

LAZARUS LOOSED! (Jn. 11:43,44)

We have been with Jesus as He has travelled through His home region of Galilee, and met with many of its people. We now journey with Him to Bethany, a small town ... away to the south, on the outskirts of Jerusalem, where two sisters and a brother lived, - Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.

They were close friends of the Saviour, and the door of the home was always wide open to Him. We meet them on a previous occasion when He visited Jerusalem, Lk. 10:38, Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. 40 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. 41 And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: 42 But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

However, there is another sad reference to this family in Jn. 11:1-5, 17-44.

Up a long narrow street today, on the left-hand side, there is a small door in a wall, and you walk down the rough uneven steps to the burial chamber at the bottom where tradition has it Lazarus was buried.

The disciples are with the Saviour, and they will experience the power in His voice as He works this miracle of resurrection ... when they hear Him call, v.44
Loose him, and let him go.

Just a few days later, He Himself would die, and yet here we see Him at another man's tomb. Does it not make you wonder how, - for example, - the two on the road to Damascus gave up on Him (Lk. 24:21) ... and how the disciples missed what He had told them about how *He* would rise from the dead! Does it not make you wonder what was in their minds, - after what they saw He did with Lazarus? He had told them on many occasions *He* would die ... Mt. 20:17 And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, 18 Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, 19 And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again. ... Mk. 8:31 And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ... 10:32 And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, 33 Saying, Behold, we

go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: 34 And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again. ... **Lk. 18:31** Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. 32 For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: 33 And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.

Is it not amazing how often we read God's Word and still not fully appreciate its truth! ... The disciples made their promises, for example, v.16 Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellowdisciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him. Yes, they loved Him, and in their love they would have done anything for Him but when the time came to demonstrate their words, disappointment often shrouded their good intentions.

So, here in Bethany, - just a few days before Calvary, the Lord Jesus has come to the burial place of a dear loved one, for whom all earthly hope had gone. Consider what He was confronted with ...

DECAY

Lazarus had been dead, - physically dead, - for four days. Because of the heat, his sisters assumed correctly his body would have already been showing signs of decay, v.39 Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. ...

Yes, they shared the hope they would see their brother again, v.24 Martha saith unto him [*Jesus*], I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. They had the blessed hope, - in accordance with the promises in the Old Testament there was a day coming when death could not hold Lazarus, and he would be raised incorruptible!

... Yes, Jesus is coming back again, I Cor. 15:52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed ... Yes, of course, Martha believed ... but the reality was that in the tomb was her beloved brother, *lying dead* ...

Needless to say, there is no more hopeless a state on earth as death, but consider it from the perspective of spiritual death. Spiritual death means there is absolutely no consciousness towards God. To a spiritually dead person, God is a Stranger ... and the Bible describes it as, Eph. 2:1 dead in trespasses and sins: 2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world.

You know about Him, - from His Word, - but as yet, you do not know Him. The Bible describes it as spiritual death, - a coldness towards His claims to be Saviour and Lord, and a hardness to accept and acknowledge Him.

I could stand in a graveyard and preach from the depths of my heart the Gospel of Saving Grace. I could plead for all those dead people to come to Christ and be saved. I could shout at the top of my voice to try and waken them, but ... *what kind of a reaction would I get?* ... I would get absolutely none, and so it is, that unless the Holy Spirit, - the Holy Breath of God, - breathes in spiritual life, their state of spiritual deadness continues unaffected.

Jesus is in the cemetery. He makes His way along the path to where Lazarus is, for He came to find this dead man. Just for a moment He veils His omniscience, and He says to Mary, [v.34 Where have ye laid him?](#) He asked tenderly the question. And when He stood outside Lazarus' tomb, His tears flowed ... Jesus the Man [groaned in the spirit, and was troubled \(v.33\)](#).

He stares at the tomb in which Lazarus is laid, ... [Take ye away the stone, He said \(v.39\)](#). Why did He not do it Himself? *He* made the stone, and He made the side of the rock, the opening through which the dead man was brought into that tomb ... Why did Jesus not remove the stone Himself?

... Just a few days later, some of them would be at the entrance of another tomb, and the question asked then was, [Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? \(Mk. 16:3\)](#). On that occasion, the Lord had the stone rolled away ... but at Lazarus' tomb, it was the task of His disciples.

