

Devotion on the Miracles of Christ (Raising of Lazarus) – 5 March 2014, Anno Domini
(In the Year of our Lord)



The miracle of Our Lord in the raising of Lazarus from the bonds of death is, I believe, the most powerful of all of the miracles recorded in the New Testament. It bears a message to us of present power and future glory. It conveys a comfort and a confidence in the love and hope made available through the mercies of God our Father. Just as the Morning Sun rises on the eastern skies, so did this miracle take place on the eastern slopes of Mt. Olivet where the 'temporary' tomb of Lazarus had been carved from the rocky face of the mountain. The miracle suggests a prophetic reminder of the resurrection of the Lord Himself just a short time hence. He is our rising Sun with healing in His Wings. The Voice of the Lord penetrates time, space, and matter to achieve its will. It does today for Lazarus.

Martha, Mary and Lazarus were close friends with our Lord. Jesus never failed to visit their home when circumstances permitted. He spent every night of Holy Week with this beloved family. Each were special to the Lord in different ways just as each of us who love Him are special to Him in unique ways. Martha was a woman who always was about the business of caring for people and providing for their needs. Mary was more inclined to a gentler nature that sought out a loving relationship with the Lord. Mary was always found at the feet of Jesus – either to listen and to learn of Him, or to minister to Him by anointing His head with expensive oils and wiping His feet with her hair. We know less of Lazarus except to say that Jesus loved Him and even restored him to life – it is enough!

I must apologize for the length of this devotion, but it cannot be fully rendered without the entire passage of contextual narrative.

*1 Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) 3 Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. 4 When Jesus heard that, he said, **This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.** 5 Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. 6 When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was. 7 Then after that saith he to his disciples, **Let us go into Judaea again.** 8 His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again? 9 Jesus answered, **Are there not twelve hours in the day? If***

any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. **10** But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him. **11** These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, *Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.* **12** Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. **13** Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. **14** Then said Jesus unto them plainly, *Lazarus is dead.* **15** *And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.* **16** Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him. **17** Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already. **18** Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off: **19** And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. **20** Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house. **21** Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. **22** But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. **23** Jesus saith unto her, *Thy brother shall rise again.* **24** Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. **25** Jesus said unto her, *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: 26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?* **27** She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. **28** And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee. **29** As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him. **30** Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him. **31** The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there. **32** Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. **33** When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, **34** And said, *Where have ye laid him?* They said unto him, Lord, come and see. **35** Jesus wept. **36** Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! **37** And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? **38** Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. **39** Jesus said, *Take ye away the stone.* Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. **40** Jesus saith unto her, *Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?* **41** Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, *Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.* **42** *And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.* **43** And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, *Lazarus, come forth.* **44** And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, *Loose him, and let him go.* (John 11:1-44)

It is a great comfort for us to know that Christ will empty our tombs just as He does Lazarus. He is Lord of the living and not the dead.

In this account, we learn that a 'certain man named Lazarus' was sick. He is a man from Bethany, the home of Martha and Mary (the same Mary who anointed the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair). The two women were sisters to the ailing Lazarus. We learn from the text these cardinal points:

1) **He whom thou lovest is sick:** It is important to make note of this appeal of the sisters to Christ in their message. Those whom Christ lovest will receive a certain and sure attention of the Lord to his condition. The Lord may have reason to delay a satisfaction to prayer for the greater glory of God, but He will certainly respond in the

due process of time according to a Will which is beyond our understanding. IT is the power of His love that gives us life and hope in death.

2) ***This sickness is not unto death*** A profound truth that begs elucidation here is that there is no real death to the believer. Death is simply a gate to a fuller and richer eternal life of ecstasy with God. Though a physical death should drag our bodies to the tomb, the Lord of Life will awaken that body regardless the impediments of stone and masonry surrounding. Christ spoke in a knowledge and wisdom of which the hearers were not prepared to grasp. He does so often to us today, but we must trust always for the final count.

3) ***Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus*** This is no random statement of insignificance for Christ loves all who love Him. The love of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus for Christ was a lasting love, proven by dedicated service and unquestionable loyalty. The love of Christ for you, me, and all who love Him and obey Him is a truth beyond any doubt. In fact, He died especially for you and me. Had there been none others but only one, He would have doubtless died as a redemption for the sins of that one.

4) ***He abode two days still in the same place where he was*** God is not subject to the Space-Time Continuum in which the physical world operates. Considerations of time are not matters of any import to the Ancient of Days. He delayed His coming to Lazarus at Bethany for TWO more days! This delay doubtless caused much trouble and worry for Mary and Martha as the life of Lazarus gradually disappeared as a star on the distant horizon. Why did their Lord delay? They were certain that Christ could heal Lazarus, but what if Lazarus died while Christ delayed? They could not have comprehended the glorious purpose for which Christ delayed. When our prayers are not answered in the same time required to order a MacDonalds hamburger, we often suffer a failure of faith. Do we not know that Christ does all things well regardless our lack of understanding His ways?

