

The Glory of God in Resurrection

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Reading: John 11, Ezekiel 37:12,13, Isaiah 11:11, Romans 9:27-29

In order to see the setting of this point it is necessary first to look back to what is marked as chapter 10:

"They sought again to take him (Jesus): and he went forth out of their hand" (John 10:39).

"The Jews took up stones again to stone him.... The Jews answered him, For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God" (John 10:31,33).

Then verses 7 and 8 in chapter 11:

"Then after this he saith to the disciples, Let us go into Judaea again. The disciples say unto him, Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?"

You see the Jewish background. Repeatedly the Jews attempted to stone Jesus. They wanted to do with Him what later they did with His servant Stephen - just stone Him, and leave Him there broken in body and dead. Again and again they took up the stones to stone Him - "They took up stones to cast at him" (John 8:59). That is the Jewish background of chapter eleven, and it shows us very clearly why Israel of old had to be set aside, and why God had to have another Israel. That kind of Israel could never serve the purpose of God! And so it was rejected.

If you remove the mark 'Chapter 11' and read through from chapter ten right on, you find that this account of the death and raising of Lazarus is set right in that background. We must never just take some story as an incident in itself. We must always recognize that it relates to something else, and this dying and raising of Lazarus is set right in that Jewish background. This was not just a coincidence, a thing that happened by chance. Jesus made it perfectly clear that it was in the plan of God. If you read the story you will see that it is quite clear from what Jesus said that this is all planned and arranged by God. He arranged that Lazarus should die, and Jesus is not going to interfere with that. It HAS to happen because it stands related to some very big thing that God is doing.

Well, let us look at Lazarus. Lazarus is sick, and it is a sickness for which there is no cure. I do not know how many doctors there were within reach of Bethany, or in Jerusalem, which was just a few miles away, but I am quite sure that if there were any doctors about, the sisters could have sent for one during those four days. But whether they did or not, the doctors could have done nothing. Lazarus just HAS to die in the plan of God. He has a sickness for which there is no cure, and even Jesus, who had raised the dead more than once, will not interfere in this matter. He just positively refuses to prevent Lazarus from dying. It tells us here that when Jesus heard about it He stayed where He was for four days. That, of course, made the great problem for the sisters, and it gave something to the enemies. They said: "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of him that was blind, have caused that this man also should not die?" Well, let the sister misunderstand and the enemies misjudge! Jesus is not going to be moved by anything, so He lets Lazarus die.

Is this a hopeless situation? Well, what does Jesus say about it? When He received the message from the sisters He said: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby." ... This sickness is not unto DEATH, and yet He let him die. He evidently meant: 'This sickness is not unto death for ever. It is not final death.' Later He said "Lazarus is dead", and yet He said "This sickness is not unto death". So He meant: Death is not going to be the last word.

Now let us note this as we go along: the spiritual knowledge of Jesus. Although He was a long way away from Bethany, He knew exactly when Lazarus died. No one sent Him a second message to say that Lazarus was dead. He said to His disciples: "Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep". They replied: "If he is fallen asleep, he will recover." ... "Then Jesus therefore said unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead." Jesus knew in His spirit that Lazarus had died, and He always knew in His spirit when there was death and when there was life anywhere.

If the Lord Jesus is in us by His Spirit, we always know whether things are alive or dead. We may go amongst some people and say: 'My word, there is no life here! It is dead.' Or we may go amongst others and say: 'Well, there is life here.' We know it in our spirit. No one has to tell us that those people are dead or alive. And that is a mark of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus knew the moment that Lazarus died. Thus we have the Jewish background, the immediate connection of this incident, that is, the connection of the old Israel. That is why I read those Scriptures from Ezekiel and Isaiah. When Israel was in captivity in Babylon and Assyria, the Lord said they were dead and buried, and He said "I will open your graves". To the Lord they were in their graves. And then Isaiah said that a remnant would

return, and that remnant was the people who came out of the grave of Assyria and Babylon.

Did you notice that in Romans Paul takes that up and brings it over into the New Testament? He quotes Isaiah's word about a remnant and says that out of the old buried Israel there is going to come a remnant that is resurrected by the Lord, and that remnant is going to be incorporated into the new heavenly Israel.