At that point, He lifted up His eyes towards Heaven, and prayed for His Father to demonstrate His mighty power. ... In each stage so far, this could have been an ordinary man doing what Jesus did ... [Heb. 2:9 we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels](#) ... Here is Jesus the Man, - weeping, asking for help to roll the stone away, praying to His Father ... [in the form of a servant, and ... in the likeness of men \(Phil. 2:7\)](#).

And yet the voice with which He spoke had the authority to make its way through the walls of that tomb, and into the life of that dead man! How did that happen? How *could* it have happened? It happened because the voice of Jesus is the voice of God, [Heb. 2:7 Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour](#).

Not only was Jesus the Man standing outside that tomb, this was Jesus Who is God, Heb. 1:8 unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. His was the voice of God!

Had any other man or woman on that day, - even the two sisters of the deceased, - called the dead man's name, ... yes, they would have called with deep passion, but Lazarus would not have heard ... but Jesus called him by his name! ... There in the graveyard, we see the *decay* of Lazarus... and in the graveyard we also see ...

The DOMINION of the Lord

Death is powerful, - and unless the Lord Jesus Christ returns in our lifetime, we shall die. It is an appointment for us all. All life on this earth will one day cease. Paul told the Roman Christians, 6:8 Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: 9 Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more **dominion** over him. 10 For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. 11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. ... While death is powerful, God is *all-powerful*!

The Bible speaks about a day when the graves will be emptied of their dead, for it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment (Heb. 9:27). Death is not the end, - every man and woman, boy and girl will stand before God ... and the matter they will face concerns the acceptance or rejection of His Son.

But notice how the Lord *dominated* in that graveyard. The language He used was simple, but it was powerful, v.43 he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. Six times the name of Lazarus is mentioned in this chapter, - three times in the general narrative (vv. 1,2,5), but in vv. 11,14,43, it was Jesus Who spoke ... culminating in the command when Jesus spoke directly, Lazarus, come forth. ... What is the point I am making? The point I am making is that while others were instrumental in bringing Christ to the dead Lazarus, it had to be the voice of Jesus alone Who would raise him from the dead.

Yes, Jesus uses faithful evangelists and preachers (i.e. 'to roll the stone away'), - and it is our calling to preach the Gospel, - ... but when it comes to accomplishing the work of salvation in the heart of the sinner, it is a work He alone can do.

Even if Jesus had not arrived to much later, and all the flesh had come away and only the bones of Lazarus were left, ... it still would not have been too late. You have been praying for your loved ones for years, - keep on praying ... Ezek. 37:4 O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5 Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: 6 And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. The irresistible call of Jesus raised that dead man from the tomb!

From out of the darkness of the tomb, - out through its entrance, ... bound as Lazarus was, he shuffled his way to Jesus. He came alive at the voice of God ... when God called his name. God knew him and loved him. God had a plan for him to sit beside Him at the dinner table (Jn. 12:1ff.).

When Spurgeon was preaching on this passage in the morning service of April 20th, 1884, he also related it to the people of Israel, "Do you speak of a nation being born at once, as if it were impossible?" Yes, and it would have warmed Spurgeon's heart when the nation of Israel was established in their land just over sixty-four years later. Spurgeon believed it would happen because he saw God's Word prophesied, Is. 66:8 Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.

What takes politicians and strategists years to arrange, God can do in an instant! ... Imagine the disciples as they rushed to the large stone when Jesus told them to roll it away. ... Imagine them as they put their shoulders to it and pushed it to reveal the open entrance. ... And imagine them then returning to the side of Jesus. Their efforts demanded a certain amount of time ... but, when Jesus spoke ... Lazarus came out of the tomb!

We read about the plans of men to silence Him (vv.45-47), but they were powerless. Even if all the mourners and all the friends had gathered outside the tomb and shouted 'at the top of their voices', Lazarus would not have been raised from the dead. ... It took the voice of Jesus! It was powerless and feeble to some, - it was not making any impact in the salvation of the chief priests and Pharisees ... but it raised from the dead the man to whom Jesus *particularly* spoke.

There is Lazarus' **decay**, and Christ's **domination** ... let's finish our study looking at ...

The DELIVERANCE Christ brought

Take time to consider the *development* within this deliverance. Imagine standing there in that crowd and watching the impossible happening, v.44 he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Here was “a living man in the garments of death”, said Spurgeon. ... What came we draw out of such a picture?

