

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

When we come to consider the work of Messiah, particularly his becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2:8), we tend to do so from the point of view of what benefits might be obtained by ourselves from what he did. How we can find forgiveness in the sight of the Deity by association with the death of Messiah, and how we can look forward to the future in hope, knowing that he who raised up Messiah from the dead can also raise us up in the likeness of his resurrection. We tend to look at the Sacrifice of Christ from the point of view of human salvation, and human benefits.

However, the salvation of men is merely a means to a greater end. The Psalmist was moved by the Spirit to write:

“Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; **that** glory may dwell in our land” (Ps 85:9).

From this, we learn that Salvation is extended to men for a purpose – that Yahweh’s Glory may dwell in the land. Indeed it is the Father’s Revealed Purpose to fill all the earth with His Glory:

“As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh” (Num 14:21; Hab 2:14, cp Ps 72:19, Is 6:3).

It is the Father’s purpose to ultimately populate the earth (Is 45:18) with an innumerable multitude (Rev 7:9) of immortalised men and women, who are his children, being the children of the resurrection (Luke 20:36), each of whom is in his likeness and image (Ps 17:15; cp Rom 8:29 with Heb 1:3; see Col 3:10, 1Jno 3:2). Showing forth His glorious attributes in a state of sinlessness and deathlessness, this global, raised population shall fill all the earth with the glory of Yahweh – as we have seen, as the waters cover the sea. So it is, that the salvation of men is but a part of the process by which Yahweh will be glorified, and the earth transformed from its present state of corruption and wickedness into a habitation for the Deity among men (Rev 22:3).

That being so, when we turn our attention to the ministry of the Master, we find that it was his purpose to glorify Yahweh among men. He prayed at the end of his ministry: “*I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do*” (Jno 17:4). The work that was given to Messiah to do, therefore, was to glorify Yahweh upon the earth. This means that the miracles which the Master performed, were not mere humanitarian gestures, healing the sick solely for their own individual benefit, but were also designed to give glory to his Father. And this we see in the example before us: the raising of Lazarus from the grave.

John chapter 11 opens with a description of how Lazarus was mortally sick. His sisters, Mary and Martha sent a message to the Master “saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest 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 might be glorified thereby” (Jno 11:3-4). The sickness then, was not that Lazarus might die, but was for the glory of God, and that Christ might be glorified. And this we see in the raising of Lazarus by Christ, for when he had commanded that the stone covering his grave be removed, Messiah said to Martha, “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest **see the glory of God?**” (Jno 11:40). The glory of God was declared in the death and resurrection of Lazarus, for it declared the power of the Almighty to save, and foreshadowed the greater events to come to pass in the death and resurrection of Messiah himself. It caused many to believe in Jesus, and was a powerful testimony to the fact that he had power, even over the grave itself.

MARY AND MARTHA

Several highly interesting characters are involved in these events, most notably Lazarus of course, but also his two sisters, Mary and Martha. We first come across these women in the tenth chapter of

Luke's inspired narrative, where we find that the Master had been received into their house. Mary "sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:39-42).

Here, we find that both women are preoccupied with the Master, one hearing his word, the other serving him, presumably by way of preparing a meal for both him and his disciples to eat. Martha was serving alone, and seems to have become somewhat flustered by this, and desired of the Master that Mary be taken away from him, to help her. However, the Master placed things into their proper context. There are many things to be done in life, and Martha was troubled about them all; but only one thing is really "needful" - which is to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. Mary had chosen the "needful" thing which would not be taken away by her having to go and help her sister. Here, Mary is portrayed as being at the place of learning, at the feet of Jesus (cp Deut 33:3), being instructed by him, and therefore receiving spiritual food. Martha, on the other hand, although being moved by admirable motives in wanting to do her best for her Master, nevertheless had her attentions drawn away from what the Master might do for her by way of instructing her, to what she might do for him. Her focus had shifted, and needed to be brought back by the Master. She needed to be corrected, that she might be ministered unto by him, for his purpose was not to be ministered to by others, but to minister himself (Mark 10:45). The lesson for ourselves is clear: we must not become so distracted by the cares of this life that we neglect to hear the voice of Messiah. There is much to do in life; some things are needful, others are not. In fact, most are not, but that which is needful however busy and preoccupied we might find ourselves, is to give ear to the word of Messiah. He alone can save, and the Gospel he spoke is the power of God unto salvation.

