

### The Raising of Lazarus From the Dead

#### John 11:1-16

John 11:1-16 – “Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. <sup>3</sup> Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.”

<sup>4</sup> 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.”

<sup>5</sup> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. <sup>7</sup> Then after this He said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” <sup>8</sup> The disciples said to Him, “Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?” <sup>9</sup> Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. <sup>10</sup> But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” <sup>11</sup> These things He said, and after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.” <sup>12</sup> Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.” <sup>13</sup> However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep.

<sup>14</sup> Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup> And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.”

<sup>16</sup> Then Thomas, who is called the Twin (Didymus), said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”

#### Background Notes

Lazarus of Bethany was gravely ill. Lazarus’ sisters, Mary and Martha, are well known from Luke 10. When Jesus was visiting in their home, Martha was distracted occupied with preparing and serving the meal, and she was irritated that her sister Mary simply sat at the Lord’s feet, listening to His every word.

Mary was the woman who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair (v2). Now some of you might be thinking, “Wait a minute – the event when Mary anointed the Lord’s feet isn’t recorded until John 12. Isn’t John’s mention of the event out of chronological order?” Yes, that event is recorded in John 12, but consider this fact. John the Apostle wrote his Gospel around 85AD, long after the events took place. By that time Mary was well known as the one who anointed the Lord’s feet. Remember - the Lord said in Mark 14:9 that everywhere the gospel was preached, Mary’s act of worship would be remembered! So it’s not unusual that John described Mary as the one who anointed the Lord’s feet.

Lazarus, Mary, and Martha lived in Bethany, which is two miles east of Jerusalem (v18). The fact that it is close to Jerusalem explains the disciples’ reluctance to go with the Lord when Lazarus died: “*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?” (v7-8).* So they were reluctant to go to Bethany because Judea and Jerusalem were dangerous. The last time they were there, the Jews picked up stones to stone the Lord (John 10:31; also John 8:59).

Finally Thomas said to the other disciples, *“Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”* Some commentators have found fault with Thomas for not being more optimistic or for not having more faith. That may be so, but at least Thomas showed some courage!

However, Thomas is not remembered for being courageous. Thomas is remembered for doubting that the other disciples had truly seen the resurrected Lord - right? And don't be surprised if you too will be remembered for your mistakes rather than for your accomplishments!

This is true in the world, and unfortunately it is also true in the Christian life. I know of a Christian man who is greatly involved in worldwide Christian ministry, but he is remembered in some churches as the man who was the cause of a split in a church. No one in those churches remembers his great accomplishments and service for the Lord. Instead they remember what might be called a mistake.

## Doctrinal / Teaching Points

### 1. The death of a believer is “on schedule.”

Was the death of Lazarus premature? Was it untimely? Did it “just happen”? No. Although it might seem that Lazarus' death was untimely, it was right on schedule according to the Lord's program and timetable. The same is true of your death and my death, and the death of any of our loved ones.

Notice several points from this passage that emphasize this truth.

- First of all, look again at verse 4, where the Lord said, *“This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”* That is, the death would not be permanent - the Lord was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. So we see that there was a **purpose** for Lazarus' death. It was right on schedule.

- Another point we should notice is in verse 6. The Lord stayed two more days in the place where He was. We would have thought that He would go to Bethany right away - but no. He delayed two days. Why? Because this was part of the Lord's **program**.

There was a Jewish superstition at that time that the soul somehow remained near the body for a couple of days after a person died. It seems that the Lord *may* have purposely delayed so that when He arrived, Lazarus had been dead for four days. So by then there was no doubt in people's minds that Lazarus was really dead, and his raising would be seen as a real miracle. The Lord's delay was part of His program and timetable.

God's delays are *not necessarily* denials. This is true in all areas, not just when a loved one is seriously ill or dies. You may be praying about an urgent matter right now, and it seems like the Lord is not answering. He is delaying. Remember - God's delays are not necessarily God's denials.

