

# The Power to Raise the Dead

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A man was lost in the jungle all alone. He sensed that he was being stalked. As he began to run he heard the terrifying roar of a large tiger. Screaming, the man raced for his life. Exhausted, every muscle aching, he dared not stop. Ahead the pathway dropped from view down into a river. With the tiger nearly upon him, he leaped for a vine hanging down from overarching trees. He caught it, then desperately clung to it. The tiger paced along the edge, roaring, saliva dripping from its mouth. With his heart still pounding, the man inched down the vine towards safety. But suddenly he stopped, stock still. What was that? A quiet swishing in the water. To his horror, he saw an immense crocodile staring hungrily at him. Hand over hand he pulled himself away from the grasp of those jaws, only to see the tiger still watching, watching. Below—the crocodile! Above—the Tiger!

His hands burned. How long could he hold out? Would the tiger or the crocodile ever go away? It seemed they would not. With his small bit of remaining energy he wrapped the vine around his waist and legs. He could rest. He could wait. Surely they wouldn't stay forever. Surely there was an escape. But a quiet sound sent adrenaline coursing through his body. It was two rats, a black one and a white one, gnawing on the vine above his head. "No!" He shouted, shaking the vine. "Get away!" But it was in vain. The rats could not be frightened. Surely now it was just a matter of time and he and the vine would go crashing to the water below. Death was certain. In hopelessness, he closed his eyes. Something wet and sticky dropped onto his face. Startled, he looked up and saw a bees' nest. He opened his mouth to catch the sweet honey. It was good. It was refreshing. But he could not forget the tiger, the crocodile or the rats.

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This folk story explains clearly that all of us stand before death. There is no one who can escape it. The black and white rats symbolize day and night that continues to eat up our life bit by bit. All people are on a journey towards death, including the rich and the poor. No one can escape it. We all remember that "life is not certain." Gong Ken, a high monk, wrote about death: "All creatures cannot escape it," he said. "Beg and plead: ask it to wait and it will not listen; bribe and it won't accept; try to force it and you can't; it will still do what it wants."

## Life is very Uncertain

How do people respond to thoughts about death? Some do everything they can to prolong their lives. They exercise and eat healthy. This is good, but it won't keep death away forever. Some people pay for ceremonies that promise to help them after they die. However, most still feel so uncertain, so afraid. Still others don't like to think about death. They fill their days with business or parties. They always think accidents or illnesses will happen to other people and not them. It is like their eyes are closed as they drive down the road of life. How long will it be until reality hits them?

We must think about death because it is coming our way. Look at the man who is working in the rice field and suddenly dies. He was not even able to return to his house. One student laughs and talks with his friend on their motorcycle. When they ride to school, the motorcycle suddenly crashes, suddenly killing them both. A chubby little baby is laughing with its mother in the morning. But in the evening it drowns in the water.

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We may not like to think about these things, but we must. We must find a way of escape. We must find hope. Surely the only hope for the man on the vine is a hunter who can chase the tiger and the alligator away. Is there someone like that for us?

## Jesus Interrupts a Funeral

We have known clearly that Buddhists (those who believe in Buddhism) have hope in that they will die and be reincarnated, suffering in many lives and will seek to save up merit enough to go to heaven. But Christians believe that they will die only once and the power of Jesus will raise them from the dead and take them to heaven.

If God is the one who has made the world, can He raise people from the dead and take them to heaven? If it is true, this is a great hope that we want. The Bible says that when Jesus went to a village called Bethany He would always rest at the house of his three friends, Lazarus and his two older sisters, Martha and Mary. One day while Jesus was far away, Lazarus became very ill. The sisters sent a message asking Jesus to come and heal their brother. They thought Jesus would come quickly when he heard the news because Jesus loved him so much. Jesus did not come right away: instead, he waited where He was two more days and Lazarus died. The Bible tells the story like this, “On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother” (John 11:17-19). Many people had seen the body put into the tomb so that they knew that Lazarus had been dead for four days.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to

meet him, but Mary stayed at home. Lord, Martha said to Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask (John 11:20-22).

Martha was in great grief over the loss of her brother. She was disappointed that Jesus had not helped her when she asked. Jesus knew about her suffering. He pitied her. But Jesus had a great plan. He had seen her strong faith and knew that Martha understood His great love and power.