LOVED OF THE LORD

This family at Bethany were loved by the Master. There are very few people in Scripture concerning whom it is said that the Master loved, but here are some of them: "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus" (Jno 11:5). They were amongst the few in Israel who received him. For the most part, "his own received him not" (Jno 1:11), but here were a handful who delighted in his company, whom he himself had developed an affection for. He whom Jesus loved had fallen sick, and knowing of the miracles of healing that Jesus had performed in many parts of the land, Martha and Mary send to him: "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick" (Jno 11:3).

Concerning this, Bro John Carter writes: "The greatness of their friendship and trust in Jesus is seen in the simple message they sent to him. They make no request either that he should hasten to their home or exercise his power from where he was; it is enough that he be informed that the one whom he loved was sick. They were content with whatever action he chose to take" (*The Gospel of John*, p 128). Their trust in him was implicit, and in the end of the matter, was amply rewarded. The Master, upon hearing this message did not rise to go to them, but took the rather unusual step of remaining where he was for another two days: "When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was" (Jno 11:6). What a trial this must have been for Jesus! He had the power to heal the one whom he loved, yet it was not yet the time to exercise that power. A greater miracle could be performed, and greater glory would be given to God, if his friend should die first, and be raised from the dead. This must have been a great trial indeed, to allow a loved one to die, in order that the power and glory of God could be shown later.

AWAKENING OUT OF SLEEP

The time came for the Master to go to Lazarus. He said to his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep" (Jno 11:11). The language here is taken from the prophecy of Daniel, and the 12th Chapter: "At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which

standeth for the children of thy people ... and many of them that **sleep** in the dust of the earth shall **awake** ..." (Dan 12:1,2). Here was Michael – the one “who is like El” coming to awaken one who slept in the dust of the earth. The miracle was to be an earnest of the Kingdom – a shadow of greater things to come, when Messiah shall come to raise others, even his brethren whom he loves, to life eternal.

The disciples, however, did not perceive this allusion to their Scriptures, thinking that he meant merely a taking of rest in sleep, in which case it would be good for Lazarus. The Master therefore presented the matter plainly to them: “Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him” (Jno 11:15). The miracle was to be a sign not just to the unbelieving Jews, but to the disciples also, that their faith might be increased. They did not yet understand that Messiah himself had to suffer before he could enter into his glory, and the events concerning Lazarus would have helped to prepare them for his death and resurrection.

The Master, with his disciples following, went towards Bethany where Mary and Martha lived, and where “many of the Jews” had gone to comfort them concerning their brother. “Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat in the house” (Jno 11:20). Here, the events are most instructive to ourselves. Martha, literally as soon as she knew that the Master was on his way, went out to meet him, without stopping to tell anyone else, even her sister. Again, we have a similar reaction on Mary’s part, as soon as she knew Jesus was coming: “as soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him” (v 29). Both were ready to immediately go out to meet the Master, as soon as they knew he was near.

We are living in the age immediately prior to time when Messiah shall leave his place in a “far country”, having received for himself a kingdom, and come to raise his brethren from the dead. How will we respond in that great day, when the angelic voice announces to us that the Master is come? The seven wise virgins of Messiah’s parable were ready to immediately go out and meet him: “at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; *go ye out to meet him* ... the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut” (Mat 25:6,10). Here is the outworking of faith in a lifetime of waiting. To be ready at all times for the Master’s coming is difficult – especially for those whose lives are cluttered with the cares and troubles of this life - but needful, for we know neither the day nor the hour of his appearing. May it be that in that day to come, we will be found ready to leave all behind, to go out and meet our Master, as did Martha and Mary.

Upon greeting their Master, both the sisters uttered the same words, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died” (vs 21, 32). Here was their confidence in his ability to save; that had he been present, their brother would have been healed. Martha however, expresses a greater confidence in the Master, that even at this late hour all is not lost: “but I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee” (Jno 11:22). The Master tested her with the words: “Thy brother shall rise again”. But what could this mean? Martha could hardly dare to presume to apply these words to the immediate circumstances. Her words in reply expressed a faithful anticipation for the future: “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (v 23, 24). He replied with words that could only strengthen her conviction: “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?” (v 26). He was the Resurrection – and the life! Here was the life-giver of Israel, the One through whom life eternal might come! Those who live and believe in him “shall never die in the age” (according to Bro Thomas’ rendering of the Greek). Lazarus believed in him, so there was still hope for Lazarus! Did Martha believe this concerning the Master? “She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world” (v 27).

