

Lazarus at the table

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[0 : 00] I'd like you to turn with me this evening in a meditation in God's Word. And it's a meditation which very much has the Lord's table tomorrow morning in mind.

I'd like you to turn with me to the Gospel of John on to chapter 12. And we'll read the first two verses here on the kind of text.

Now, six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

Here, a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Not a third, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. And I'd like to concentrate our attention.

In a short devotional time of the Passover, from the last word, Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with Jesus.

[1 : 09] But in the words of the other expression, or the meeting game expression, if there's one more familiar, Jesus was among them, or one of those reclining at the table with him.

But Lazarus is forevermore a type of what Christ can do in the realm of death.

He stands out for us. And for Christians believing, believers in every nature, two daughters. There's one who personally was dead.

And who was dead physically without any possibility of having lifeless enemies. He was only dead, but he was buried. And yet, over the last dissolution and severance of body and soul in this man, the Lord Jesus had power.

Lazarus, I suppose, for every one of us, is one of those in whom Jesus manifested that he was no ordinary man.

[2 : 21] The power of God is in this amazing miracle. Now, I think that it speaks to us true of the fact that the Lord Jesus has authority and power, not just in the realm of physical death, but in the realm of spiritual death.

The realm of physical death is not unimportant. Every one of us has to escape the reality, the self-reality, of physical death.

It doesn't matter whether it's a belief or non-belief, or it's a belief that it's a belief that it's a belief that it is appointed unto all men once to die. And we know that we, too, will have to die unless the Lord comes home.

But far more important and devastating than physical death is the reality of spiritual death, although that is a death over which not too many people in our days make much mention at all, if they believe in it or if they are aware of it.

And yet, the very fact that we are so unaware of the spiritual state is a belief of spiritual death.

[3 : 42] The world in which we live should prove to every believer what a terrible and what a solemn reality spiritual death really is. No matter how we speak to men and women about eternal reality and about the solemn realities of life and of death, no matter how we attempt to make them see the students that have hit their own minds and their own hearts, they refuse to believe and will not believe until God opens their eyes.

And this raising of love for it, this demonstration of the power of Christ over death, is a demonstration of his power over spiritual as well as physical death.

Whatever death remains, Christ kind of spell it. There is a great deal of interest that touches, for me personally anyway, and I am sure for most Christians, to what he did with Lazarus.

That he should leave him and not go to him immediately, he knew of his illness, that seems strange. And yet he said himself that it was for the glory of God.

And sometimes, illness and distress and discipline in our lives from God is, although we don't see it, it is ultimately to the glory of God.

[5 : 19] His coming to the place after Lazarus had been four days in the grave. His agitation, because that's really the word that's used, his angry agitation at the graveside of Lazarus, speaks very strongly also.

Also, the original Greek word speaks of him being crushed in the inward man. And being not just sorry, but angry with death. As death had worked in his friend.

And I think that that also is a very reassuring thought for our Christian hearts. That God in Christ reveals his anger with what is the ultimate consequence of sin.

Because this is what death is. You see, that's why Jesus, or one of the reasons why Jesus is operating in this realm.

He is unraveling, breaking up the works of the devil. And the work of the devil and the work of sin has wrought death.

[6 : 34] The wages of sin is death. Sin, death in all its forms is related to sin. And Christ is exercising his mastery over that.

Christ's presence in the world has to do with man's sin. And with the consequences of man's sin. And it has to do with the dispelling of these consequences.

And the annulling of them. And the overcoming of them. It's a gospel of great grace. And a gospel of great power. And I think that both these things are manifested to us.

In the raising of Lazarus. Graciousness. He does it so tenderly. And so compassionately. And yet he does it so authoritatively.

We see him really exercising his threefold office of prophet, priest and king. He is there as the prophet.

[7 : 35] With a word from heaven. A word of life. Going out into the realm of the dead. He calls. But he calls.

As the one who has power. The prophet of God. Now that was the function of Christ as prophet. It's in a sense in which it's the function of every prophet. Go, God said to his prophet.

And speak in my name. And surely I will be with you. And I will do the thing whereof I speak. And in a sense that was the commission of every prophet. And supremely and superbly.

It was the commission of Christ as the prophet. His God's own son. And we see him exercising in word.

