

**Beyond
Breakthrough**

Beyond Breakthrough

If you enjoyed watching the movie *Breakthrough* perhaps you'll be interested to read my reflections. I would suggest that you ask yourself, "Was there any scene in the movie that particularly impacted me and why?"

The scene that touched me most comes after the doctor had given up hope of re-starting John Smith's heart. His mother was alone in the room sobbing beside the lifeless body of her only son. This reminded me of another tragic scene where Jesus encountered a weeping widow accompanying a funeral procession carrying the dead body of her only son. Clearly both of these mothers, felt deep anguish at losing their sons. In Luke 7 Jesus overflows with compassion at seeing the deep loss of the widow and he raises her son back to life. In a similar way God sees Joyce's broken heart and answers her prayer by making her son's heart start pumping again! But there's a striking difference.

The widow's son was completely restored to life, whereas John Smith barely recovered. It is true, Joyce felt incredibly thankful having her son's heart kick-started so dramatically. It rekindled her hope. However, her son didn't immediately regain consciousness, in fact, he barely clung to life by means of life support for the next three days. Furthermore, on the last day before the critical turn-around, John's temperature rose to 104! The question naturally arises, "Considering that the widow's son was **immediately** restored to full health, couldn't God also do this for Joyce's son?" Of course, God could have done this, but perhaps we should humbly acknowledge that God must have had a good reason for delaying John's full recovery.

The account where Jesus consoled the widow of Nain reminds me of another tragic scenario involving the burial of Lazarus, a personal friend of Jesus. Mary and Martha, the two sisters of the deceased man, were grieving at the graveside and Jesus also

end in death. No, it happened for the **glory** of God." The second time was when Jesus told them, "Roll the tombstone aside," but Mary protested because the stench would be horrible. "Jesus responded, 'Didn't I tell you that you would see God's **glory** if you believe?'" (John 11:39-40)

God was **glorified** in the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. So let us consider how John Smith's 'resurrection' **glorified** God. We see this in the church service when dozens of people from the wider St. Louis community gathered to celebrate John's miraculous recovery in answer to the prayers of literally hundreds of people. It was awe-inspiring to see so many, including firefighters and medical personnel coming together, each one having played a vital role in their own way. There was a beautiful display of unity and love testifying to the Spirit of Jesus working in his people. As Jesus himself prayed; "I have given them the **glory** you gave me, so that **they may be one** as we are **one**." (John 17:22, bold added) Although many people were involved in John Smith's rescue and recovery, a supernatural intervention is the only way to explain the miracle. This was clear to Pastor Jason and to John's family. That is why they expressed their heart-felt gratitude to God and gave him all the **credit** he deserved.

All Bible quotes are taken from the New Living Translation.

If you have believed in Jesus as God's Messiah and Saviour please email me as I would like to encourage you in your spiritual journey: rolandclarke1139@yahoo.com

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and some people who came to visit the family seemed hopelessly resigned to the idea that death would win. Pastor Jason Noble, who spent countless hours supporting Joyce through these critical days, commended Joyce for fighting passionately to save her son, saying, "I've never seen such a fierce Mama bear." Is it not appropriate to see her intense fervor as reflecting, albeit imperfectly, Christ's godly anger against death?

In conclusion it's fitting to ask, "What was the outcome when people saw God's power gloriously displayed in raising Lazarus from the dead?" Martha recognized and believed in Jesus as God's Messiah – the One who would come and bring salvation fulfilling the Scriptures. The prophets foretold that the Messiah would "be a light to the Gentiles, and bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6) When Jesus finally came he did just that, by dying as God's perfect Lamb to take away the sins of the world. (John 1:20) Not only so, Jesus conquered the grave, when he rose from the dead, demolishing death forever.

Accomplishing this phenomenal feat means that Jesus could rightfully claim, "I hold the keys of death and the grave." (Revelation 1:18) which echo his words to Martha at Lazarus's graveside, "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." (John 11:25-26)

Jesus prayed to his heavenly Father these profound words shortly before going through the ordeal of crucifixion, "this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. I brought **glory to you** here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do." (John 17:3-4)

Endnote: Glory to God

How fitting it is that Christ '**glorified**' God twice in the story of Lazarus: The first time in John 11:5, "Lazarus's sickness will not

wept. There is important background leading up to this sad scene which provides wider perspective and helps us understand that in spite of our heartache God works all things for the good of those who love him.

