



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. (John 11:1-16)

One may fail to see any similarity whatsoever in the account of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha of Bethany, and Mary Magdalene who sought the body of our Lord early on the first day of the week while it was yet dark; but there is an important connection which I will draw out in the course of this devotion.

The first point I would like to make concerning Lazarus is this: Our Lord referred to the condition of Lazarus as he lay in the tomb as one of sleep. Jesus knew Lazarus was dead, yet he told the disciples that Lazarus slept. Why did He do so? Like the disciples, the modern Christian finds scarce faith to call death a sleep, but not our Lord Jesus Christ. The death of every saint of God is nothing more than an intense sleeping in the tomb while the spirit of that person abides with God. *Also when they shall be afraid of that which*

is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. **Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.** (Ecclesiastes 12:5-7 (KJV) It is easier to understand the Master's perspective on death when viewed from the heights of faith and not the depths of despair and doubt.

When our Lord arrived at Bethany, many who loved Him dearly and trusted in Him were quite disappointed that He had lingered so long in coming. Lazarus had already been dead for four days, so their hope was forlorn. Martha did not conceal her disappointment. *Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already. Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off: And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house. Then said Martha unto Jesus, **Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*** (John 11:17-21)

Now, there was a purpose hidden from the understanding of the mourning Jews and the family gathered in Bethany. The family of Lazarus had faith in our Lord, but it did not extend beyond the veil of death. Why had he delayed until it was too late for Lazarus? His purpose was written in the eternal annals of Heaven, but these could not read on that level. Martha did have a tiny spark of faith that the Lord could do SOMETHING, but what? She added: *But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.* (John 11:22-24) As mortal beings, we view life only from our immediate surroundings. We are unable to see, not only the beginning, but the end as well (and all things in between) as God sees.

My eyes moisten to understand the next lines of Jesus in answer to Martha's implied question: *Thy brother shall rise again.* (John 11:23) Then our Lord proclaims a truth that penetrates all time and eternity, top to bottom: *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?* (John 11:25-26)

Note the profound truths that stand as a mirror of reality in our Lord's two phrases above.. Lazarus had a faith in our Lord, though limited by understanding. He believed, and he had suffered physical death, but not spiritual. His soul did not die! He believed in the Lord and he had died, but not the death of the lost. It was a mere passing from a mortal state to a glorified one. It may have even been a disappointment to Lazarus to be called back to this muddy existence had he the faculty to realize the issue. The second comment of our Lord above very clearly delineates living faith and faith which is dead. We must believe while life remains for there is no salvation in the grave. This, we MUST believe, or else we remain lost.

When our Lord was taken to the tomb, sealed with a large stone, he told the attendants to remove the stone which they did. Martha objected that Lazarus had been dead four days and his body stank. But our Lord moves beyond our paltry objections. Lazarus was truly dead, and his body did, indeed, stink! But Jesus stood without the tomb and commanded *with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.* Many of the attendees without the tomb had mentioned the name of Lazarus over many times, yet Lazarus did not respond to their voice, but the voice of our Lord penetrated the stone walls of the tomb, into the dead ears of Lazarus, and down into the dead chambers of his heart which, suddenly warmed with the pulsating of blood. He came forth wound tightly in the grave clothes common even today in Asia.

When Jesus calls our name, we cannot help but respond. He even reminds us of this in the preceding chapter of John. He calls the name of all His elect, and they come to Him. He knows the name of every lamb of His own, and they know His voice. The porter at the doors of death also respond to His voice in opening the death chambers: *To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.* (John 10:3-4) Now, our Lord gives one more command once He has called us forth into eternal life. *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 11:44) If you remember nothing else of my devotion today, please remember that Christ sets us free when He has called us into the circle of His elect!

I know that you have patiently read to this point wondering how the calling forth of Lazarus was likened to that of Mary Magdalene. You will recall this line in John 20:1 – *The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.* The stone covering the tomb was not a small one. It measured at least eight feet in diameter according to the custom of the day. But Mary was startled to see the stone rolled away. Moreover, the guards had fled and left the broken Roman Seal hanging from its place. She ran to tell Peter and John – she was first to report, unwittingly, the risen Lord. Peter and John came to the tomb, entered, and witnessed the array of grave clothes and the folded napkin. They partially understood the circumstances and went away. Poor Mary was left alone with her profuse tears. She had courageously stood with John at the foot of the tomb in defiance of the enemies of our Lord and out of an immeasurable love for Him. She followed to witness His burial, and was last to leave the grave. Now, she has been first to come to the open tomb – a borrowed tomb just like the one Lazarus needed temporarily. Now her despondency is multiplied by the missing body she came seeking to anoint. Here is a most beautiful passage of this occasion: *Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.* (John 20:11-13)

I know that angels experience joy, for they sang with joy at the creation of the world. Can you imagine the hidden joy they felt when Mary answered that *they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.* The angels inside the tomb could see beyond Mary's back to a figure approaching. They knew the figure to be the risen Lord, but Mary was unaware. *And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.* (John 20:14-15) I apologize to the reader if I mention this text too often, but John 20 is my favorite of all the Bible; and Mary Magdalene is my favorite New Testament figure. I love Mary Magdalene, because she loved so very much my Lord.

Our Lord knew precisely why Mary was weeping. In fact, she was blinded by her tears and mistook our Lord for the gardener (He is, in fact, the great Gardener of Souls). But wait! Mary turned back furtively for a last look into the tomb when Jesus spoke again, *Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.* (John 20:16) Why did Mary know the Lord when He spoke the second time? It was not by appearance for she was still blinded by her tears – it was in the manner in which He called her name! No one will ever call your name as Jesus does. Her tears of abject sorrow were suddenly transformed into tears of great joy! He called Mary's name in precisely the same manner He had called out to Lazarus lying dead in another borrowed

tomb. If He calls your name, friend, you will know and answer – GUARANTEED! Don't you LOVE our Lord and His WORD