Once Upon a Lazarus

There’s a reason why “the last miracle before the Crucifixion” was told only once

December 1, 1997 By Peter Kurth

Call me Lazarus. I thought I’d put that in writing to see how it looks, and because everywhere I go lately people are talking about “miracles.” I can’t open a newspaper or flip on the television without hearing about someone leaping from his deathbed and running a marathon or opening a new AIDS musical Off-Broadway. You know the story:

SOMEWHERE, AMERICA [but usually California]--A year ago, David [Kevin/Michael/Stephen/Todd] was lying exhausted on his futon, his once-muscular frame wasted away, his features pale, gaunt and covered with lesions. Sweat poured from his brow as he toyed apathetically with his two cats, Mistle and Toe, his only companions in the barren studio he’s called home ever since he was diagnosed with full-blown AIDS and had to give up his job as a personal assistant to Jennifer Aniston’s veterinarian.

Today, thanks to the lifesaving new treatments known as “AIDS cocktails,” David is back at the gym, dating the man of his dreams, planning his retirement and wondering whether he should join the MCC chorus this summer on a six-week singing tour of Nepal and Bhutan.

There are thousands of Davids all over the country, men who only last year were ready to throw in the towel. Scientists call this phenomenon the Lazarus Syndrome, after Lazarus of Bethany, the man Jesus raised from the dead with three simple words at the door of his tomb: “Lazarus, come out!”

Well, I’m out. There’s nothing like rising from the dead to get people’s attention. And if my own experience means anything, Lazarus himself must sometimes have felt he was better off molering in the grave. I’ve done some research on this guy, and I can tell you: Resurrection isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.

The story of Lazarus is told in only one of the four gospels of the New Testament (John 11:38-43). Apparently, it was the last miracle before the Crucifixion, and it so stunned the scribes of the pharisees that they decided to kill Jesus right there on the spot. They decided to kill Lazarus too, on the grounds that anyone with a story that powerful was a menace to society: “Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.”

So the first thing Lazarus had to deal with after coming back to life was a death sentence. This explains why the other writers kept the story under wraps. It can't have been easy converting people to Christianity when the price of Eternal Life was immediate execution.

I can relate to Lazarus' predicament, anyhow, because ever since I started on Crixivan last fall people have been trying to get rid of me, too. Not to be paranoid, but I know they liked me better up here before I started taking the pills. I was practically dead when I crawled back to Vermont from New York City a couple of years ago. My health was gone. My career was in a shambles. Many of my closest friends were dead, and the ones who weren't had left me in the lurch, unable to cope with the spectable of *moi* on a downhill slide. I was easy to get along with because I had only two moods, gloom and hysteria.

But now I'm a goddamned firebran. Crixivan and I are like Popeye and spinach. I've never felt so stalwart in my life. I haven't stopped talking in a year. I'm Charles A. Lindbergh, Helen Keller and La Pasionaria all rolled into one. I'm Scarlett O'Hara after intermission. You would be, too, if you had my creditors. Lazarus had only the Sanhedrin to worry about; I've got the IRS, the Vermont Department of Social Welfare and an overdue book contract. Publishers want their money back if you don't do the work, I've discovered. The only excuse is death, and it has to be your own.

The Bible doesn't tell us what happened to Lazarus after the high priests put a price on his head. Some church legends sprang up later, of course: ridiculous things about Lazarus and Mary Magdalene taking the first boat out of Jerusalem and sailing to France, where Lazarus became the Bishop of Marseilles.

But I don't believe any of these stories. I expect what really happened is that someone told Lazarus he was out of shape after four days in the tomb, and if he wanted to make the scene again, he'd have to go back to the gym.

So I guess we're gon our own when it comes to the future. There's nothing in the Bible to help us, that's for sure. If it's any consolation, I intend to finish Lazarus' story myself this time. This is one set of resurrected bones that won't take a miracle lying down.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/resurrection-bible-aids-12858-3695