

Lessons from Lazarus Series
“Lessons about Resurrection and Eternal Life”
John 11.17-46

Introduction:

- Currently we are considering the events leading up to Passion Week recorded in the Gospel of John chapter 11 and 12.
 - Last week we looked at the beginning portion of the familiar story of Lazarus.
- As you recall while Jesus was staying beyond the Jordan River He received news that His friend Lazarus was deathly sick and was descending steadily into the valley of the shadow of death. (Lk.10.38-42, Jn.11.3)
 - Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha of Bethany and Jesus loved this trio of siblings. (Jn.11.2, 5)
 - But instead of rushing to Lazarus’ aid, Jesus stayed two more days beyond the Jordan and it was during this two-day delay that Lazarus dies. (Jn.11.6, 11-14)

T/S: Last week the Lord taught us some important lessons about life and death. If you weren’t here last week I want to encourage you to listen to the sermon online. (www.christcovenant.cc/media)

- This morning Jesus will teach us some important lessons about the resurrection and life.

SCRIPTURE READING – John 11.17-44 NASB

- By the time Jesus and His disciples arrived to the outskirts of the village of Bethany, Lazarus had already been buried in the tomb for four days. (11.17)
 - Since Bethany was only about two miles from Jerusalem, many friends and family had gathered to console the sisters. (11.18-19)
- When Martha heard that Jesus was outside of the city, she quickly rushed out to meet Him. (11.20a)
 - Mary, however, was unaware of Jesus’ arrival and stayed in the house with those who had gathered to mourn Lazarus’ death. (11.20b, 31)
- There are those who want to compare Martha and Mary’s responses to Jesus’ arrival to determine their spiritual character.

- Some say that Martha shows the proper response by quickly running to Jesus during her time of distress whereas Mary remains distant and removed.
 - Those who want to compare Martha and Mary, make the point that the sisters behaved exactly opposite than the way they behaved when Jesus visited their home months earlier. At that time, Martha was the one distracted and Mary was the one who sat at Jesus' feet. (Lk.10.38-42)
 - But now, these teachers conclude, it is Martha who is the woman of faith and Mary is the one who is distracted by the cares of this life.
 - But this type of comparison is ridiculous and unnecessary.
- I believe that the text shows that Martha and Mary stood in unified faith as they experienced the untimely death of the brother.
 - Notice that Martha and Mary reached Jesus on different occasions but they both say exactly the same thing, *"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."* (11.21, 31)
 - The sisters had an unyielding faith in Jesus. They knew that if Jesus had been there Lazarus wouldn't have died. It is as simple as that!
 - The sisters saying the exact same thing to Jesus on separate occasions suggests that they had talked about this and they had reached a common conclusion. If Jesus had come earlier, their brother would not have died.
 - But Jesus, for some reason unknown to them, was not there and because of that Lazarus died.
 - The sisters were disappointed but their disappointment was not going to cloud their faith.
 - Notice also that when Martha told Mary that Jesus had arrived and that He was requesting to see her that she quickly got up, ran to where Jesus was, and fell at His feet. (11.29-31)

APP: Therefore, I would conclude that both Martha and Mary were women of faith who believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world. They both believed that whatever Jesus asks of God, God would give Him. Martha and Mary were not just sisters they were soul sisters! (11.27, 22)

- *Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."* (11.23-24)

- When Jesus says to her, *"Your brother will rise again,"* Martha had no idea of what was about to happen.
- Martha thought that Jesus was referring to the general resurrection and therefore she responded, *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."*
- The Bible clearly teaches that there will be a general resurrection on the last day of all those who have died. (Acts 24.15)
 - Let me explain;
 - People are made with body and soul.
 - When a person dies the body and soul separate – the body returns to the ground from which it came and the soul returns to God who gave it.
 - A person remains in this condition until the great resurrection day – when the body is reunited to the soul and we inherit a glorified existence.
 - So when Martha says, *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day"* she is making reference to the great resurrection day.
 - The day when all shall come forth; those who are in Christ to a resurrection of life, those who are outside of Christ to a resurrection of judgment. (Jn.5.29)

APP: Knowing what happens at death gives us comfort so that we do not grieve like those who have no hope. (I Thess.4.13)

