

## 26. The resurrection of Lazarus

When God appeared to Moses for the first time and told him to speak to the people of Israel—and to Egypt's Pharaoh who oppressed them, Moses said,

“When I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?’ And God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”  
(Exodus 3:13,14)

In the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ often associated himself with this phrase: I am. In John 8:58, he said: “Before Abraham was, I am.” After having multiplied the bread and fish, he said, “I am the bread of life.” Before healing the man who was born blind, he said, “I am the light of the world.” Later he would say, “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved” (John 10:9). In the same chapter, he said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.” And in John 15:5, he said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

Today, we will look at another miracle of Jesus, a very great miracle, also preceded by one of these declarations of Jesus which begin with “I am.” It is a miracle capable of producing faith in him, a miracle which demonstrates once again his compassion, a miracle which shows something—it shows that only Jesus gives life.

### THE TEXT

“Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha... Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, ‘Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.’ When Jesus heard that, He said, ‘This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days 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, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?’ ... He said to them, ‘Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.’ Then His disciples said, ‘Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.’

However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.’ Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him.’

“So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Now Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ... who is to come into the world.’

“And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, ‘The Teacher has come and is calling for you.’ As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him... Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.’

“Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to Him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, ‘See how He loved him!’ And some of them said, ‘Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?’

“Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha, the

sister of him who was dead, said to Him, 'Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?' Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, 'Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.' Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth!' And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Loose him, and let him go.'"

### **A MIRACLE WHICH CAN PRODUCE FAITH**

Many people today claim to do miracles. Some draw big crowds by promising them healings and other wonders. Some manage to fill stadiums. Many are convinced by what they see. Others doubt. Those who go on the stage and claim to be healed are individuals whom the people in the crowd did not know previously so no one knows if they had really been sick. There is no opportunity to see them afterwards to know if the healing was complete and lasting. Most of the time, an ailment is involved which is not visible—a pain in the stomach or an alleged cancer. Some people wonder why the supposed healer does not go to the hospital to cure the sick or even to the cemetery to bring back the dead.

In contrast, the miracles of Jesus left no reason to doubt, and none of them was clearer than the one in the narrative we have just read.

Lazarus seems to have been relatively well-known. His sister Mary had sufficient means to buy some perfume which cost nearly as much as a year's salary for the average worker of that time. The following chapter in the gospel of John tells us how she anointed Jesus with this perfume. John says that many Jews had come to comfort Mary and Martha when Lazarus died. This crowd of people who were present when Lazarus came out of the tomb knew perfectly well that Lazarus had really been dead. As Martha said, the body would stink already since it had been in the tomb for four days. And after the miracle, it was easy for anyone to find Lazarus and know that he had truly been brought back to life. John 12:9-11 said, in talking of the Jews who later came to

Jerusalem for the feast of Passover:

"Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus."

Jesus had done this miracle so that people might believe that God had sent him. It was a miracle that no one could deny. The Jewish leaders did not believe in him, but they recognized what Jesus had done.

Verses 45-48 say:

"Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done. Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, 'What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him...'"

When people are faced with the facts about Jesus, they can always refuse to believe in him, but it is not because there is not enough proof of his identity. It is because their hearts are closed to him. They don't want to believe in him.

### **A MIRACLE THAT SHOWS THE COMPASSION OF JESUS**

When the news reached Jesus that his friend Lazarus was sick, he did not return immediately to Bethany. However, this was not because of a lack of love for Lazarus and his sisters. He loved them very much. He knew that he would raise Lazarus from the dead, and that this miracle would lead many to believe in him. He said in John 11:14,15, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe." Yes, he could have kept Lazarus from dying, but he was seeking a more important blessing for Lazarus and his family, for his disciples and for the multitude.

But at the same time, he was not insensitive to the grief and pain caused by this death. Even while allowing this pain, he shared it, "He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to Him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, 'See how He loved him!'" (John 11:33-35).

The Lord allows us, too, to sometimes pass through troubled waters, to suffer, to be sad, to cry. He does this so that our faith may be strengthened or purified by the trial, so that others may be brought to faith by seeing our steadfastness, or for other reasons that we can't disregard. But when we weep, he weeps with us. He is not indifferent to our grief. He feels compassion. He is moved. And it is because he loves us.

### **A MIRACLE THAT SHOWS THAT JESUS ALONE GIVES LIFE**

As we said previously, the miracles of Jesus signified something. The meaning of this one is found in one of the declarations of Jesus that begin with the words "I am." He tells Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." But what did he mean? We all know that Christians die just as all non-Christians do. When it comes to physical death, there is no difference. Everyone dies. But physical death is nothing more than sleep. Jesus told the disciples that Lazarus was asleep. Many passages in the Bible compare physical death to sleep. We will all wake from this sleep. "The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28,29).

True death is condemnation and banishment from the presence of God. Those who are spiritually dead will hear these words: "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). This death will not reach the ones who believe in Christ and obey him. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Only he can give life to those who are spiritually dead as well as to those who are physically dead. Spiritual death is the only true tragedy, and Jesus can deliver us from it.