

"Lazarus, come forth"

John 11 v.1-3.

Martha and Mary go about the house with anxious looks.

Martha and Mary? Who are they? ... Oh come, you know that, don't you? Just look back to Chapter 52. There you read that Jesus had three friends in Bethany, namely Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Now you can remember no doubt.

But why are Martha and Mary so anxious? Well, their brother Lazarus is ill, seriously ill. We may be quite sure they have carefully nursed their brother. They have provided him with all that he needed. They surrounded him with their affection.

Yet all their kind attention produces no improvement. Lazarus is getting worse, rapidly worse. If there is no change for the better, he will soon die!

Each time they leave the sick-chamber with a sigh, they cast an anxious glance up the road, but each time their faces show a look of deep disappointment.

It seems as though they are expecting someone to come.

Yes, boys and girls, that is indeed true. They are looking out for the arrival of the Lord Jesus, their Friend.

Does He know then that Lazarus is ill?

Yes indeed! They have sent somebody to Perea with the Message: "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick."

Now they are hoping that Jesus will get to Bethany in time. We may well imagine how they must have counted the hours.

But Jesus does not come. According to their reckoning He could have come by now. They are waiting ... waiting..... Their hearts beat anxiously, for their brother is sinking fast. He is dying ... they can see that ... but, there is still a hope!

But Lazarus does die, and still Jesus has not come.

Perhaps they hoped that Jesus would even now come. The young man of Nain; the daughter of Jairus; they had been raised to life by Him. Would He then be unable to raise Lazarus from the dead? ... They do not doubt it.

The hours creep slowly by. Already preparation is being made for his burial. In Eastern lands the dead are buried on the day of their death, on account of the warm climate.

A few hours later Lazarus is borne to the tomb. They were rich enough to possess a tomb of their own.

Look, the corpse is carried within the sepulchre and the heavy stone is rolled across the opening. The mourners return homewards.

In the evening of that day, the two deeply bereaved sisters sit together. They have lost the support of their daily life. We may be sure that they wept many sorrowful tears. Probably many questions came into their hearts. Why should Jesus not have come? ... If He had set out at once, He could have been with them in time. Why, why has He not come? ...

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John 11 vv.4-16.

Perhaps you are asking that question too. Had the Lord Jesus not received the message from Bethany? ... Yes, indeed He had.

As soon as He heard the sad news, He replied, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

So, He did know the position. Yet He remained two whole days at the place where He was then staying.

At last He says to His disciples: "Let us go into Judea again."

His disciples look at Him in amazement. Go to Judea? ... No, they are not at all inclined to do that. It is so dangerous in Judea for the Lord Jesus. Had not the Pharisees wanted to stone Him the last time He was in the temple? And will He again expose Himself to that danger? ...

They remind their Master of that incident. It is as though they say, "Master do not go. Thy life will be in danger."

But the Lord Jesus tells them that He must do His Father's work while it is day.

Soon afterwards the Lord says: "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go, that I may awake him out of his sleep."

Once more this is not understood by the disciples, and they answer: "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well."

And that is right, surely? If someone who is very ill falls asleep, it is usually a sign of improvement. But the Lord Jesus does not mean natural sleep here, but the sleep of death. That is why He said that.

The Saviour then says quite plainly: "Lazarus is dead."

He prepares for the journey to Bethany. The disciples realize that their Master is quite determined to return to Judea and its dangers. They look at

each other, shrug their shoulders resignedly, and follow Him.

One of the disciples, Thomas says to the others dejectedly: "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

With anxious looks and heavy hearts they follow their Master on His dangerous journey to Judea.

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John 11 vv.17-44.

Come, let us go back to Mary and Martha. How they must have missed their dear brother. Day after day goes by, but Jesus, their Friend, does not come.

Do you know who do come? Just read what God's Word says: "And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary."

Which Jews? ... Well, Jews from the surrounding district and from the city of Jerusalem, which was but a half an hour's walk from Bethany. From this it would appear that Lazarus had been a fairly important man. He was known in Jerusalem also. His friends and acquaintances have heard that Lazarus has died, and now they come to visit Martha and Mary, in order to comfort the two mourning women.

The house of mourning is full. One says this, another talks about that.

Suddenly Martha gets up and hurries out. Why does she do that? ... Well, she hears that Jesus is approaching and she hastens forth to meet Him.

Mary stays indoors. Some think that she had not heard that Jesus was approaching. Others say that she had heard it, but that she was too sorrowful to go out and meet Jesus. Whatever was the case, Mary stays home, while Martha hurries outside. Look she is coming up to the Lord Jesus.