The same divine power as he exercised the scriptures tell us. At the very beginning. He is the one who has the prophet of God called all things into being.

[8 : 33] All things the Bible tells us are upheld by the word of his power. It should be very reassuring for us. That this one who speaks at the grave of Lazarus.

Is the one who's speaking. Whose speech. Whose existence. Whose life and being. Hold everything in power.

He's the same one. And although there's such power. There's such tenderness. Lazarus. He uses his name. Lazarus. Come forth.

And he's there as priest. Every activity of God's grace in the world. Looks towards the priesthood of Christ. God's coming to man in the garden of Eden.

When man had sinned and fallen. God's coming in the cool of the day. God's very first question.

[9 : 29] Adam, where art thou? Where art thou? All speak of God's grace. And God's grace. Splendid in the atoning work of Christ as priest.

It was because there was one to die. That God came. It's because of that death that God still comes. To work his purpose of salvation.

Christ is there as priest as well as prophet. And he's there as king. We can see his kingly authority, can't we? Lazarus came forth. And he that was dead came forth.

Bound hand and foot. And then. A little time passes. We read in the interval there. We haven't taken time to read the whole story. How the Jews set out to kill the very one that Jesus had raised from the dead.

Isn't it amazing? The leaders were saying among themselves. Because he has raised this man Lazarus from the dead. Everybody's believing in him.

[10 : 34] Let's kill Lazarus. And of course they went further. And it was to be at this very Passover. They said let's kill the son himself.

But the thing I want to focus attention is. And it's this. Six days before his own death. Six days before the last Old Testament Passover.

The last real Old Testament Passover. Six days before the Passover was to be transmuted. Into the Lord's Supper. Which we remember here this morning. Six days before it was to change. From being the Old Testament Passover. Into the New Testament Passover. When God's own lamb had been killed and offered. Six days before that.

Jesus goes to the home of these friends. Who often entertain them. On whom he loved. And it's the home of Lazarus. And he sits at the table.

[11 : 35] And he becomes the host. You notice how the Bible puts it. Lazarus was one of them that sat with him. And it's as though he becomes the host.

Now this is not the sacrament. And I don't want to spiritualize it in that way. This is not a sacramental meal. This is an ordinary family meal. And yet it's an extraordinary meal. Because the host in it. Is the Son of God himself. And all we can do. Is draw an analogy. Between this meal. And the one who is host at it. We can draw an analogy. Between that. And the sacramental meal. At which the same one is host. And all I want to do.

Is draw parallels. Not spiritualize. And I think we can legitimately draw these parallels. I want us to look just at the fact. That Lazarus is one of them. The man who had been dead. And buried.

[12 : 32] And even the man whose sister said. By Lord by this time. And I must say. I prefer the authorised Russian word. Because I think it's far more like the Greek word. To the NIV word that we read there.

Lord by this time. There's a bad odour of the world. And I think it's far more like the Greek word. To the NIV word that we read there. Lord by this time. There's a bad odour of the world. That's very weak really.

What she said was. Lord by this time. He's stinking. He's smelly. That's what death brings. Now here is Lazarus. Who had been dead. And is alive again. And he's at the table with Jesus. And that I think.

Is the first analogy we draw. The people who sit at the Lord's table. The table at which Jesus. The table at which Jesus. And that I think. Is the first analogy we draw.

The people who sit at the Lord's table. The table at which Jesus. And the table at which Jesus. Is still host. Are every one of them. If they are true Christians.

[13 : 29] People who. Have been dead. And to owe their lives. And their ability. And their freedom. To sit at that table. They owe it to the host.

Lazarus must have looked at Jesus. And he must have wondered. He must have wondered. He must have looked at Jesus. And he must have felt. That he had been given his life.

Back anew. From the hands of this Jesus. And I believe that. Every. Converted sinner. Every born again. Man and woman. Who sits at the Lord's table.

Looks by faith. To the same Jesus. And they see the same truth. Here is one. Whose hands. Whose power. Has given them life.

Given them back. That which. Was lost. By Adam. And which was lost. By themselves also. Not only original sin. The sin of first man. Which affected all men. But our own sin.

[14 : 26] From our own nature. A newness of life. The newness of life. Which we celebrate. At the Lord's table. We owe to him. Now I do want to dwell. On Lazarus. These thoughts. Too much just now. I would rather.