5) ***Let us go into Judaea again:*** Jesus is aware of the dangers lurking in returning to Judea, the place of Bethany, but while it is yet light, He must labor. While He is yet living in the flesh, He is the Light itself. He is the "Day Star" (2 Peter 1:19) and the very "Sun of Righteousness" (Malachi 4:2) in whose wings is healing (for you, me, and Lazarus).

6) ***Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep*** All who confess Christ are joined in friendship and love. "Our friend Lazarus" is a precious term by which Christ made reference to the dead. Even our friends who have physically died are still our friends. In the eyes of all his friends and family gathered at Bethany, Lazarus is DEAD! But to Christ, the Author and Giver of Life, Lazarus is merely sleeping. The length of the sleep is irrelevant – hours, days, months, years – all are immaterial to the awakening from sleep of the power of Christ. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is not the God of the dead! Christ will surely awaken Lazarus regardless his length of sleep and condition of decay.

7) ***But they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. 14 Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.*** The words of Christ are gracious and gentle. He looks upon physical death in the same way as sound sleep. But his disciples could not understand, so He speaks to them in terms which they can understand. Let us look upon death in the same way Christ has taught us to view it – as merely a temporary sleep – a twinkling of the eye before we are given glorified bodies not subject to the

least shadow of death.

8) *And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe* Jesus is constantly vexed by our little faith. Do we not recognize Him as the Lord of Life? Do we expect too little from such a One?

There is an account of King Cyrus the Great coming with his splendidly armed array of archers, swordsmen, and cavalry to surround the city of Lydia. Its king, being an intelligent man, and knowing the reputed invincibility of the massed power of Cyrus' army, surrendered without bloodshed. This favorably impressed the great King Cyrus and he parleyed with the King of Lydia and told him to ask any favor of Cyrus and it would be granted. The King of Lydia wasted no time in requesting two thousand talents of gold. This was an enormous value to ask, and the treasurer of Cyrus complained to King Cyrus that the man was presumptuous in asking such a great treasure. Cyrus responded, "Not at all, my friend. This man recognizes me as a great king and so he asks a great ransom. Anything less would be an insult to my power." Should we not view the riches of Christ with at least a greater regard?

9) We must trust in Christ to provide our security. "*Let us also go, that we may die with him*" Thomas (the doubter) presumes much courage that he does not possess in this remark. We must take care not to make claims to God that we are unable to support. Why was Thomas hiding away after the crucifixion? Why did he doubt even eye witness accounts of Christ's resurrection? Was his faith on the same scale as that of the Scribes and Pharisees "*He saved others; Himself He cannot save*" (Gospel of St Matthew 27:42). More important than dying with Christ is the practice of Living IN Christ! This requires greater faith and trust than the disciples presently have at this moment before the raising of Lazarus.

The clear message of the above passage is to trust in Christ even when all worldly signals defy that trust.

I feel that we have been climbing a great, lone mountain in this chapter. Christ now utters a mighty and profound truth around which our salvation is gathered: ***I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.*** His is the life that transcends all time and eternity. His promise is the life that continues beyond the grave. Though we die in this mortal body, yet we are alive in our Ark of Christ which rises all the higher the greater the calamity below. Only God's clearly stated Word can do justice to this promise and our descriptive adjectives fail us to come near in explanation. ²⁶ ***And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? Whosoever liveth and believeth?*** Once our last breath is taken, there is no longer opportunity for decision – it must be made while we yet live in these bodies. We must not gamble away valuable moments – NOW is the time of decision for Christ! *Though he were dead, yet shall he live!* There is no death in the life of the Christian. If we are safe in our Ark of Christ, we shall rise as the Ark has risen! NO DEATH!

Do not overlook the significance of the first two words of Jesus' statement – "*I AM!*" - not I was, or I shall be, but "I AM" from before the foundations of the worlds and beyond the dying of the suns. If we are in Christ, **WE ARE** from this time forward beyond the Space-Time Continuum and into Eternity Future. The comforting point is that this also includes the dead (in our sense) in Christ!

The faith of Martha gives off a spark on understanding, but the whole

understanding is yet to be realized. But she believes enough to know Him. ***Yea, Lord; I believe thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.*** We may not comprehend (and certainly cannot) the fullness of the character of God, but to believe and know His Son is sufficient of faith.