- I think there's a further point in verse 9: *“Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.”* What did the Lord mean by this statement? This was said in response to the disciples' comment about the danger of going up to Jerusalem: *“Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?”* (v8).

The Lord answered the disciples' concern with the statement in verse 9. Essentially, the Lord was saying, "As long as I am walking in the light of my Father's will, there is no chance of being killed, or dying before the appointed time." There was still "daylight" in this sense that there was more work to be accomplished before the time of the cross. The scheduled time for His death had not yet arrived.

As believers, we too are "immortal" until our work on earth is done. We will not die until our **earthly mission is accomplished** and our time to die comes. And remember, there is a time to die: "*A time to be born, and a time to die*" (Ecclesiastes 3:2). God knows the schedule! The death of a believer is on schedule.

- Now one more point from verses 14-15: "*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."* Glad? The Lord was glad that He wasn't there? In the New Testament record, no one died when in the presence of Christ! So it seems that the Lord was indicating that He was glad that He was not there because Lazarus was able to die.

Is God glad when a believer dies? Yes, but not in the sense that God likes death. Death is an enemy! 1 Corinthians 15:26 says, "*The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.*" But God is glad when a believer dies in the sense that the death of a believer is on schedule - right on schedule, on **God's schedule**. And the believer is welcomed into His presence! Psalm 116:15 says, "*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints.*" The death of a believer is on schedule.

## 2. The death of a believer is *like* sleep.

"*These things He said, and after that 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*"(v11-14).

The term "*sleep*" is never used for the death of an **un**believer, but it is used for the death of a believer. Why? Because physical death for a believer is temporary. We await the **resurrection of the body**. When Steven was martyred, Acts

7:60 says that "*he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin."* And when he had said this, *he fell asleep.*"

The words "fell asleep" are a figure of speech for death. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13 we read, "*But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.*" Now notice: the "*sleep*" mentioned in these verses has to do with the **body**, not the **soul**! There is no idea or mention in the Bible of a "**soul sleep**" for the believer.

What did the Lord mean For example, the Lord said to the believing thief on the cross, "**Today** you will be with me in paradise!" (Luke 23:43). The apostle Paul said, "*So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord*" (2 Corinthians 5:6). And Paul also said, "*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*" (Philippians 1:21). Certainly Paul could not - and would not - have written that if the Bible taught that the soul of a believer "went to sleep" until a later time.

Only the body sleeps. The death of a believer is *like* sleep, in the sense that it is only **temporary**.

## **Practical Application**

### **Have you run a “heavenly credit check” lately?**

If you have ever had your credit checked, I’m sure you’ve been amazed at how much information is known about you - and how quickly the person checking it can get that information! Recently I applied by phone for a credit card. I thought that they would send me a bunch of forms to fill out, but no! They ran a credit check right over the phone, and in seven seconds they knew everything about me!

Certain computers know everything about you. It’s all in there. They know where you live, work and shop – and they know about that late payment you made on your Visa card five years ago! That’s all known.

Heaven keeps a lot of detailed information, too. Look at the heavenly credit information on Mary, Martha, and Lazarus: *“ Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.”*

Notice the further heavenly credit information for Mary. She was the sister of Martha and Lazarus, she lived in Bethany – **and** the heavenly computer knew that she was the *“Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair.”*

Mary’s act of worship is remembered in Heaven! She will be remembered forever for this act of worship and gratitude. It’s part of her “heavenly credit rating”! The fact that you are in this church today to worship the Lord and to grow as a Christian - believe it or not, this becomes part of your heavenly credit rating.

But maybe you’re not a Christian. Or maybe you’re a Christian, but you’re not here for worship and growth. Maybe you’re here for other reasons. If so, it’s important for you to take a look at your “heavenly credit check.” What’s going on in your life? What are your thoughts and motivations and actions? What information about your life is being recorded in heaven’s credit report? What actions do you need to take to get and maintain good “heavenly credit”?

Have you run a heavenly credit check lately?