazarus died. And I am glad for your sakes that I wasn't there. You're about to be given new grounds for believing. Now let's go to him." That's when Thomas... said, "Come along. We might as well die with him." John 11:14-16 (NLT)

I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done. John 14:12 (NLT)

Reflection: One thing that this story teaches me is that Jesus knew what His mission on this earth was all about. He had come to seek and save the lost. He had come to live the life I should have lived (but never could) and die the death I should have died (but now don't have to) so that I could share in the reward that is by all rights His alone (but He is delighted to share with me).

You and I also have a mission on this earth. Did you notice the second scripture for today? Jesus says that anyone who believes in Him will do the "same works I have done."

Huh?

How does that work? I mean, think about it. He's saying this to His friends in John chapter 14. Does anyone remember what He's done prior to that in the book of John? How about feed thousands of people with just a couple of loaves of bread and a few fish? How about heal the blind, paralyzed, demon possessed and leprous. Not to mention the miracle of how He treated people who were outcasts in their culture. And then in John chapter 11 He opens a tomb that has been sealed for 4 days and calls on the dead guy to get up and come out and what happens... out comes the dead guy!

And now He says that if I believe I'll do the same things as He did?

Huh?

I don't know about you but I've never had quite the same results when I've prayed for miracles as Jesus did/does. Don't get me wrong... I've seen miracles happen in response to prayer. In my own life and the lives of those I love. But I can't control outcomes the way Jesus did. I have to ask boldly for what I want and then leave my request in the hands of God to do what will be best for everyone involved.

So then what does He mean by me doing the same works He did? Well, I think that means that if we believe in Him then we will join Him in His assault on hunger, isolation, loneliness, sickness, disease, poverty, injustice & even death itself. Obviously we can't all be involved in every front of Jesus' battle against the things that threaten the people of this world. But we can all do something.

That's where your mission on this earth comes in. I know it can be overwhelming. But God isn't looking for you to be the savior of the world. That role has already been fulfilled. That job has already been accomplished. But He does expect you to find some area that is meaningful to you and where you can make a small difference. And your small difference is important.

In the song, "Do Something", Matthew West has this amazing line:

So I shook my hand at Heaven and said, "God, why don't You do something!"
And He said, "I did... I created you!"

I know that it may seem like our contribution doesn't really make a difference but it does. A few years ago a group of 14 people from Riverside Community Church went to Tecate, Mexico to work on a church being built there. The church that they worked on exists because somebody looked at a situation (no building for a community of believers to worship in, bless the people of their community with and teach children from the neighborhood in) and said, "I can't fix all the problems in Mexico... but I think I could facilitate the building of a church where right now there's only a vacant lot.

And so he did. Now there is a two story building where the pastor and his family live and sleep in the top floor and ministry is done out of the bottom floor. The group from Riverside played just a small part in the building of this facility but everybody's small part has made a HUGE difference in the lives of the people of that neighborhood in Tecate, Mexico.

While they were there they took a day trip to Ensenada to visit a church that is currently meeting on a vacant lot under some old blue tarps. We are praying about God's direction for us and the church there in Ensenada but if we end up going there in the future to help build a building then it will all be because somebody decided to do "something". No, we can't fix the problems in Mexico. But we can something and if enough of us do "something" it will change somebody's world.

And what I've noticed... it's in the doing "something" that we are led into our unique purpose and mission in this world. I never dreamed of being involved in ministry but one time I was asked to be a counsellor at a kids camp (the guy they had lined up had an emergency and couldn't make it) and I thought... why not? I could do that.

And I learned I loved working with people. I loved making a difference in their lives. That week as a counsellor led to my decision to volunteer with the youth at my

church... which led to me deciding to go to college to study the Bible... which lead to me becoming a youth minister which led to me becoming pastor.

And I never would have dreamed how much I would love what I'm doing now and may never have ended up here if I hadn't done "something"... anything to find out what I was good at, what I enjoyed doing.

So how about you? What is your mission on this earth? Don't know? Don't know where to get started? Well, you don't have to be the savior of the world. You will not fix all the worlds problems with your contribution. But God is inviting you to do "something". Maybe you're good with kids. I imagine our church's children's ministry could use some help. Maybe you like older kids... I imagine our church's youth ministry could use help. Maybe you're a musician... then do "something" with your talent that will be blessing to somebody else. Maybe you're good at working with your hands... then do something to be a blessing to somebody else.

It doesn't matter so much what you do... the key to living a blessed life is to do something. So do something.