- Jesus no longer wants to talk about Lazarus or the future resurrection so He turns the conversation to Himself by saying to her, *"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.* (11.25-26a)
 - This is one of the seven *"I am"* statements issued by Christ in the Gospel of John.
 - I AM the Bread of life" (6:35, 41, 48, 51) "I AM the Light of the world" (8:12). "I AM the Door of the sheep" (10:7, 9) "I AM the Good Shepherd" (10:11, 14) "I AM the Resurrection and the Life" (11:25) "I AM the Way, the Truth, the Life" (14:6) "I AM the true Vine" (15:1, 5)
- The "I AM" statement was used originally in an episode prior to the Exodus when Moses asks how he should answer those who want to know the name of the God who sent him to deliver the sons of Israel out of the bondage of Egypt.

Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name? What shall I say to them?'" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Ex.3.13-14)

- Here the Lord reveals Himself as "I Am", the one and only God, the reliable Redeemer, the first and the last.
 - So, when Jesus says, "***I am the resurrection and the life,***" He identifies Himself as the One and Only One who has the authority to deliver God's people from the bondage of death.
 - Jesus is declaring that all those who face death and wrestle with questions about death will only find an answer through faith in Him.
- Jesus backs up His claim by continuing, "*he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.*"
 - Here Jesus uses a form of Hebrew poetry (called "masal") to describe the same thing by using a comparison or expressing the same truth in paradoxical manner.

***(25b) he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,
(26a) and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die***

- In verse 25b He refers to death in the natural sense and to living in the reference to eternal life.
- In verse 26a He refers *lives* to the natural sense and to *never die* in reference to eternal life.
 - So, the logical interpretation is that everyone who believes in Jesus will live to enjoy eternal life.
 - Jesus reduces that whole perplexity of death down to one important fact of faith – that He is the great I Am and that He alone has the authority over life, death, resurrection, and eternal life.
- In the poetic statement Jesus turns the conversation away from *the last day* and focuses our attention on the now.
 - Jesus makes it clear that resurrection living is not a matter of "*the last day*" as Martha had referred to. No, resurrection living is a matter of the now!

- He is declaring that living in the power of the resurrection is not an eschatological event but rather it is “already now reality” for those who believe in Him as the great I Am.
 - Those who believe in Him as the great I AM are no longer subject to the power of death and no longer live under its bondage in this life and in the life to come.
- So, Jesus confronts Martha with this question, “*Do you believe this?*” (11.26b)
 - This was the reason why Jesus had come.
 - His primary purpose was not to console the family in their time of lost – even though Jesus deeply cared for them.
 - He didn’t come to show respect for Lazarus – even though Lazarus was a good friend that Jesus loved.
 - No, Jesus came to declare Himself as the great “I Am” who has come to deliver His people out of bondage of death and the slavery to corruption.
- *Martha said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.”* (11.27)
 - Martha’s statement is a clear confession of faith that she believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the eternal Son of God, who had become flesh to accomplish the purposes of the Father. “Yes Jesus, I believe!”
- After this Martha went and told her sister Mary that Jesus had arrived and was requesting her to come to Him. (11.28)
 - Mary darted out of the house so quickly that her guests thought that she was having an emotional breakdown and supposed that she was running to Lazarus’ tomb. (11.29-31)
 - As Mary fell at Jesus’ feet, she too expressed her confidence in the Lord saying, “*Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.*” (11.32)
- As Mary knelt at His feet Jesus *saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled.* (11.33)
 - Jesus’ reaction to their weeping was that ***He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled.***

