

The Miracles of Jesus

Miracle # 27

"The Raising of Lazarus"

John 11: 1-53

In the miracle we are examining this evening Jesus faces the challenge of posed by death. **Three** times in His ministry Jesus raised people from the dead; first the son of the Widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), then Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:41-56) and now his dear friend Lazarus. This is without a doubt the greatest miracle of the Lord's ministry. Although he had previously raised two persons from the dead, they had only been dead for a short time. Lazarus had been dead for four days. With this miracle there can be no doubt in any one's mind that Jesus has restored a person who was without dispute dead.

As we reflect on the miracles; to turn water into wine (Jn 2:1-11), to feed a crowd of 5,000 with a little boy's lunch (Jn 6:1-4) or even to open the eyes of one born blind (John 9:1-7) makes little difference if Jesus is not able to overcome **death**. This miracle offers proof that Jesus is not just the Lord of this world but also of the world to come. He is not just a Savior who helps us when life gets tough he is a Savior who can help us when life ends.

The Background of the Miracle (vv. 1-37)

"He who you love is sick" (1-4)

"Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (2) It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. (3) Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." (4) 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."

He began by telling His disciples that illness of Lazarus would not ultimately prove fatal (v. 4). Our sicknesses also - even our last sickness - will not **end** in death.

He goes on to say that Lazarus' illness was designed for God's **glory** and His (v. 4).

Of course the raising of Lazarus from the dead will bring glory to both the Father and the Son, but it is more than this. As we will see in verse forty-

nine and following, the course of events set in motion by the raising of Lazarus will culminate in the **Cross**.

The Delays of Love (5-6)

"Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. (6) So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was."

It seems that the sisters have no doubt of Jesus' love for their brother (v. 3). And John adds his commentary in (v. 6) that "**Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus.**"

Because Jesus loved Lazarus one of the obvious things we should note here is that **death** comes into every home, even including those in which Jesus is loved. Although Jesus loved Lazarus, that did not prevent his death.

Perhaps even more incredible to us is the fact that although Jesus loved this family he did not hurry to Bethany but rather stayed two days where he was. Likewise, we some times have found ourselves in trouble and fire off a prayer but he does not seem to hear. At those times you may think that God just does not care about you. The circum-stances of your life don't seem to allow for any other explanation. When you are being ravaged by the events of your life, it is very difficult to believe that God's **silences** and **delays** are really evidence of his love. Was His decision to wait a heartless response to the urgent cry of His beloved friends? No of course not!

Can any set of circumstances, including God's seemingly silences and delays, cause Him to abandon us? Paul reassures us in Romans 8:35, 37-39, "Who (or what) shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ...(37) Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. (38) For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, (39) nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God." Our death or of our loved ones, even if it should be sooner than expected, does not reflect unfavorably on Jesus' care for us.

"Let Us Go to Judea Again" (vv. 7-14)

"Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." (8) The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?"

(9) 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. (10) But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." (11) These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." (12) Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." (13) However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. (14) Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead."

When Jesus told his disciples the news that he had received about Lazarus, at first they misunderstood. He then went on to say that Lazarus was asleep and that he was going to awaken him. The disciples were puzzled. They knew that sleep was good for a person who was sick, and they could not understand why Jesus would want to awaken Lazarus. Jesus then plainly told them that Lazarus was dead.

"I am glad I was not there" (15)

"And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him."

These words seem out of character for Jesus, his friend is dead, the sisters are weeping and Jesus is **glad**. Charles Spurgeon said of this verse, **"Christ is not glad because of sorrow, but on account of the result of it. He knew that this temporary trial would help His disciples to a greater faith, and He so prizes their growth in faith that He is even glad of the sorrow which occasions it... He set so high a value upon His people's faith that He will not screen them from those trials by which faith is strengthened."** [Charles Spurgeon. The Treasury of the Bible. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962) 2:456]

"Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

(16) "Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

The real concern of the disciples is not so much distress over the death of Lazarus, but over the distinct probability of their own deaths if they go to Bethany with Jesus. Thomas spoke for all the disciples when he said, **"They would rather die with Him than live without Him."**

"Already in the tomb four days" (17-19)

"So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. (18) Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. (19) And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother."

When Jesus and the disciples arrived in Bethany they were told not only that Lazarus was dead, but that he had been buried for four days.

"If Only" (vv. 20-34 comp. 21 & 32)

"Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. (21) Now Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. (22) But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

The first words of Martha (and repeated by Mary in verse 32) reflect the classic response to a difficult situation, "**If Only.**" We hear these words whenever we are faced with the death of someone we love.

- "**If only**" I had convinced them to go to the doctor sooner.
- "**If only**" they had not been driving that evening.
- "**If only**" they had not had that surgery.
- "**If only**" they had been more careful.

Of course the list goes on and on. But what are we do with our "**if only's**?" We need to do what Martha and Mary did, they took them to Jesus.

Even as Martha expresses her "if only you had been here" the idea is still in the back of her mind, that even yet He could still do something, for she says in verse twenty-two, "**But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.**"

Jesus answers her by saying (v. 23), "**Your brother will rise again.**" She answers him in verse twenty-four with the fact that she believe is a future day of resurrection, "**I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.**"

Jesus then makes it clear that eternal life is possible not after death in the distant future, but through Him, in the **present** for he said: in verse twenty-five, "**I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. (26) And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die....**"

Then he asks her the most important question that any one can ever face.

