

## Sermon 26 March 2023 Death and Resurrection

The theme today is death and resurrection and we are looking at the story of Lazarus. Lazarus lived with his sisters, Mary and Martha in the village of Bethany which is in Judea and about 2 miles from Jerusalem. We have already met Mary and Martha in *Luke 10 v38-42* and we read of Mary sitting at Jesus feet and listening to him while Martha was getting on with the house work and cooking. There is another sermon there, but not for today!

We are told that Lazarus was sick and Mary and Martha were able to send a message to Jesus to tell him this. In verse 4 Jesus heard the news and said: *“This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory, so that God’s son may be glorified through it.”* Lazarus was already dead when Jesus said this, but He knew the end result would be **the glory of God**, not death. Jesus also knew that the events recorded in this chapter would set the religious leaders in determination to kill him. This meant the end result would be **that the Son of God may be glorified** in His death and resurrection.

Jesus stayed away from Bethany for two more days and then said to his disciples that they should go back to Judea. But the disciples were very concerned about this, as the Jews had tried to stone Jesus there. Jesus could have raised Lazarus from a distance. And because of the opposition from the religious leaders, Judea was a dangerous place for Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus was willing to go to Judea again – despite the warnings from His disciples.

In verse 9 Jesus said *“Are there not twelve hours of daylight?”* Jesus meant by saying that He still had work to do. The twelve hours were a figurative way to speak of the time allotted by God the Father for the earthly work of Jesus. During these hours of daylight, no harm could come to Jesus and the disciples. They had to work before the night of Jesus’ passion.

Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to wake up Lazarus from his sleep. Here the word sleep is a metaphor for death. Jesus would wake him from his sleep or resurrect him. The disciples did not understand this and thought Jesus meant he was sleeping. But Jesus said in verse 14, *“Lazarus is dead and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.”* Jesus could be glad, even in the death of a dear friend, because He was certain of the outcome.

In verse 16 Thomas, also called Didymus, which means twin said *“Let us also go that we may die with him.”* Thomas was willing to go with Jesus even if it meant dying with Him. He made this commitment without much understanding of a promise of resurrection.

So, Jesus and the disciples arrive in Bethany and find that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Jesus knew the Jewish superstition of that time that said a soul stayed *near* the grave for three days, hoping to return to the body. Therefore, it was accepted that after four days there was absolutely no hope of resuscitation. In verse 19 we read that *“many Jews had come to Mary and Martha to comfort them in the loss of their brother.”* It was considered an important obligation to join with those who mourn the death of a near relative. Mary stayed at home, but Martha went out to meet Jesus and expressed her disappointment. In verse 21 she says: “Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” She goes on to say “But I know that God will give you whatever you ask.” Martha was not confident that Jesus would raise her brother. Despite this, she said that she would still trust Jesus although she was disappointed. This was a remarkable demonstration of faith, one that should be taken as an example. There are times in our lives when we experience disappointment and things don’t go in the way we either want or expect. Proverbs 3 v5-6 says this: *“Trust the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight.”*

In verse 22 Jesus tells Martha that her brother will rise again and Martha responds that she knows he will rise again in resurrection on the last day. Then in verse 23 Jesus says: “I am the resurrection and the Life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” Jesus did not claim to have resurrection and life, or understand secrets about resurrection and life. Instead, Jesus dramatically said that He is the resurrection and the life. To know Jesus is to know resurrection and life; to have Jesus is to have resurrection and life. Jesus challenged Martha to trust that He is the source of eternal life. The world fears death, but as Christians we have the promise of eternal life. Martha tells Jesus in verse 27 that she believes he is the Christ, the son of God.

So, Martha went back to the house, told Mary that Jesus, the teacher was here and he is asking for her. Mary got up quickly and went to where Jesus was, still outside the village and fell at his feet. The Jews who had been in the house comforting Mary thought she was going to Lazarus’s tomb to mourn there, and they followed her. In verse 32 Mary says through her tears “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” She uses the same words as Martha, but Jesus is deeply moved in spirit and troubled. God sees the tears of those who are grief stricken and is moved with compassion. God sees our tears and acts to dry our tears.