A thing. A little more. A little more. A little more. A little more. A little more. A little more. A little more. A little more. A little more.

A little more. A little more. A little more. A little more widely. And. Think first of all. Of this. Very simply. What a wonder.

Not only Christ. But Lazarus himself. Must have been. To the other people. Around that table. They must have felt.

That there was a very special connection. Between the host. Jesus. And this man Lazarus. And they must have looked at Lazarus. Wasn't they? They must have looked at Lazarus. And they must have thought.

[15 : 23] I wonder what he's thinking. I wonder how he feels. I'm sure. That his heart is deeply moved. At being fed.

By the one who gave him life. And Lazarus must have been a real marvel. Marvel. To all around that table.

To all around that table. And he must have been. Especially a marvel. To his fellow believers. Those who were Christians. And the Lord had his disciples. Perhaps they were all disciples. We don't know.

But certainly. There were disciples at the table. And Lazarus must have been. A marvel to every one of them. And let me say.

As we draw the parallel again. Is that not true. When we sit at the Lord's table also. When we look at one another.

[16:20] When we see people who have been raised into newness of life. By the power of God in Christ. When we see people who have been loved from eternity by God.

And that love has been manifested by Jesus to them. And to us. Are we not a marvel to one another? And do we not have great cause to say.

What a saviour this is. What a saviour. One who takes the dead. And makes them live again. And once they're alive. Who nourishes.

And looks after them. And that's what the Lord's table is. It's for the nourishing. Nourishing. Of the faith. Of God's people. It's not just a memorial service.

It is that. It's a service of commemoration. But it is more the Lord's Supper. It's a means of grace. I feel myself. I was saying this to one of my classes in the college the other day.

[17:24] I feel myself that we are tending to let that basic truth about the Lord's Supper fall out of sight. We are tending to regard it just as a memorial supper.

Or as an opportunity for manifesting outwardly our union and communion with one another. Our unity in Christ. And even our communion with Christ.

But first of all our forefathers reforming theologians they said this was a means of grace. God conveys grace through the elements of bread and wine.

Which symbolise the Lord's body broken. And the Lord's blood shed. And faith is to feed on these elements. And faith is to grow strong by feeding on them.

Now it won't be a different grace which is imparted through the sacrament. The saving grace of God is of the same kind and the same nature. No matter through which means it comes to us.

[18:29] Prayer is a means of grace. To the people of God. And it brings grace into their experience. And that grace is the same kind of grace.

As is conveyed in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. But it may be in a different degree. The preaching of the word is a means of grace. Fellowship with one another is a means of grace.

The worship of God's house is a means of grace. God communicating himself to us. Giving himself because when God gives grace.

He gives nothing less than himself. What is grace? Is God acting graciously. What is the grace conveyed to us in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

In our believingly taking bread and wine. And eating and drinking in obedience to Christ's command. What is it? It is God giving himself to us.

[19:28] It is God pledging again to be our God forever and ever. It is God reminding us. Of what he has done for us.

Just as Lazarus must have been. Remind is not the right word is it? Lazarus wasn't just reminded. He had shined in front of him there in the presence of Jesus.

He had there at that table. In front of him. The mark. Of all that had happened.

And the one through whom it had all happened. And we have the same. We should be a marvel to one another. And I'm sure that Lazarus was a marvel not only to the other believers around the table.

But that he was a marvel to his loved one. And you know. I think that that is still true. When we see those who are near and dear to us.

[20:27] Professing the Lord Jesus Christ at his own table. Our husbands. Our wives. Our families. If God gives us that. What a blessing that is.

To know that. The unity which we share in our homes. And in our families. In our loved ones. That that unity.

Stretches beyond just the ties of nature. And goes right into the realm of grace. I think that. Is our lovely thing. Which we do not dwell on. Often enough.

What a precious thing it is. And I often think. Of Martha and Mary. When Lazarus was at that table.

They must have been overwhelmed by the whole scene. They must have been overwhelmed by their love to Christ. And their love to their own one. There.

[21 : 25] Where they thought they had lost him. And you know. Sometimes that happens. What God's people do. They are afraid they have lost a husband or a wife.

Spiritually. Or they are afraid they have lost a son or a daughter. And then God works. And the family circle begins to become the family circle of God.