Wednesday: When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he was told that Lazarus had already been in his grave for four days. Bethany was only a few miles down the road from Jerusalem, and many of the people had come to console Martha and Mary in their loss. When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. But Mary stayed in the house. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again." "Yes," Martha said, "he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day." Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?" "Yes, Lord," she told him. "I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God." John 11:17-27 (NLT)

Reflection: This story is pretty unique. There is so much that we could talk about between Lazarus and Mary and Martha and Jesus' disciples and even Jesus Himself.

So let's talk about Jesus. How does He react to the people who are gathered for Lazarus' funeral (the Jews had a tradition that when someone died the family would take a week to mourn and all of the friends and extended family would come and "sit shiva"... the idea comes from the book of Job where when Job's family is killed, his friends come and sit with him for seven days... in fact the word, "shiva" means "seven"... so to "sit shiva" is to sit for seven days)?

Well Martha is the first one to reach Him. She comes and makes a statement:

Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.

Is it a statement of fact or an accusation? Probably a little of both. And how does Jesus react. He is cool, calm and in control. In fact, He teaches her. He tells her that Lazarus will rise again... I think this is Jesus saying, "Martha... don't stress out... everything is about to change."

See, Jesus knows what's about to happen. So He takes this moment to teach Martha something important. And something truly amazing happens because of it. When Martha agrees that Lazarus will rise again at the "last day" Jesus makes an amazing statement:

I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?

This is amazing. He doesn't say, "let me show you the way to resurrection" or "I will bring the resurrection" or "I will cause the resurrection." No. He says, "I am the resurrection".

What does that mean? Well... since we'll be looking in detail at all seven of the "I am" statements of Jesus in the book of John later in this "year of Jesus" lesson series I don't want to get into this too far. What I hope you'll notice is what Martha says after this:

"Yes, Lord," she told him. "I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God."

I didn't know this until a few years ago but this is one of only two times that we know if during his life on this earth that somebody confesses belief that He is the messiah. The other one is when Peter says it... I knew about that one. I figure just about everybody who's ever spent much time in church probably does. But Martha's amazing confession gets almost no publicity. Why? Is it because she's a woman? Maybe. Or maybe it's just because it's tucked away in this amazing story and so it always gets skipped over. I don't know why but I wanted to make sure you knew about it. This is HUGE.

Tomorrow we'll look at how Jesus responds when Lazarus' other sister comes to see Jesus... but for today I hope you'll see Jesus as Martha did... but not only as Martha saw Him. We need to see Jesus through the eyes not only of Martha but also of her sister Mary. The God Who has stepped into our world to teach us not just the facts about the Bible... but to also enter into our suffering with us. That's the Jesus we will see tomorrow.

Thursday: When Mary arrived and saw Jesus, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled. "Where have you put him?" he asked them. They told him, "Lord, come and see." Then Jesus wept. The people who were standing

nearby said, "See how much he loved him!" But some said, "This man healed a blind man. Couldn't he have kept Lazarus from dying?" John 11:32-37 (NLT)

Reflection: Did you notice that Mary makes the exact same statement/accusation to Jesus as Martha did? If you had only been here my brother would not be dead. How did Jesus react to that statement from Martha? He was calm, cool and in control. He took the opportunity to teach Martha an important lesson. That He was the resurrection and the life.

But with Mary, when she says the exact same thing to Jesus, how does He respond. He is speechless. He is crushed. It's hard to really see it in the english translation of this passage but Greek scholars will tell you that the words used here to describe Jesus' state of mind are weak compared to the greek words they were originally written in.

Jesus had "deep anger" and was "deeply troubled" and later it simply says, "Jesus wept".

Read just about any commentary on this passage that you want to and you'll get the same explanation. Jesus was bellowing with rage. He was wailing in grief. This wasn't a polite case of misty eyes and a couple of polite sobs. Jesus is losing it here. When they say, "Look how much He loved Lazarus" it wasn't because Jesus was quietly mourning... it was because He was visibly stricken by grief and rage.

Why? Why was He mad? I mean, if He knows He's going to resurrect Lazarus (which He does) then why doesn't He just do with Mary what He did with Martha? Just tell her, "wait for it, Mary... things will feel totally different in just about 5 minutes".

Well, I don't think He's mad at Mary or Martha. And I don't think He is grieving for the people who are there mourning Lazarus. I think the reason He's so angry is because He's thinking about every other funeral in the future that He would not interrupt. Funerals where people are devastated by loss and fear and loneliness and pain. And Jesus HATES it.