Consider Lazarus as someone who comes to saving faith in Christ, ... still with the ‘garments of spiritual death’ around them. ... Maybe they have long hair, things dangling round their necks ... “they don’t look like Christians!” Sometimes God’s people stand back and judge, “Look at them ...!” Maybe when we were first saved, people looked at us, because we might not have always have said the right thing, or acted in the right way, or had ‘the proper look’. ... When Christ saves a person He changes them, - He changes them from the inside out ... and sometimes we keep our ‘rough edges’ for a while. When you and I see the ‘rough edges’ on young believers, we have a responsibility to help them ‘take the grave clothes’ off. They have become so used to them, but with patience and calmness, we have a duty to help them those ‘old clothes’ with the ‘new clothes’ from Heaven’s wardrobe.

Can you imagine Lazarus struggling? He would have fallen over; he would have hurt himself, he could have smothered. ... How far could he have been expected to go, bound the way he was? ... Not very far. Sometimes you see television pictures of prisoners in American jails shuffling along corridors in their chains, - it must have been even more debilitating for Lazarus ... and so, Jesus instructed His disciples, v.44 *Loose him, and let him go.*

What a responsibility we have to Christians who are struggling! ... I think particularly of many whom the Lord has saved out of Roman Catholicism, and they have been brought up to believe in the authority of their church, and the priest, and the saints. What a tremendous work of gentleness and God-given patience needs to be shown towards them, to strip them out of the old heresies!

Remember the man who came into our prayer meeting chained in the shackles of alcohol. ... A man who knew the Lord, but his alcoholism had brought him down. We prayed for him, - and in praying for him, and in the follow-up, - it was like what the disciples were commanded to do to loose Lazarus. There is nothing attractive about a drunk man, and there would have been anything attractive about Lazarus either ... but the Lord gives us a work to do with all kinds of people.

Look again at Lazarus, - strong, yet helpless. In obedience to the command of Christ, strong enough to get up from where he had been lying dead and, - at the command of Jesus, - to leave the tomb, and yet not strong enough to loosen the napkin from his face (v.44), and the grave clothes he was wearing.

When the Lord saved us, many of us had issues to deal with. We had previously lived lifestyle that was contrary to His ways. You might say, "I wasn't that bad!" Oh yes, you were, because one of the hardest lifestyles to escape from is the one that tells you, you weren't too bad". Maybe the mind had to be cleansed, or the tongue, or the fists ... and God sent someone to free us. They helped us work through issues that would have caused us to doubt. One of the most difficult issues young Christians face is the question, "Am I truly saved? Am I truly born-again?" ... And how often, in our early days with the Saviour, He had mature believers coming and strengthening us in our fears. Young Christians need help. ... Hurting Christians need help. Your brother or your sister might need the gentle advice and encouragement Christ has sent you to bring them.

In the years to come, it would have been a joy for those disciples to have looked back and remembered, "I was with Jesus when He raised Lazarus from the dead. With others, I helped roll the stone away from the tomb. I helped take the veil from off the face of Lazarus... and I helped him remove those grave clothes". ... Isn't it a privilege when the Lord uses us in the maturing process of a new believer! Maybe someone for whom you have been praying. Maybe it was through your invitation they came to church and were saved. Maybe it was through something simple you said to them. You might not have given it much thought at the time, but they have since come to you and explained how meaningful that little action you did impacted upon them.

And the reason you were there for them was simply because you are a servant of God. Someone helped you out of your 'grave clothes' ... and the Lord led you to do the same to another.

Who would have thought they would have had such a great time in a graveyard! It is not about the conditions we find ourselves in, it is about Who we are with! Sadly, there are plenty of people 'dead in their tombs' ... and they will stay dead if Christ is not brought to them, and they receive Him.

On the 11th and 12th of April we are going round some homes in the area with the message of Easter, - Christ died for sinners. Many of these homes are tombs in which lie the 'spiritually dead', with absolutely no hope of resuscitation and new life for they have nothing in them to bring them to Christ ... and that is where you and I have responsibility to roll the stone away.

Please speak to Gordon about how you can help, - it is a matter of bringing a Gospel tract and invitation and putting it into their home. It could be the means God uses to start a work of salvation in the heart of the stranger to Him. When Jesus instructed His disciples to roll the stone away and to take off the grave clothes from Lazarus, they were available to eagerly obey. ... God has laid hold upon us through His grace, and what a privilege and a pleasure to be used to bring that same message to others.

May He find us as willing in the graveyard, as He found His disciples on that day in Bethany! Amen.