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (v. 23-24). She believed that in the day of judgment in which all would live again and be judged by God, her brother would rise again.

Then Jesus said something very startling. Jesus said to her, “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.” (vs. 25-26). Do you believe this? Jesus was saying that He had power to raise the dead, to give them life.

Jesus went to the tomb that had a big rock in front of it and said, “Take away the stone.” “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.” Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.” Therefore

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many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him (John 11:39-44).

The Bible says Jesus then cried because He had pity on those who will die because they refused to receive life from Him.

The Bible says that He went into one city and saw a weeping crowd of people who were carrying a dead body. The mother of the dead person was a widow who had only this one son. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother (Luke 7:13-15).

If you had only one child or one family member and he or she died, and someone came and raised that dead person like in this story, would you be happy? What would you say about the person who performed the miracle?

## Hope for the Brokenhearted

There was a young girl in high school named Julie. A popular and pretty girl, she was also very athletic, winning foot races in school track meets. She and her mother Wanda were best friends. Outside of school they went everywhere together, shopping, working and playing. Often they talked late into the night. Julie was sure that nobody had a mother as special as hers.

Then tragedy hit. Her mother began to experience serious pains in her stomach. An examination was made and tests were run. To the family's great shock the doctor reported that she had stomach cancer. The disease ravaged her body and she quickly became weaker and weaker. They were Christians and they began to plead with God to heal Wanda. The entire

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church community began to pray. Would the living God heal her?

Wanda became too weak to walk, too weak even to talk. Julie stayed at her bedside in the hospital every minute possible. Her faith was strong. She was sure God would answer her prayer. Meanwhile her mother wrote letters of love to her children and relatives. In particular she wrote to those who were not following God. She urged them to turn to God and surrender to His ways. She told them she wanted them to be in heaven someday with her.

Finally, on the saddest day of Julie's life, her mother died. The tears flowed and flowed and wouldn't stop. Hundreds attended the funeral. The preacher encouraged the people by talking about heaven and Jesus' promise to return and take those who trust in Him to live with God for eternity in a place of peace where there is no suffering or death forever.

But Julie's tears would not stop. "I don't want to live without my mother," she sobbed. Days crept by. "There is no point to living," she mused darkly. "She was my best friend. What do I have now?" Thoughts of suicide crept into her mind.

But the truths her mother had taught her kept coming back to her mind. The comfort of the living God was very near. Friends and family held her close. People were praying that God would sustain her. Slowly, light broke into her darkness. Jesus' promise, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" came ringing through her mind. She knew one day Jesus would come again and raise her mother to life. She determined that she would be ready to join her mother in heaven.

She pressed on through college, got married and went as a missionary to tell others the good news of God's compassion-

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ate love and the hope that the resurrection gives us all.

## Jesus Promises to Resurrect those who Believe

Do you want that hope? It can be yours. Let's look closely at what Jesus promised. Before He died, He told the disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3).

Here Jesus clearly told us God's intention. He wants us to live with Him in a place of perfect beauty and peace. Jesus intends to return and take us there.

But how can we go? These bodies are not able to travel through the sky like a bird or a rocket? These bodies decay. They are impermanent. The ancient scriptures explain it clearly. They say our body is like a seed. If you plant a black watermelon seed it springs up as something new, red, yellow, green and delicious. In the same we our bodies die old and decaying, but Jesus will raise them to a new life, with a new body more like that of angels which never die. The scriptures say, "So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.....It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:42-44a).

When people think about dying they wonder where they will go next. Will they go to a heaven or a hell? Will they be reincarnated? Will there be nothing at all? In the story of Lazarus, when Jesus raised him from the dead, he did not tell

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any stories of having gone anywhere. Instead, Jesus described death as a sleep in which the person knows nothing until God wakes him.

When the people understood what Jesus was teaching, they were greatly encouraged. Death was not final. There was hope of living again, when Jesus returns. People are not frightened to go to sleep because they are quite sure they wake the next morning. In the same way, those who trust in Jesus' power to resurrect are not frightened of death. They know they will wake to eternal life and never have to return to a world of sin and suffering again. The Bible clearly teaches, "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). He does not have to face cycle after cycle of suffering.