"Lord," she says, "if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

Yet she still has a secret hope that the Lord Jesus will help her, yes, she believes in the Lord's almighty power, because she knows that He is the Son of God, the Messiah. Listen to what she says: "I know, that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee."

It is just as though she says: "Though it is quite impossible to us, as human beings, for Thee there is nothing too wonderful."

"Thy brother shall rise again," Jesus says to her.

At once she replies: "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Then resounds Jesus' answer: "I am the resurrection, and the life."

The Lord means: "Martha, I am the God of heaven and earth. I am the Ruler over life and death. Believest thou that?"

Without hesitation and with joy in her eyes, she cries out "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God."

Do you hear that? ... Do you believe that too? ... Oh certainly you will believe it with your understanding, but do you also believe it in your heart?

Martha did not just say this as so many words, she believed it with her whole soul. The Lord Himself had given her that true and saving faith.

Martha then hurries back home and whispers to her sister: "The Master is come, and calleth for thee."

When Mary hears this, she too gets up and hurries outside. The many Jews who had been with her in the room, get up too and follow her. They thought Mary was going to the tomb to weep. But Mary is not going to the grave, but to Jesus.

When Mary sees the Lord, she falls before Him sobbing, and says sadly: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

The Jews who see Mary's pitiful weeping, also begin to weep. It is a moving moment.

Deeply affected the Lord Jesus enquires quietly, "Where have ye laid him?" He means, "Where is the grave?"

They all go now to the place where the body of the dead man was placed. Look, they are standing in front of the closed sepulchre. Silence reigns, a silence broken only by the weeping of the two sisters, and the mourning of the Jews.

And just look, Jesus also weeps! By this we can see that the Lord Jesus is truly human. The sadness of all those present makes Him also sad.

Some of the Jews who are standing there cannot understand this. They murmur: "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?"

In these words there lies a quiet reproach, and at the same time, it goes to show that the recent restoration of sight to the man born blind had made a deep impression upon them.

But Jesus makes no reply. He steps a little closer to the grave and then says to Martha: "Take ye away the stone."

Martha looks at Him in great surprise and answers hesitantly: "Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he hath been dead four days."

Because of the warm climate the bodies of the dead quickly began to decompose in those regions.

"Martha," comes the voice of the Lord, "said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"

Yes, now Martha dares no longer refuse. At her command the stone is rolled from the entrance.

Look, the Lord Jesus lifts up His eyes towards heaven and says: "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."

Why is the Lord Jesus pleased? ... Oh, perhaps the Jews who are standing there will now believe in Him. Perhaps now they will acknowledge Him as the Messiah, as the Son of David, who was for to come.

Meanwhile it has become breathlessly quiet. The Jews are awaiting in the greatest suspense what is about to take place. In many hearts the thought arises: "Can He do such a thing?" ...

Suddenly Jesus cries with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth!"

And what then? ... Then Lazarus comes outside. In the dark entrance to the cave a white figure appears. His hands and feet, his face, yes, his entire body is still wrapped with grave clothes, but ... he is alive! How amazing!

Do you see the looks of boundless amazement on the faces of the Jews? They can scarcely believe it, but they must believe it, for they have seen it happen with their own eyes.

Calmly Jesus commands "Loose him, and let him go."

At once Lazarus is freed from the bondage of the grave clothes.

With his sisters, and followed by a great multitude, the resurrected Lazarus returns home.

What do you think? Will Mary and Martha have been overjoyed? ... Oh, there is really no need for me to ask that. It can be seen in their gleaming eyes.

This is the third time Jesus has raise one from the dead. The daughter of Jairus was raised very soon after she had died. The young man of Nain was raised as he was being carried to ~~to~~ the grave. But Lazarus rose from the dead after he had laid four days in the tomb.

The Jews had said mockingly: "Show us a sign, give us a token, that hou art truly tne Messiah."

Well now, here they have a sign, for what has just been done can be done by none other than God. This wonder of God was a clear proof that the Prophet of Nazareth was indeed the Son of God.

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You too, boys and girls, lie dead in trespasses and sins. Not physically dead, but spiritually dead. You too can do nothing to the glory of God.

But that same Jesus, who raised Lazarus after four days of physical death, can also raise you up from spiritual death. He can make your souls to live.

Oh, ask often for this. What an unspeakable blessing it would be, were the Saviour's voice to echo in your souls also: "Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead."

May the Lord grant it may be so!

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