Why did Jesus wait before going to help Lazarus after he got the message of his illness? Why did God allow John Smith's mother to go through the agony of a three day wait?

A clue towards answering this perplexing question is provided earlier in the story of Lazarus. The story begins by telling us;

A man named Lazarus was sick. He lived in Bethany with his sisters, Mary and Martha. This is the Mary who later poured the expensive perfume on the Lord's feet and wiped them with her hair. Her brother, Lazarus, was sick. So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, "Lord, your dear friend is very sick."

But when Jesus heard about it he said, "Lazarus's sickness will not end in death. No, it happened for the glory of God so that the Son of God will receive glory from this." 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." (John 11:1-7)

Jesus deliberately waited for a period of two days before going back to Judea to see Mary and Martha. This delay was purposeful. Jesus knew that by the time he reached Bethany Lazarus would already be dead and buried. Make no mistake, Jesus wanted Mary, Martha and his disciples to see a fuller demonstration of God's glory. If he had come earlier, undoubtedly they would have seen Christ perform a marvelous healing that would have inspired praise to God. But because of the delay they witnessed something even more awe-inspiring and God-honoring – a dead man dramatically raised to life!

Before we trace this theme of rescue-from-death as it unfolds throughout the Bible, we need to pause and notice something crucial in the story of Lazarus. Not only did Jesus weep, he also became deeply troubled, even angry. Verse 33 says that “a deep anger welled up within him.” Again in verse 38 we see this holy anger persisting: “Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb.”

In a sense this is similar to what happened with John Smith's mother. Knowing that God had answered her prayer by miraculously causing his heart to start beating, she was inspired to fight on to save her son's life. During the three days when John was unconscious the movie shows numerous examples of Joyce fighting to save him. This included rebuking a doctor for saying negative words in the presence of her son which could dishearten him and undermine his will to live. She admitted feeling deep anger but later confessed she didn't always express these strong feelings appropriately. Even so, it is no secret that anger is one of several basic human responses to death. Furthermore, the idea of resisting death and fighting to save life is a key aspect of the whole Bible.

The first time death is mentioned in the Bible is the account of Adam and Eve. Some time after God placed Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden the Bible tells us that they disobeyed God and were handed the death sentence, having been forewarned of this consequence. However, God didn't abandon them to their fate. He promised to provide a rescuer, declaring that a seed (child) of the woman would (eventually) come to crush the serpent's head. (Genesis 3:15; cf. Revelation 12)

The theme of rescue and salvation is found over and over again throughout the Old Testament. God is exalted as praiseworthy because he is the heroic 'warrior' who rescues people's lives, granting escape from death, often very dramatically. For example, we read in Exodus 15; “Then Moses and the people of

Israel sang this song to the Lord: 'I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; he has hurled both horse and rider into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song; he has given me victory. This is my God, and I will praise him—my father's God, and I will exalt him! The Lord is a warrior; Yahweh is his name!'” This song was their response to God having parted the Red Sea enabling the Israelites to escape certain death.

In a similar way, the Psalmist exalts the Lord in song, “Praise the Lord; praise God our savior! ... Our God is a God who saves! The Sovereign Lord rescues us from death.” (Psalm 68:19-20; cf. Isaiah 49:24-26). Isaiah 25:7-9 is another key passage that uses warlike imagery, foretelling a day when God will 'destroy' death forever and bring salvation.

On this mountain (Zion) he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces... The Lord has spoken. In that day they will say, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us... let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”

This prophecy uses strong terms, such as **destroy** and **swallow up** to further underscore God as a heroic warrior. This warlike imagery helps us understand the holy anger Jesus felt as he stood in front of Lazarus's grave. He saw death for what it truly is – a terrible **enemy**. As Scripture declares in 1 Corinthians 15:25-26, Jesus “must reign until he has put all his **enemies** under his feet. The last **enemy** to be destroyed is death.”

We shouldn't be surprised, therefore, that Christ felt holy anger. This encounter at Lazarus's grave foreshadowed his final clash with the powers of death knowing death would be destroyed forever. Neither should we be surprised at seeing Joyce Smith feeling deeply troubled, even angry, when certain medical staff