Many others were confused by Jesus' words that death is like a sleep in which you know nothing until the resurrection. Many claim to talk with the ghosts of those who have died. Many seek their wisdom and power. What is this? Have we forgotten already the clever schemes of the enemy of God? Satan once told Eve to disobey God. He said, "You will not die." It was a lie. Disobedience leads to suffering and death. Still Satan tries to convince people that those who die are not really dead. He has led almost the whole world to think there are ghosts and spirits who can be talked to.

Instead, these are the evil spirits who once were angels but fell from heaven because they were jealous of God and tried to seek worship for themselves. Today they continue to lead people to worship them and seek their power. Jesus warned us to stay away from their deceptions, to leave all magic and spirit power alone. God's power is more reliable and His compassion is sure.

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## Trust His Power

You and I might like to fly like the birds but we know that we can't. No matter how hard we try, the law of gravity pulls us to the ground. However there are other laws that can be used to overcome the law of gravity. We see it happen every day when a jet leaves the ground and roars into the sky. The laws that work in a powerful engine make this possible.

Do you still wonder if it is really possible to escape the consequences of this law of sowing and reaping? Could there be another law that would be powerful enough to overcome this law like the jet overcomes gravity? The Bible says that God's grace, through Jesus' death on the cross, is the more powerful law that overcomes our sins. We can be forgiven by His gracious gift if we believe

The jet helps us understand something else that is very important. If a person does not get into the jet he cannot overcome the law of gravity. He may say that he believes in the power of the jet to overcome gravity, but unless he gets into the jet he cannot experience its power.

To experience the power of God's compassion, we must ask Him to forgive us. If we do this and trust that He will, we will feel peace and calm regarding our sins and death.

There is one more lesson from the jet. If a person steps out of the jet he will fall under gravity's power again. This means that a person cannot continue to deliberately sin and expect to escape the consequences. No one can claim God's forgiveness while deliberately doing what is wrong. The good news is that according to the Bible, this God is very gracious and is willing to forgive many times even for the same sins.

It would be foolish to jump out of a jet. It is also foolish to

sin. But don't you think it is a wonderful idea that there is Someone who is compassionate enough and powerful enough to forgive sins? Won't you ask Him to give you peace and hope regarding death today?

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## Pray this prayer if it is your heart's desire.

Father of Life, You have prepared a home for me in heaven for eternity. I want to go there. I am not clean or pure enough to live there. I deserve death and hell. But You have sent Jesus to die in my place. I ask for His righteousness to fill my heart and to cover my sins. Thank You for taking away my fear of death. I trust in You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## Points to Remember

- \* Death has power over all things.
- \* The actions of all people are in order to escape death.
- \* The Bible says that Jesus can give eternal life to people.
- \* We need not sleep in wait of death but should look for a path to escape it.

John 11:25 "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.'"

## Questions

1--Please write T in front of the statements that are true.

In the story of "Fall Into the Water Meet the Crocodile, Go Up, Meet the Tiger,"

\_\_\_\_\_ The tiger and the crocodile are a symbol of death.

\_\_\_\_\_ The rats are symbols of day and night.

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\_\_\_\_\_ The man has many ways to escape the tiger and the crocodile.

2--Please underline the correct sentences

\_\_\_\_\_ Many people can escape death.

\_\_\_\_\_ People are all afraid of death.

\_\_\_\_\_ Christians believe there is only one life.

\_\_\_\_\_ Jesus will come again and take the righteous who have died and make them live again. "The old seed will sprout again."

3--Please check the answers that are correct.

What did Jesus say to Martha:

\_\_\_\_\_ Don't cry so much.

\_\_\_\_\_ Your younger brother will live again.

\_\_\_\_\_ No matter what, life is uncertain.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am the resurrection.

What happened when Jesus called Lazarus from the grave?

\_\_\_\_\_ Heard a big sound.

\_\_\_\_\_ There was a terrible smell.

\_\_\_\_\_ Lazarus came out covered with grave clothes.

4--Can you go to heaven without Jesus?

5--Will you let Jesus help you go to heaven or will you still try to go on your own?

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6-- If this statement is true of your choice today, check it:

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe that Jesus has power over death and I ask Him to save me from death by raising me to life when He comes again. I am no longer afraid of death.