And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee It appears that Martha, in her characteristic zeal to 'get the job done', has told a little white lie to her sister for it is not recorded that Christ asked for Mary. Of course, such a casual request may not have been recorded. But we are told that Martha called Mary "secretly". She knows, perhaps, that Mary is hurt by what she misconceives as her ardent love for Christ being scorned by His seeming indifference to the predicament of her brother Lazarus. Not knowing the power and mind of Christ, Mary cannot know what Christ is about to do. We are told that Mary, on hearing Martha's report, arose and came to Christ quickly. This is the same Mary who loved to sit at the feet of Christ. Now she has sat in her parlor delaying going out to Him at first as Martha had done. The Jewish friends who had come to the house to mourn the loss of Lazarus were blind to that love that compelled Mary forth to Christ. In their reasoning, she was "gone to the grave to weep there." In fact, Mary had not gone to the place of death, but the One in whom there was no room or place for death – "the Resurrection and the Life!" Yet, when she fell at His feet, Mary asked the same question as her sister: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Though an outright statement, the statement is an implied question.

*33 When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, 34 And said, **Where have ye laid him?** They said unto him, Lord, come and see. 35 Jesus wept.* Why did Jesus groan in His spirit at the sight of the mourners? He was troubled. Why? We are not told outright, but the context of the scene, as well as knowing the nature of Christ, are indicators of the reasons. He did not groan for Lazarus for He knew that Lazarus was not finally dead. He was not troubled over the sorrow of the women, for He knew their sorrow would be turned to joy in a matter of minutes. It is possible that Christ was troubled that His friends, who had known Him intimately and seen His many works of wonder, did not seem to know Him fully – that He was the Lord, also, of Life itself. "Jesus wept." Though the shortest verse in the Bible, it is also the most poignant. I am often impressed with the notion that my own lack of faith and obedience may cause a precious tear of Christ to well up in His eye of love and compassion.

Some of the Jews remarked: "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" They focus is upon death and not upon the LIFE that Christ offers.

*Jesus said, **Take ye away the stone!*** What powerful command is this! God will do a work that no man has before witnessed, yet He allows us a part in the work. We may roll away the stone to demonstrate our faith that something of wonder will be done by our Lord.

How many stones of ignorance and faithlessness block the way of sinners in coming to Christ? May our living and teaching not remove some of these cumbersome stones from their way? We are now to witness a profound and memorial event!

Martha simply cannot believe the power of the Christ whom she knows to be the literal Son of God. Her ability to see beyond common measures is limited by her lack of fully understanding what it means to be the Son of God. ***Martha, the sister of***

him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. She, too, is focused on the tragedy of death and not the hopefulness of life. In her understanding, the length of death is a measure of the eternity of it. Though Abraham died thousands of years ago, yet he lives today, for God is not the God of the dead, but the living!

*Jesus saith unto her, **Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?*** As I write these words, I am overcome at the intensity of this statement! Though we may be secure in our salvation, yet we still are unable to comprehend the immensity of the power of God. In my private prayers and devotions, I often repeat the words of the father of the child possessed of a devil: ²³ *Jesus said unto him, **If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.*** ²⁴ *And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.* Mark 9:23-24 The mighty powers of heaven are about to be concentrated on the least of all things – a dead body in a stone tomb in an unremarkable community in an unremarkable land, and that before observers who cannot comprehend the measure of the miracle about to be performed before their very eyes!

*41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, **Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. 42 And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.*** If Christ can return thanks to His Heavenly Father for granting the powers to do great good, can we not also return thanks for His doing of the great good to us? Our lives are a sermon to the unbelieving world.

²⁵ *And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, **Lazarus, come forth.*** Are my ears worthy to hear this final commandment, even to ears that are dead? Yes, Christ spoke with a loud voice – so loud that it penetrated the stone casing of the tomb. So loud that it entered and fell upon the ears that had been dead four days (no matter the length of time). So loud that it transcended the eternities of time. So loud that the Voice entered in the dead and lifeless heart of Lazarus and thereby sparked an impulse that made that dead heart no longer dead. The heart responded, and life-giving blood again pulsed through a body that had already begun decay. No longer! The very cells and tissue came alive and responded to that Loud Voice! Death cannot exist in the presence of life. Darkness cannot abide the force of Light! Spirit of Lazarus was returned to his lifeless body, and Lazarus WAS ALIVE! That Loud Voice echoes down the annals of time and completely off the charts into eternity! That same Voice will one day beckon to another dead body that belongs to you and me and all others who know Christ as Lord and Savior.

And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Lazarus, because of the habits of mankind, was bound hand and foot in grave clothes. He was blinded, too, by the napkin that covered his face. Without Christ, we, too, are bound hand and foot by our deadness in sin. We are blind and know not the way. But Christ commands, “ **Loose him, and let him go**” How can I add any word of meaning to this last command? It sums up the whole of what Christ does for us if we only will believe and come to Him in faith. His Grace will set us free!

Because of the sacrifice of Christ, we may all be loosed and set free.

¹ Don't we all?