"Do you believe this" (26- 28)

"... **Do you believe this?**" (27) She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that **You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.**"

He is not asking,

Do you believe in **God**?

Do you believe in an **afterlife**?

But rather do you believe this? Do you believe in **Me**? Do believe that I am the resurrection and the Life.

Then Martha went back to tell her sister that Jesus had arrived. Verse twenty-eight,

"And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you." (29) As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him. (30) Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. (31) Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there." (32) Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." (33) Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. (34) And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see."

"Jesus Wept" (35-37)

"Jesus wept. (36) Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" (37) And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?"

The shortest verse in the Bible but one filled with meaning. Notice that with the active and thoughtful Martha He responded by reasoning with her and with the tender-hearted Mary, he wept. The Lord always responds to us in accordance with our make up.

The fact that Jesus wept reminds us that although God permits the suffering in our lives he also feels it with us. This episode reveals that the Lord is deeply moved by the pains and sorrows of his children.

The Elements of the Miracle (vv. 38-44)

"Take Away the Stone" (38-41)

"Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. (39) Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

(40) Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" (41) Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying."

There some things we can do for ourselves and Jesus does not do for us what we can do for ourselves. Jesus could have rolled the stone away by act of his divine will, yet he asks those present to roll the stone away.

To Martha the removal of the stone was an **unnecessary** and **distressing** thing to do. It is possible that the only purpose she could imagine; was that Jesus wished for a last look at his friend. Martha tries to

reason with Jesus by pointing out that Lazarus has been dead for four days and decay of the body has no doubt already begun, and what he desired would not be any possible consolation. It was Martha's belief that Lazarus was now dead beyond all recall. But the question that begs to be asked is; **"Would it have been easier to raise Lazarus if he had been dead, for a single day or even for a few hours?" No, dead is dead** and only God can bring the dead back to life.

"Lazarus Come Forth" (41-44)

"And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. (42) And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." (43) Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" (44) And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

Jesus prayed out loud in order to focus the faith of those who stood around him, in order that they might **believe**.

One of the most amazing things about this miracle is its brevity and simplicity. Jesus simply ordered the stone to be removed and then with a loud voice commanded Lazarus to come forth.

Augustine in the fourth century said that it was good that Jesus called Lazarus by name or else the whole **cemetery** would have come out of the grave.

The crowd no doubt waited in breathless anticipation, they listened so intently that they heard the sound of their own hearts; then slowly out of tomb, moving with great difficulty because of being wrapped head to foot in grave clothes, came Lazarus – out of the tomb alive.

Again the people are asked to become a part of the miracle, to do what they could do, when Jesus tells them to **"take off the grave clothes and let him go."** (v. 44)

The Effect of the Miracle (vv. 45-54)

"Many believed" (45-46)

"Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. (46) But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did."

The mourners who had come to comfort Mary and Martha were stunned by the miracle they had witnessed. According to John's report **"many believed"** (v. 45) but others rushed to report to the Pharisees what Jesus had done.

His enemies plot to kill Him (47-52)

"Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs."

Even his enemies had to admit that this man "works many signs." (v 37) . Even though they chose not to believe, they knew that this miracle was not a matter that could be **ignored**. If there was any doubt as to the real reason why the Jewish leaders refused to acknowledge Jesus it is spelled out in verse forty-eight, "If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." If the Jesus is proclaimed as the king of Israel, the Romans will view this as **treason**. The Jewish leaders would be held accountable and the positions and wealth would be taken away from them. For them this was far too high a price to pay, to believe. The greatest proof of who Jesus really was became the critical event that drove the Jewish religious leadership to seek the death of Jesus.

Caiaphas, the high priest speaks for the nation in verse forty-nine, "You know nothing at all, (50) nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." (51) Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, (52) and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad." (53) Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death."

The words of Caiaphas can be understood on two levels. First, he is saying that it is only common sense that one man should die to prevent the destruction of a whole nation. Jesus has to die before He is proclaimed king by the people and the nation of Israel is destroyed by the Romans in response.

Yet on a deeper level, Caiaphas is also making a prophecy that even he does not understand. When he says that Jesus would die for the nation (v. 51) it is a prophecy of the **sacrificial** death of Jesus for the sins of the world. Jesus will die, not to keep the armies of Rome away, but to defeat sin and make eternal life possible to all.

Conclusion

There are two things I want us to take with us from the study of this miracle.

- There is comfort in the **presence** of Jesus.

More than any other factor is it is the absence of Jesus at the time of the death of Lazarus which overwhelmed Mary and Martha. Even today, we

may be assured of the fact that we can find comfort in the presence of the Lord. Today we as believers have the promise of Hebrew 13:5, "**I will never leave you nor forsake you.**"

- There is comfort in the promise of Jesus.

Jesus said, "**I am the Resurrection and the Life**" (v. 25). Our hope for life beyond the grave is grounded on His promise and his promise is certain because of His power over death and the grave.