- Jesus is described as having two emotions in response to their grief. However, the modern translations do not adequately communicate the extent of Jesus' emotions.
 - The text reads that *He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled*.
 - The first emotion describes Jesus as being ***deeply moved in spirit***
 - This phrase “*deeply moved*” is the Greek word *embrimaomai*, which means, “to snort with anger.”
 - The second emotion states that Jesus ***was troubled***.
 - This word “*troubled*” is the Greek word *tarassō*, which means, “to be moved emotionally.”
- Let's first consider that the outpouring grief by the sisters and their friends *troubled* Jesus so that He was moved emotionally. (11.34)
 - Jesus was overcome with emotion to the point that He could not suppress His sorrow for their loss and “*Jesus wept.*” (11.35 – the shortest verse in the Bible)
 - Jesus' sorrow for the family's loss was so evident that the *Jews were saying, “See how He loved him!”* (11.36)
 - John Calvin wrote, “Jesus allows Himself to be caught up in the general grief over Lazarus' death, and there He experiences and participates in the grief of all whose loved ones have gone to the grave. As the Son of God He does not come to redeem the world from imaginary grief or to make grief over death imaginary. Therefore He joins the mourning procession for the friend whom He loves and weeps.”
- Yes, Jesus the Son of God was a *Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Surely He has borne our grief and carried our sorrows*.
 - Please don't devalue Jesus' emotions as just some reflection of His human nature.
 - No, the Bible tells us that Jesus is *the radiance of the Father's glory and the exact representation of the Father's nature*. (Heb.1.3a)
 - The point is that because Jesus was moved to tears means that God weeps with those who weep. (Rom.12.15b)

APP: The fact that Jesus wept it shows us that He sympathizes with our sorrow and that it is ok to mourn the lost of our loved ones knowing that the Lord will comfort us. (Mt.5.4)

- So now lets consider that Jesus was also *deeply moved in spirit*.
 - Remember this phrase “*deeply moved*” means, “to snort with anger.”
 - This anger caused Jesus to say to the crowd, “*Where have you laid him?*” (11.34)
 - And the text underscores Jesus’ anger by telling us that when they finally reached the tomb *Jesus, again was deeply moved within*. (11.38b)
 - Jesus’ anger is not directed against the cynicism of the Jews who commented as they walked to the tomb, “*Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?*” (11.37)
 - No, Jesus’ anger was focused on the dilemma of death.
 - Jesus was angry because humanity was originally created to live forever and to never suffer the pain of death.
 - He was angry that Satan had sought to steal the beauty of eternal life.
- So, Jesus wipes the tears from His eyes and stands in front of Lazarus’ tomb – the friend whom He loved – snorting with anger.
 - Like prizefighter standing in the middle of the ring knowing that he will be declared as the champion of the world.
 - Like a championship wrestler standing on the middle of the mat knowing that the referee will raise his hand as the victor of the battle.
 - Like a pro linebacker standing in the middle of the field knowing that he will destroy the tight end crossing over the middle to catch a pass.
- Jesus stands in front of Lazarus’ tomb snorting with anger knowing that He is the great “I Am!”
 - Jesus stands in front of Lazarus’ tomb knowing that He is not just the Author of Life but that He is the resurrection and life. (Acts 3.15)
 - Jesus stands in front of Lazarus’ tomb knowing that He had come to destroy the results of the fall and stand the Victor over death!

- So Jesus, snorting with anger, commands that the stone be removed! (11.38b-39a)
 - Jesus stands at the entrance of the open tomb and demonstrates the “already now reality” for His beloved Lazarus and shows what He will do on *the last day* for all those who He loves and cries *out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.”* (11.43)

Conclusion: Brother and sisters, the resurrection of Lazarus on one hand is a physical analogy of what happens to us spiritually in Christ. And on the other hand, it is a physical example of what will happen on the last day.

- Therefore, there are two important lessons we should learn from the story of Lazarus:
 1. It is imperative that you believe that Jesus Christ is the great I Am – that He is the resurrection and the life – the “already now reality” of resurrection living.
 - Those who say, “I Believe,” there is the promise of the future resurrection but more importantly there is the “already now reality” of resurrection living.
 - Those who have experienced the “already now reality” acknowledge that they were spiritually dead in their trespasses and sin. That Christ Jesus called them out of darkness and released them from the bondage of sin and death.
 - Those who have experienced the “already now reality” can sing with all of the Lord’s beloved:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
 Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
 Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
 I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
 My chains fell off, my heart was free,
 I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
 (And Can It Be – Charles Wesley)

2. Secondly, it is imperative that you know that you will rise again in the resurrection of the righteous on the last day.
 - That you can say, *“As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; Whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes will see and not another.”* (Job.19.25-27)

Brothers and sisters, *Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.* (Jn.5.25; 26-29)