In his grace. And what a blessing then to parents. What a blessing then to a husband or a wife.

When they see. One they thought they had lost. Alive. And alive in Christ forever more. A wonder to his loved ones. You know. I think he was a wonder to himself too. Lazarus.

And perhaps. That's true isn't it. When we draw the analogy. Perhaps that's the greatest wonder of all for us. At the Lord's table. At the Lord's table. I can still remember. Very vividly.

The first time. I went to the Lord's table. Although. It's now. More than 31 years ago. I can still remember. Being at the Lord's table. And feeling that. Everyone else who was at the Lord's table. Well they had a perfect right to live.

[22 : 23] But they are able to live. Right. And the Lord's table. I can still remember. Very vividly.

The first time. I went to the Lord's table. Although. It's now. More than 31 years ago.

I can still remember. Being at the Lord's table. And. Feeling that. Everyone else was at the Lord's table. well they had a perfect right to be there and they had a right many of them for many many years to be there but to see for for me to see myself there was a miracle in my eyes i marveled at it and you know after 31 years when i sit at the lord's table still i feel that it's a marvel in my eyes still that i should have commanded the constraining power of god's grace and that i should have shared in this marvelous life which there is in christ and that i should have a right to sit as a sinner trusting in jesus at the table at which he is host and you know i think it will be a sad day in the experience of the christian believer who he or she loses that sense of wonder that i'm here and you know i think that's just a foretaste of the wonder you'll have when you step inside yes and let's use the word step inside it would be the soul stepping inside probably but stepping inside the gates of glory itself all these other ones abraham and mooses and david and samuel all the others they are that can't be right but for me to be there will you not feel then dear me i'm here after all what a miracle of god's marvelous grace and you have something about already here and my friends you will be there if you're trusting in jesus so you've been caught up in the grace of god no man and no thing will pluck you out of his hand just as he raised lazarus and was nourishing lazarus and thus lazarus was in his great divine hand never to be plucked out of it so if everyone he trusts in the lord jesus no man he says shall pluck your mind lazarus must have been a wonder to himself a wonder to the people with him at the table i wonder especially to his loved ones i wonder above all to himself and i want to go a step further before closing and say this that i believe he was even a marvel in the eyes of jesus now you say could anything be a wonder to jesus or a marvel to jesus let me say this if we believe in the real humanity of jesus of course things were a wonder to him the world that his father had ordained and created the world that he himself had spoken into existence as the eternal son and word of god that world was a marvel to the man christ jesus we read of some things that were a marvel to him we read that faith in one poor woman her faith working was a marvel to jesus he marveled at i have not found this that such great faith no not in israel and the man christ jesus marveled on the other hand at unfaith unbelief he marveled other unbelief and i think if we think of the for all that has happened that jesus must have marveled the man christ jesus and lazarus and lazarus and lazarus you see was a token to him a token to him of the power that the father had vested in him

lazarus was a token to him of the mission that he had come to fulfill why why do i say that because he was yet himself to go down into the experience of death he was to go down into the land of death since the incarnation he had been in the land of the shadow of death and with them that sat in darkness but he is to go right into the darkness he is to have death in his own experience and you see already in lazarus he had an encounter with one who was to be longer under the bands of death by a day than he was to be himself and he had exercised the power of god through the holy spirit he had exercised that messianic power which was his and he had called lazarus come forth and he had a token of his own kingly power he had a token of his own prophetic mission and of his own prophetic commission he had a token of his kingly authority there in lazarus at the table now i say the power which he exercised by the holy spirit because that's what i believe he did dr hugh martin one of our great scottish theologians of last century has said very simply this but very