That is why this story of Lazarus is put right in the Jewish setting. You notice that Jesus deliberately moves into the hostile Jewish area. It was there that they had repeatedly tried to stone Him, but He said to His disciples: "Let us go into Judaea again." They said, 'Lord, they have only recently tried to stone you there. Why go back?' But He would not accept their argument. He deliberately went back into the hostile area although it was so opposed to Him. Why did He do that? The story of Lazarus is the answer. This death and raising of Lazarus was set over against that situation. Right in the midst of the rejected, dead and buried old Israel He is going to raise a new one.

You might have thought that when the Lord wanted to start His new work He would have gone to some other country. He might have said: 'Well, I can do nothing in Jerusalem or in Palestine. Let Me go to India, or to China, and start all over again', but He deliberately went back into Judaea and said: 'In the place of death I am going to have resurrection.'

The Day of Pentecost is wonderful for that fact alone. If ever there was an impossible situation, it was Jerusalem on that day! The old Israel had been rejected by God and was dead from His standpoint. It was buried - and right there God brought in by new birth His new Jerusalem. That is the immediate setting and meaning of this incident.

But we said that Paul carries this whole thing right over into the New Testament and says: 'God has sent the old Israel away, but He is going to bring out of that very place of death His new Israel. A remnant is going to be saved through union with Jesus Christ in death and resurrection.'

What is the new Israel? What are marked chapters nine, ten and eleven in the Letter to the Romans deal, on the one side, with the death of the old Israel, the rejected nation. And then the Apostle says that out of that a remnant will be brought. But you see chapter eleven goes straight into chapter twelve. And what is chapter twelve about? It is about the Body of Christ. And what is that Body? It is not Jew and Gentile brought together, but it is both, having lost their own distinctiveness, becoming one in Christ. In another place Paul says: "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free... for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3: 28). So that when the old Israel is removed and a remnant is taken out of it, buried with Christ and raised together with Him, it does not come back as a Jewish remnant, but as a part of the Body of Christ. That is the new Israel.

Well, I have said that that is the immediate connection. What will help us most, however, is to see the wider connection.

We go back to Lazarus. The New Testament teaches us this: that the Cross of Jesus Christ does not cure the old man. It crucifies him. That is the trouble with most of us. Let us be perfectly honest about it! We are wanting the Lord to cure our old man, to make him a good old man, and to remove from him all his faults, all that is wrong with him and all his sinful nature. The Cross of the Lord Jesus does not do that. It says: 'In the sight of God the old man is dead and buried.' "Our old man", says Paul, "was crucified with him" (Romans 6:6). Jesus never came to any old man to heal him and make him better, and yet we, all the days of our lives, are wanting the Lord to make us better. Right to the end of our lives the old man will still be the old man, but with this difference - that God looks upon him as buried, as in the grave, as crucified with Christ. 'In Christ (risen) there is a new creation.'

That is Lazarus. Jesus would not cure Lazarus of his sickness. And God would not cure Israel of its evil nature. He said: 'It must die!'

That is only half the story, but let us be quite clear about it. There will always be an incurable background in our life and it will not be healed. It is there all the time and will not be cured of its spiritual maladies. Any day, if you like to go back on the ground of the old man, you can commit the same sins. That is what the New Testament teaches on the one side.

But the glory will be in that which stands over against the background. It will be in what is in the foreground. We may have a sick body, for the Lord does not always heal sick bodies. He does sometimes, but not always, even

with the very best saints that He has had. We may have a sick human nature - and we all know that is true. We are all the time up against the troubles in one another. 'Oh, if only I could forget what that brother or that sister is in himself or herself, I would have a happy time! But, you know, he is such an awkward man! He loves the Lord and wants the Lord's best, but if you come up against him naturally you don't find him a very easy man to get on with.' Grace does make differences, but it transcends, not eradicates. As in the case of Paul, we shall all be saying at the end of our course: "Not that I... am already made perfect" (Philippians 3:12). Perhaps in our last days, before going to the Lord, people will find some difficulties with us. I am not saying that we ought not to lose some of those strong, wrong ways in our lives. Grace can work miracles in our human nature, but if you are looking for the day in this life when you are going to be absolutely free from that nature, you will be disappointed. Perhaps you say: 'That is a very poor Gospel to preach!'