A CONFESSION OF FAITH

Martha declared the Master to be “the Christ, the Son of God”. On another occasion, the Master asked his disciples to declare who they believed him to be. “Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the

Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Mat 16:16, 17). Flesh and blood cannot of itself reveal anything of the Spirit to any man, for the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ... neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). Knowledge of such things must come from above, revealed by the Father through inspiration, direct instruction of the Son, or as in our case, through the Spirit-Word. Simon was especially blessed for his recognition of who Messiah actually was; and here we find Martha giving the same confession of her faith in him. She knew that Jesus was he of whom the prophets wrote, the Son of the Living God; and although she dared not presume that her present wish for her brother would be granted, she trusted in him that Lazarus would rise again at the last day. What a remarkable understanding she had! Her sister, Mary, also showed a depth of understanding in the Master. The record informs us that she was “that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick” (Jno 11:2). She anointed the Master against the day of his burying (Jno 12:7), showing a most remarkable understanding that the Master himself must suffer before he could enter into his glory. Not even the disciples understood this – what a remarkable family this was who dwelt at Bethany! No wonder the Master loved them!

The Master went to the tomb, beholding the weeping of Mary, and of the Jews who accompanied her. Then we have the shortest, yet perhaps the most poignant verse of the Bible: “Jesus wept”. “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ...” (Heb 4:15), and here we behold the feelings of the Son of Man. The Master wept. But why? After all, he knew he was going to raise Lazarus from the grave again – why was it a time of sorrow for him? Perhaps it was that in Lazarus, he saw represented the dead state of the nation; that though he had power to revive it, and bring breath back into it’s carcass (Mat 24:28), the Jews were too hardhearted to accept him. Perhaps it was the hypocrisy of those who wept with Mary, yet who were to rejoice at his own death. Perhaps it was that in the death of Lazarus, he saw his own death foreshadowed. Perhaps it was also his sharing the feelings of human infirmities, those whom he loved weeping at the loss of a loved one (Rom 12:15).

Being touched with the feeling of human infirmities, the Master wept at the graveside of his friend. Lazarus’ body had been placed in a cave, with a stone lying over the entrance of it (Jno 11:38), which reminds us of the Master’s own tomb. The Master, having come to the tomb gave the command for the stone to be removed. Martha, however, said to him, “Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days” (v 39). Again, we see her becoming concerned with the practicalities of things, being over worried at natural things. The Master gently reminded her of their previous conversation when she had met him: “Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?” (v 40). Her seeing the glory of God was predicated upon her belief. It would only be so, if she *believed*. She was strong in faith, as the stone was removed. The Master lifted up his eyes, and prayed to his Father: “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. 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” (v 42).

His purpose was that the Father be glorified, not he. This is why he made this prayer, that those standing by would know that the resurrection was by the power of the Father, who had heard the voice of His Son (cp 11:22). “And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. 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” (v 43, 44).

Notice the parallels and contrasts with the Master’s own death and resurrection, which we come together each week to remember in the bread and in the wine. The stone was rolled away, that the resurrected Lazarus could come out. Even so was the stone removed in the Master’s case – albeit by angelic hand. Contrary to Martha’s expectation, the body of Lazarus had not seen corruption: it had been perfectly preserved for four days in anticipation of this miracle. Even so, the body of Jesus saw no corruption (Acts 13:35-37) for the three days it lay awaiting revival. But Lazarus came out of the grave still bound by the bands of death – the grave clothes. He was still mortal, was still going to die

at some point in the future. Whereas when the Master emerged from the grave, he did so to return there no more – he had achieved the victory over death, and so the graveclothes were folded up and left behind (Jno 20:6,7). The bands of death were loosed, for he could not be holden of the grave. He emerged to be given immortality, as being the firstfruits of them that slept. He is the resurrection, and the life.

We come then, to focus our attention upon our Master, as emblemised in the bread and in the wine. We have seen the depth of faith that both Mary and Martha had, a faith that was able to bring their brother back to life, for they both believed, and saw the glory of God. Yahweh was glorified in Lazarus' death and resurrection, for through it; many came to believe in Messiah. In this seventh 'sign' of John's Gospel, we have a declaration that Jesus is the keyholder of the grave (Rev 1:18); he has the power to resurrect those whom he chooses. And we look forward with great faith in him – with the faith of Martha, that he is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He is our hope and our salvation, and though we may yet descend into the dust of the ground before he comes, we will but sleep, awaiting the time of awakening at his appearing.

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