

JOHN 11

JESUS, THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

This matchless narrative is of vital importance to the Gospel-history, as related by John. The miracle that it records was the most marvelous and significant of all the “signs” wrought by our Lord. It awakened and strengthened faith in those by whom it was witnessed; while it aroused fear and deadly hatred in the rulers, who now finally determined upon the death of Jesus. But above all, it was a proof and prophecy of the life – both present and everlasting – which Christ imparts to all who put their trust in Him. Such a narrative needs little commentary, yet it may be helpful to fix our thoughts successively upon some of its special features.

Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were privileged indeed to enjoy such a close personal friendship with Jesus during His earthly ministry; in their home, He loved to be. Our Savior possessed a genius for friendship; He had His chosen companions, and there were certain homes where He was a welcome guest. “Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.” Even today, Christ has His “inner circles” of friends, and they are not chosen arbitrarily; they are composed of those who love Him and respond to Him, and who have the grace of hospitality in their hearts. Of Mary and Martha, we have the charming picture drawn by the evangelist Luke – where the very love of Martha led her to assume such burdens, that she became anxious and troubled; while the sensitive heart of Mary perceived that she could best entertain the Master by sitting at His feet and listening to His words. But Mary also served, and her subsequent act of devotion had already become so well-known by the time that John wrote this narrative that he described her as “that Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment.” This anointing is related in the next chapter of this Gospel.

But now trouble has come to the siblings’ home! Friendship with Jesus does not protect us from earthly sorrows, but it does give us the assurance of sympathy and relief. The purposes of God are beyond our understanding, and suffering is an unexplained mystery; but it is absolutely certain that – for a friend of Jesus – the result of suffering will be some eternal good and some manifestation of “the glory of God.”

There are delays, however, by which our faith in the friendship of our Lord may be tried. We do not know why Jesus delayed to come to the sorrowing sisters; but they were confident of His love, and their confidence was not misplaced. With the certainty that His action would result in the sacrifice of His own life, the friendship of Jesus brought Him back to the sorrowful home in

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The sickness and death of Lazarus – verses 1-16
- ❖ Jesus arrives in Bethany and speaks with Martha – verses 17-32
- ❖ He raises Lazarus from the dead – verses 33-44
- ❖ The Pharisees consult against Jesus – verses 45-53

Bethany. There are mysteries and delays in His dealings with us, but we need never doubt that the One Who gave His life for us has any other thought for us except love!

Jesus stated clearly to His disciples the fact of the death of Lazarus, His purpose to raise him from the dead, and His confidence that the miracle would strengthen the faith of His followers. However, they were fearful; and Thomas was despondent, although faithful. But Jesus asserted that He had been given a task to perform, as well as the time to perform it. No enemy or accident could shorten the allotted day of His earthly life and ministry – not even by a single hour. The only peril would be in deserting the path of duty, for that would result in darkness and loss. In the way of His appointed work, He was absolutely safe. Is not this true of each follower of Christ? And will not the acceptance of this truth, concerning the task and time of life, give us courage in seasons of peril and hardship and darkness? As we follow our Lord in the path of duty, we are assured of safety because He Who allotted the task will also give the time and the strength; and we are also cheered by the prospect of all that is to be achieved by His presence, power, and grace.

The essential message of this entire narrative is embodied in the promise of Jesus: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die" (verse 25). These marvelous words (verses 17-27) were spoken in reply to the request of Martha. She had heard that Jesus was coming. True to her nature, she was the first to act; and while Mary still sat in the house, she went out to meet Him. The words with which she greets Him are not to be regarded as implying a complaint or a rebuke: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." They express genuine regret – not that Jesus had delayed His coming after Lazarus had died, but that He had not been present during his illness and kept him from death. Martha then adds what should be regarded as a request of triumphant faith; it did imply that Jesus might secure the return of her brother to life. Yet her faith was not perfect. It suggested that Jesus, as a Man, might make a request of God; and furthermore, that the realm in which Christ was working was essentially physical and not spiritual. To develop her faith, Jesus replies, "Thy brother shall rise again." But the promise does not comfort Martha; she interprets it to be speaking of a resurrection that was general and in the future. "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day," she answers. How truly does she express the feeling of countless mourners today! They are not satisfied – and indeed, they should not be satisfied – with the assurance of reunions that are only in the distant future. The heart craves something for the present, and needs a personal relationship with Christ! And so this incomparable promise of our Lord comes to Martha, and to every mourner: "I am the resurrection, and the life." He does not need to ask the Father to restore life; He does not bid Martha to wait for some future day, for

