

John 11

Bible Reading: John 11:1-7, 11-14, 19-29, 33-37, 41-45

Raising of Lazarus

Introduction

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is another miracle which is a sign pointing to a spiritual truth. Some people claim it was just resuscitation because Lazarus died again later. Yet it was a clear miracle and taught that Jesus is master of death in spiritual sense in giving us new life. But also in physical sense because at His return the bodies of His people will be raised never more to die. So, like the feeding of the 5000, the raising of Lazarus is a signpost to the significance of Jesus and the way of salvation.

Reaction of Jesus to our troubles

Going to begin with the miracle itself before looking at the spiritual truths it demonstrates. What a typical scene this is – a happy family, two sisters and their brother, whose home was a welcome refuge for Jesus in His busy life. Then suddenly one member of this close family falls sick and dies. Lazarus, Mary and Martha were deeply loved by Jesus but not immune from tragedy. How typical of the Bible to be realistic. Describing something that happens in every home, and that includes Christian homes. Every home is subject to the ravages and misfortunes of life – sickness, death, financial loss, numerous disappointments, wayward children. No home is exempt. All of us have been there before, and will be there again.

But note that in the midst of loss, the sisters did the best thing they could have done – sent for Jesus. He is the best friend in need. They left the matter with Him. They did not dictate or demand. They just told Him that Lazarus, who He loved, was sick. The Bible not only describes troubles, but also tells us what to do in troubles. It was Job's first reaction when tragedy came – when he lost his family, possessions and servants – he fell to the ground and worshipped. King Hezekiah in great danger from his enemies spread the matter before the Lord.

*“What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear”*

But the Lord's reaction is surprising. He did nothing. He did not rush to help. Things got worse, and sickness led to death. Lazarus was in the grave four days before Jesus finally arrived. The Lord does not always do what we want or expect. After the matter is spread before the Lord, we may see things get worse and not better. Yet all the time He is in perfect control. He did not prevent the illness though He could have done. He did not prevent death though He could have done. He did not ease the sisters' pain and worry, but let it turn into sorrow.

The reason – it was for God's glory. So that He could show Himself. God was going to be seen in this astounding miracle. Here is the great purpose behind all – God's glory. He purposes to show His power, love and wisdom in our lives. We forget this

when we are too taken up with ourselves. We ask why does this happen and that happen? God's answer – to display Myself in this awful situation. When He does not work a miracle, but people continue in adversity, He makes Himself known. He displayed Himself in the years of suffering Joseph underwent. And in the condemned cell where Paul lay and from where he was taken to his execution, Christ was magnified. God's people go through tribulation, distress, peril and the sword, but they are more than conquerors – and so God is glorified. Evil is permitted because it is the best backcloth on which God shows grace in adversity. Webb Paploe [writing unclear] never discovered God's grace was sufficient, though he preached on it, until he lost his own child and had to bury the child's body himself.

But note, in the midst of these awful experiences which the Lord permitted the sisters to go through, the Lord's love was not diminished. His sympathy never wavers. **Jesus wept.... See how he loved him** (John 11:35,36). Once again we see the mystery of the Lord's person. His human nature sympathising, and His divine nature in raising up Lazarus. N.B. On the throne of the universe now He reigns, but still with dual nature, able to sympathise still, and therefore **we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need** (Hebrews 4:15,16).

Interesting that Jesus is said to have wept three times – here over Lazarus, over Jerusalem, and in the Garden of Gethsemane. He is never said to laugh or smile. He knows what we go through, He knows our feelings, and sympathises and pities. There is mystery in God's dealings with us. We may get angry and impatient, like Martha, **If you had been here, our brother would not have died** (John 11:21). All this happens for a wise reason. We discover more about ourselves than we would have otherwise done, and quickly learn that if we hand over the situation, He loves, cares, sustains, and never leaves us or forsakes us.

*“There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in heaven”*

Christian understanding of death

This is something we need to be clear about. The way we look at death is one of the Christian's distinguishing marks. **Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep** (John 11:11). “Sleep” is a term constantly used in the New Testament regarding death. This is how Christians see it. Jairus's daughter was said to be asleep (Matthew 9:24). Stephen's martyrdom – **he fell asleep** (Acts 7:60). **God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him** (1 Thessalonians 4:17). The Greek word for cemetery κοιμητηριον literally means “sleeping place”. How beautifully the New Testament speaks of the believer's death. “Going to paradise”, “home with many mansions”, “at home with the Lord”, “Asleep in Jesus”.

Certainly the dead look asleep, because they no longer see, hear or speak. But though the body is asleep, in the spirit they are very conscious. They are with Christ, a state which is a gain. So this is what awaits the Christian in the future – asleep as far as the body is concerned, breaking contact with the world, but spiritually alive, and united with Christ. Christian faith radically changes the way we look at life with its troubles, disappointments and bereavements. Not empty optimism but solid rock. **Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are**

with me (Psalm 23:4). The surest refuge is in the eternal love of God. He always has special grace for special need.

Master and victor over death

Now we come to the chapter's climax. Jesus makes a wonderful and triumphant claim that is the heart of the message, the crown jewels of the passage. **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. Do you believe this?** (John 11:25,26). Physical death will never quench the believer's real life. Jesus claims that in Him and because of Him, death is not the end. It is the gateway into new and fuller life. It marks a new beginning in our experience. Deeper and more intimate fellowship with God, which lasts for eternity.

We speak of this world as "the land of the living". It isn't. It is the land of the dying. Death is not passing *from* the land of the living, but passing *into* the land of the living. We are not journeying into the sunset, but into the sunrise. Death is the tunnel through which we pass into a brighter land.

What a difference Christ has made. The ancient world feared death, the grim adversary. They feared it because they could not master it. They were afraid to speak of it. But then Christ came, He died and rose again. By His death, He paid the wages of our sin, the thing which keeps us out of heaven. Then He rose triumphantly. Because He died our death, heaven is no longer barred to us. He ever lives to receive us unto Himself when we die and our spirits go to be with Him. Death is no longer the victorious foe. Its sting has been drawn, and fear is gone.

At Christ's return, the bodies of those dead in Christ will rise, transformed. All believers are going to be like His glorious body. Changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Our spirits will be clothed with a resurrection body, glorious, beautiful, and incorruptible. An exact replica of Christ's own body He had after His resurrection. What a grand reunion. No more pain, parting, sin, sorrow among God's people. Then we will know as we are known. Death will be swallowed up in victory. Hence Paul's mockery: **Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? Thanks be to God! He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ** (1 Corinthians 15:55,56).

How Christ makes a profound difference to every aspect of life. How tragic not to know Him. No salvation, no forgiveness, little to live for, no assurance about death and beyond. To know Christ – all is totally changed. In Christ there is forgiveness, not condemnation; victory, not defeat; confidence, not uncertainty; joy, not despair; purpose, not meaninglessness; death is the beginning, not the end; future is in heaven, not in hell. This is what Christ offers to those who believe – who commit, trust and yield their lives to Him.