profoundly i think that jesus the man christ jesus never drew directly on god had power through his own divine nature but he drew on it through the power of the holy spirit given to him without measure so that there was no power available to jesus in one sense but the power which is available to every believer through the same spirit he put himself into the circle of humanity as a man he was tempted by satan to come out of it remember if thou be the son of god and jesus said man man shall not live by bread alone and you see he we have it written that he said if i by the finger of god cast down satan and the finger of god there is the holy spirit the power of god through the holy spirit and it was through the holy spirit that he exercised the divine kingly authority it was even through the power of the holy spirit that he was sustained on the cross of calvary who through the eternal spirit offered himself up to god without spot in hebrews 9 14 and you see there we have it he is seeing one if i can put it like this one who has become for him a merlest of his own resurrection now lazarus again we're only drawing an analogy not spiritualizing professor finnish used to point out to us very strongly in our classes in his theology class he used to say to us remember although we speak of lazarus being resurrected it wasn't really a resurrection he came out still on this side of the grave and he had to go back in again it was a resuscitation it was that call of the soul back to the body but lazarus has yet to go undergo we believe bodily resurrection christ rising from the dead was different he came out on the other side of the grave to die no more if i can put it by that and you see even in the resuscitated lazarus jesus the man christ jesus has a mark given to him

of his own kingly authority and of his own resurrection and when when when when jesus looks and jesus looks at you and at me and all his elect people and his redeemed people his atoned ones when he sees us with him at the table what does he see he sees of the travel of his soul and he is satisfied he sees again his mastery in the place of darkness and of death he sees again his work as breaking up the works of satan he sees again the fulfilling of the father's purpose and the father's promise he sees that in you my friend that's one of the reasons why you are precious to him we can see how he loved lazarus we can see how precious lazarus must have been to him at that table and let me say reverently how much more precious are those who have been redeemed from the death which is what from physical death precious to give every one of his sins and he sees you as precious to himself and precious to his father precious to the spirit who sanctifies and is quickened lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him i want to finish by telling you something that i had many years ago from one of our ministers who's no longer alive it was just a thought a passing thought in a sermon that i heard from the late reverend donald gillis of crossabuston lewis now it wasn't on this subject he was teaching at all but he touched on this room and he touched on the fact of lazarus being at the table with jesus and he said something like this he said i wonder sometimes if lazarus was sitting there and feeling very self-conscious i'm sure he was he said and perhaps part of his self-consciousness was what other people were thinking of him and he may even have felt i hope there's not the stench of the grave and of death of my clothes yes mr gillis said often at the table of the lord some of his two people will be feeling i hope there's not the stench of death off my clothes i hope i'm not an offense to any of my brothers or sisters at the table now we can follow that what mr gillis is saying come here and then he said mary did this beautiful thing she took her box of spikenard ointment very precious and costly and she broke it and we read that the house the room in which the supper was going on was filled with the fragrance of the ointment and i can still remember mr gillis saying all these years ago i can still remember him saying ah he said the blasters had been feeling afraid that there might be a smell of them he'll be very thankful that mary had broken her alabaster box and the fragrance in the room would have taken the attention away from himself and he said that's what we can do for one another by remembering breaking the alabaster box of prayers and bringing christ with his fragrance into our room into our observance of the lord's supper

break the alabaster box of prayers and christ will be there in the fragrance of his presence and that's what made a communion a true means of grace and profitable father not the man that's preaching but the presence of his savior himself now these are just a few father scattered devotional thoughts on that very simple scene and yet amazing scene a scene that will be looked back from back to from eternity of death lazarus and all the other scenes of all the other lazarus who sat at the communion table with the same host and the same savior now what a prayer we pray lord that thou would encourage thy people that thou will encourage us all that we may encourage yourselves in thee we thank thee for the lord jesus we thank thee for his tenderness we thank thee for his power we thank thee for his love we thank thee for his care for us and that we are

precious in his eyes because he has loved us and given himself for us we thank thee oh lord our god that unto thee the father we are also precious because we are purchased and redeemed by this the blood of thy son and we thank thee that we are precious to the spirit the comforter the paraclete whom jesus has sent forth to be the quickener and the sanctifier and the filler of his people oh may we be filled with the holy ghost and with power stand down from heaven bless each one of us and help us to come to the table of the lord tomorrow believingly as sinners who have trusted in christ and who are fleeing from the sin as sinners who are seeking his strength and seeking his cleansing bless each one of us be with the minister the office bearers with the members be with those who are seeking to join themselves by faith and in in christ and in trusting in him and an obedience to his one who are seeking to join themselves to the people of god here at this time may they all are be able to read their warrant and their right as children of god very clearly and may their hearts be warm towards the lord jesus and their witness strengthened and made powerful bless us in our closing psalm of praise and be with us through this night and come meet with us again on the lord's day and all to the glory of thy name and to our salvation amen