He Himself is the Source of life-giving power! It is our relationship with a present, Divine Lord which gives us comfort. This spiritual fellowship is the basis and pledge of bodily resurrection and eternal reunion. “He that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live.” The body of the believer is certain to be raised to eternal life; it is not to continue forever under the power of death. “And whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die.” Faith in Christ is the source of spiritual resurrection – which is a present and abiding experience of such blessedness, that it cannot be affected by any bodily change! In this sense, the believer never dies. Can Martha accept such a marvelous revelation? Is she ready to believe such a glorious promise? Her reply shows the strength of her faith and the clearness of her spiritual vision. Her hope is centered in the Person of her Lord. Her answer is voiced in words which are peculiarly characteristic of John’s Gospel: “I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.”

In Jesus’ meeting with Mary, in verses 28-37, He especially reveals His human sympathy. It has already been manifested by His coming to Bethany, and by His words to Martha; but now it is given an unrivaled expression. He sends Mary a message, telling her of His presence and His personal desire to see her; she hastens to meet Him; she falls at His feet, expressing her faith in the same words which Martha has used, but she voices no request. Then we read that “Jesus ... groaned in the spirit, and was troubled”; and as He asked to be shown the place of burial, He wept and expressed the sympathy of His loving soul by His tears. In our time of bereavement, as we fall at the feet of the Master – even though we believe in the miracle of the future resurrection which will bring us our beloved ones again – we may be less in need of the instruction given to Martha, than of the tender and personal sympathy expressed for Mary by our Lord.

However, it is not only to prove human sympathy, but also Divine power, that this narrative is told by John (verses 38-44); in fact, we could say that Jesus’ Divine sympathy here manifests itself in supernatural power. There is such a matchless eloquence in the phrases used in the narrative: “Jesus wept” and “Lazarus, come forth!” Here is love, linked with omnipotence!

In the record of the miracle itself, we must observe that it was an actual restoration to life, after Lazarus had been dead four days – such as cannot be explained by natural laws. It was unquestioned, even by hostile witnesses who were present in large numbers; and it was declared by our Lord to be worked with the purpose of producing faith in its observers. Can a careful reading of the



moving narrative leave, in a candid mind, any other conviction than the fact that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God"? Shall we not also rejoice in the promise which it gives to faith – namely, the promise of that wondrous life, whose triumph robs death of its sting and the grave of its victory?

The chapter closes (verses 45-57) with a description of the immediate results of the raising of Lazarus. As in the case of each of Christ's miracles, the first effect was faith in Him, on the part of those who had been witnesses of His power. But another very serious result was the deepening of hatred in the hearts of the Jewish rulers, and their determination to put Jesus to death. Their decision to take definite action against Jesus was due to their fear that the continuance of such miracles might result in a popular uprising, which the Roman government would use as a reason or excuse for destroying the city and nation of the Jews. The final note in their deliberations was the unconscious prophecy of the high priest, Caiaphas. "It is expedient for us," said he, "that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not!" All that he meant to say was that it would be better to murder Jesus – in utter disregard for right or justice – than to allow their positions and their nation to be in danger. His motive was selfish, and his counsel was diabolical; yet his words contained a meaning of which he never dreamed. It was true that Jesus was indeed destined to "die for the people"; for He was to be the true Sacrifice for sin, and the Source of life for all those who put their trust in Him. However, He was not to die "for the nation only," for the result of His death would be the formation of a new spiritual nation – namely, His Church, in which would be gathered together the children of God from among all the nations of the world. The unconscious prophecy was about to be fulfilled, but quite contrary to the thought of Caiaphas! The result of the death of Jesus was the destruction by the Romans of the very nation that Caiaphas wished to save; as well as the securing, through Jesus, of universal blessings that Caiaphas never dreamed of. No credit can be given to Caiaphas, and there is no excuse for his words; they resulted in the most cruel conspiracy the world has ever seen. "They took counsel that they might put him to death." But Jesus withdrew for safety to a place of secrecy until the hour of Divine appointment – the true Passover – would arrive. Then, while the multitudes speculated as to whether He would show His face in public, the rulers took further action and declared that "if any man knew where he was, he should show it, that they might take him" and put Him to death.

Lord Jesus, we confess that in our natural state, we are dead in our trespasses and sins; but we thank You that You have placed Yourself in direct contact with the stench and corruption of our iniquities, and raised us up to new life! All praises to You forever for being the Resurrection and the Life – the Source of life-giving power! Amen.