It's one thing to go to the funeral of someone who has lived a long and amazing life. Judy's grandpa & grandma come to mind. Dene was in her mid 90s and Grandpa Dick was 100. Both of them had lived long, amazing lives. Their departure was sad but it wasn't really devastating. Their celebrations of life were filled with wonder and the thought, "what a life they lived!"

But I've been to other funerals. Where someone died too young... without the chance to really live. Those funerals were full of loss and heartache and pain and fear and grief. Those are the people I think Jesus is grieving for. All the countless people in the future who whose funerals would not be interrupted by Jesus.

And it makes Him bellow with rage. He HATES death and the grave. His mission on this earth was to lessen the blow that death can give us now and to do away with it entirely eventually.

And so Jesus feels what he feels STRONGLY. He's in control with Martha... but He is vulnerable and grieves deeply with Mary. After all... He was human.

Friday: "Roll the stone aside," Jesus told them. But Martha... protested, "Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible." Jesus responded, "Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believe?" John 11:39-40 (NLT)

Reflection: We talked yesterday about the fact that Jesus was human. And He was... but thank God, He wasn't ONLY human.

Have you ever heard someone say (maybe you've said it yourself), "hey, what do you expect, I'm only human!"?

Jesus never said that. He never said anything like that. He never said He wasn't sure what to do. He was fully human, but He was also fully God. Sometimes we struggle with that concept. That's impossible. Nobody can be fully human and fully divine. To which Jesus replies, "watch me".

Think about it. Jesus is constantly bringing together what seem to us to be polar opposites. Jesus says, "the first will be last and the last will be first". We say, "that's not possible," and Jesus says, "watch me". Jesus says, "the servant of all will be the greatest and the greatest will be the servant of all". We say, "that's not possible," and Jesus says, "watch me". Jesus is the lion of Judah and the sacrificial lamb that takes away the sins of the world. We say, "that's not possible," and Jesus says, "watch me". Jesus claims that the greatest explosion of power that has ever been unleashed in the universe came about through the greatest expression of weakness that has ever been witnessed. We say, "that's not possible," and Jesus says, "have you heard of the crucifixion?"

Jesus is human, but thank God, He's not only human. And because of that He not only identifies with our weakness but can do something about it. But we have to move some stuff out of the way if we are ever going to see His power flow into and through our lives.

Have you ever looked around and people who seemed to have more of God's power and blessings flowing into and around and through their lives than you do? Have you ever felt like your prayers don't seem to be as powerful as someone else's prayers? Ever wondered why?

I'm not saying this is universally true... but it may be that there's something you're holding onto that is getting in the way. We talk about this a lot here at Riverside, that God only shares His power with those who are developing the character of His Son. When we stop engaging in character development we are turning off the flow of God's power and blessings. And it only makes sense... for God's power to flow into the life of someone who wasn't growing in humility and integrity and holiness would be a

dangerous combination. It takes the humility of Jesus to keep us from the pride that can so easily trap us when God's power starts flowing into our lives.

So if you're wondering why you're not seeing that power, maybe one thing you could ask yourself is, "what is getting in the way of the flow of God's power?" And it could be a lot of things. It might be a behavior you'd rather not stop doing. It might be a habit. It might be a relationship that you know is toxic and destructive to your spiritual life but you just don't want to let it go. Maybe it's an emotion that you don't want to work on. Whatever it is, it might be blocking the flow of God's power. And He won't force you to get rid of it.

Think about what happens with Martha and Lazarus. Jesus says to roll the stone to the tomb aside. Martha is worried about the practical side of things. But Lord, she says, he stinketh (that's the way the King James Bible puts it.... that's from John 11:39. I think that I quoted that verse more in my elementary and junior high school days than any other verse... we'd look at someone in our class and point at them and say, John 11:39... ;o).

And what does Jesus say? Does He say, "woman, don't back talk me!"? Nope. And He doesn't even just wave His hand and make the stone roll aside Himself (although He could have). Instead He says to her, "Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believe?"

Martha has the stone rolled aside and she SEES the glory of God. In a way few people in the history of the world have seen the glory of God, Martha sees. All because she was willing to trust Jesus and roll the stone aside.

I don't know what's going on in your life today. But if you have something that is blocking you from seeing the glory of God in your life, listen as Jesus says, "get rid of it." Let it go. Roll that stone aside. Until you do you will never see the glory of God that Jesus intends for you to see in your own life.

So let it go (cue the music from Disney's, Frozen ;o)