

David Bowie, 'Lazarus'

David Bowie died on 10th January 2016. 'Lazarus' is a track on his final album *Blackstar*, released as a single in December 2015. The track is also part of Bowie's musical *Lazarus*.

Since Bowie's death was announced on 11th January 2016, speculation has arisen about the track and its video in relation to the singer's thoughts about death, creativity and his musical legacy. For example <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/david-bowie-dead-swansong-lazarus-takes-on-poignant-new-meaning-in-lyrics-and-music-video-a6805571.html>

The video, directed by Johan Renck, was released on 7th January 2016 and can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-JqH1M4Ya8>



The video opens with a partially open armoire, or wardrobe, both set in, and filled with, darkness. The door begins to open. We see a shot of David Bowie dressed in white in what seems to be a hospital bed. He looks frail and his famous eyes are bandaged. Buttons are over where his eyes should be. He is moving about pulling the sheets up to his chin as he begins to sing 'Look up here, I'm in heaven. I've got scars that can't be seen'. A figure under the bed reaches a hand up towards him as he rises slightly from the bed proclaiming 'Look up here, man, I'm in danger. I've got nothing left to lose'. The camera inverts so that he now seems to be hanging from the bed. A shoe is abandoned under the bed/on the ceiling. As his feeble hands shake the scene cuts to a standing Bowie in a black, diagonally striped costume, feverishly dancing in front of the wardrobe, now in dialogue with the figure on the bed with arms stretched out, trapped by the sheets. The black figure unscrews a fountain pen and thinks before writing, as the hospital figure shakes and writhes, singing about freedom as we glimpse the mysterious figure again and the black Bowie scribbles intensely in front of a skull on the desk before disappearing backwards jerkily into the wardrobe. We see his fingers shut the door and disappear.

Some questions to help with discussion and reflection

- How did the video make you feel?
- What do you suppose the wardrobe represents? What might be inside? What might be beyond the wardrobe that we can't know or see?
- What do you make of: the man in the bed, the mysterious figure under the bed, the writing, dancing man? What relationship do they have to one another?
- What most strikes you about the music, the lyrics, the images in the video, what Bowie does, what he is wearing?
- If these lyrics are Bowie's 'famous last words', what do you think they mean?
- If David Bowie had not died, what message might you then have taken from the video?
- If you were going to record a four minute video message to those who live after your death, what might you include in words and/or images?
- Why do you think the track is called 'Lazarus'? If you have never heard of Lazarus, see below.
- What images from the biblical story of Lazarus are repeated in the video? Why might they be relevant to the message of the video?

More about Lazarus...

The story of Lazarus is found in the Bible – in the New Testament in the Gospel of John, chapter 11 (verses 1-44). It is the story of a friend of Jesus, called Lazarus, who became ill, died and was buried in a cave tomb. Jesus was extremely upset and wept for his friend, but on arriving at the tomb, told the family to open it. Jesus called to Lazarus and he came out. Jesus then told the family to unwrap him from his grave clothes and let him go and Lazarus was restored to them.

Jesus' words in this story: 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die' are often used in Christian funerals.

The Death of Lazarus

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not

there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

Jesus the Resurrection and the Life

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

Jesus Weeps

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'