But there is another side to it. You and I can live in the power of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with a very sick body and with a very poor human nature. Yes, the power of His resurrection can cover so much. The foreground can just be the power of His resurrection. We have to say about some people: 'Well, you know, they are so weak physically. They know so much about sickness, and yet, look at what the Lord enables them to do! It is a miracle how much work they get through! They ought to have been dead long ago, but they go on. Not in their own strength, however. There is another strength that is over their weakness.' Paul said: "When I am weak, then am I strong" (II Corinthians 12:10). The power of Christ's resurrection was overcoming his weakness. He said: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (II Corinthians 12:9). He was speaking of his physical infirmities and of the power of Christ's resurrection.

What is true in the physical realm is true in the spiritual. If we live in ourselves we will give up. Oh, what a lot of infirmities there are in our natures! We are always carrying about a lot of spiritual weaknesses. Do you understand what I mean? What a trouble are these natural infirmities of ours! If ever we say 'I cannot', and then, because we cannot, we say 'I give it up', we have forfeited the greatest blessing of the Christian life. Think of all that the Apostle Paul had to do and to suffer! It was a terrible life that he had to live, from one standpoint. He had infirmity in his body, he had enemies wherever he went and he suffered numerous adversities. He was in the sea a day and a night. He was in nakedness and hunger. He had to travel on foot mile after mile, month after month. So we can gather up all the difficulties in that life, and if ever a man ought to have said 'I cannot go on', that man was Paul! But what did he say? "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). Not 'I can do all things' - Paul would have said 'I can do nothing' - but "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me." There was a day when naturally he despaired of life. He said: "We ourselves have had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (II Corinthians 1:9 - R.V. margin).

Lazarus was absolutely hopeless and helpless. He could do nothing - and that is how we are naturally. But Jesus said that it was "for the glory of God".

Dear friends, the glory of God is manifested in those who in themselves are as good as dead, but whom He enables to go on and do much for Him. Jesus may not always heal us in body or in nature, but He can give us divine life and that is a great thing.

Perhaps some of you have heard of God's great servant, Dr. A. B. Simpson. He was a great believer in divine healing and wrote a book on it. But, in spite of his belief, he said this: 'So that no one will misunderstand my position, I do not say that everyone has to be healed, but I do say that everyone can know divine life, which is something more than natural life.'

Well, back to Lazarus. The Lord did not heal him, but He gave him resurrection life, and that is the hope of everyone. The Lord may want to heal you in your body, or He may not do it. However, whether He does or does not, He does not want us to live on our own life, but by resurrection life. That is what Jesus meant when He said: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God". If you look through your New Testament you will see that God is always glorified in resurrection. That is where the glory of God is.

You may see a very weak Christian physically, but you may glorify God in that one because of the wonderful power of divine life. You may see a person who has many faults and lots of things about them that you do not like, and yet there is something more than that - there is the Lord's life in them. While you may not glory in what they are naturally, you can glorify God for what they are spiritually.

That is the real heart of this incident of Lazarus. Life out of death is God's secret, the thing that glorifies Him most of all.

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Is that all a lovely story and wonderful truth? Put it into operation tomorrow morning! Say to the Lord when you get up: 'Lord, I am no good in myself, but I am going to live this day by the power of Your resurrection.' There may be impossible situations inside or outside yourself, but just say to the Lord: 'Now, Lord, you get glory today by enabling me to live in resurrection life.' It is something that we are to take by faith every day.

Timothy was evidently a physically weak young man. There was something wrong with his stomach and it was constantly troubling him. Paul said: "Lay hold on the life eternal" (I Timothy 6:12), and spoke of his "often infirmities" (I Timothy 5:23). If the Lord meant everyone to be healed physically, why did Paul not heal Timothy? Paul knew that there was something better than being healed physically. The power of eternal life in a weak physical body is a great testimony. "Lay hold on the life eternal" - that is resurrection life, and it is something that we have to do.