Jesus asked where Lazarus is laid and they reply come and see. In verse 35 we are told: “Jesus wept.” Jesus is the son of God, but he is also human and here we see his humanity. Jesus shared in the grief of those who mourn. Yet unlike any other, Jesus, the Son of God was able to do something about their grief. Jesus allowed this sympathetic passion to uniquely do for Lazarus what He will one day do for all who believe.

Jesus arrives at the tomb with a stone laid across it. Verse 38 says he was still deeply moved. He asked them to take away the stone. But Martha protested that the body has been there for 4 days and will smell. Jesus says in verse 40 *“If you would believe you would see the glory of God”*: Jesus was fully capable of this miracle without the faith of Martha or Mary. But if they would not believe, then they would never see the glory of God. They could see the end result and be happy in that, but they would miss the glory of working together with God in the fulfilment of His plan.

The stone was rolled away. This was a definite and remarkable step of faith. Jesus compelled Martha and Mary to act on their faith and they did so by obeying Jesus and His unusual request. Jesus prayed to his father in heaven, thanking him that he hears Jesus as he always does. In verse 42 Jesus prayed: “I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” Jesus was confident in His relationship with God the Father. The public nature of the prayer was for the sake of Mary, Martha, and the people who are standing by. The power of the prayer was rooted in the private prayer times of Jesus.

Jesus then called out to Lazarus to come out of the tomb. Jesus spoke to a dead body as if Lazarus were alive because He is *God*, and from Romans 4 v 17 *the God “who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.”* Lazarus who had died came out from the tomb. Jesus fought death at Lazarus’ tomb, and plundered the grave. Jesus told death that He would soon completely conquer it completely. Lazarus came out wearing the grave clothes. He arose bound in grave clothes, for he would need them again; whereas Jesus left His grave clothes behind in His tomb, as he would never need them again. Jesus asked the bystanders to remove the grave clothes from Lazarus and free him. Jesus did not miraculously remove the grave-clothes from Lazarus, but He asked some of the attendants to do so. Jesus did what only God could do, and then He looked for man’s co-operation for the completion of Lazarus’ deliverance. Last Sunday we heard about the blind man who Jesus met and put mud on the man’s eyes. But the healing was completed when the blind man obeyed Jesus’ instruction to go and wash in the pool of Siloam.

In verse 45 we read that many of the Jews who had supported Mary in her grief saw what Jesus had done and put their faith in him. Those who came to join in the sorrow of the grieving sisters did not expect that their reason for grief would be taken away. This was an impressive work of God, and for many it helped them put their trust in who Jesus said He was by seeing what He did.

So, what can we learn from this passage? We have seen that grief has been comforted, life has been restored, many more have believed, and the necessary death of Jesus has been set in motion. Mary and Martha expressed their disappointment to Jesus; Jesus understands our disappointments, when things do not work out as we had hoped, when we are let down by others and many other circumstances where we are disappointed. Jesus comforts us in our grief. Matthew 4 v5 confirms that those who mourn will be comforted. We have the power of the Holy Spirit to be our comforter and helper but the Holy Spirit also give us spiritual wisdom, discernment and guidance.

Death is not the end, the process of dying may be very painful, it may bring suffering, it may be quick or may be drawn out. But death is not the end; for all those who believe there the promise of eternal life. Jesus says in verse 23: “I am the resurrection and the Life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”

John 3 v16 states: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him, will not die but have eternal life.

## Prayer

Thank you, Lord, that you died for us, you died and took the weight of our sin on yourself. Thank you, Lord, that you rose again and are with us, through the power of your Holy Spirit. Thank you, lord, that you are with us through the good times and the bad. Thank you, Lord, for the promise of eternal life. Amen.