

Lazarus and Martha

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- [0 : 00] Now friends, shall we turn for some time this evening to the portion of scripture that we read together. The Gospel by John chapter 12, and we may read from the beginning.
- John chapter 12, at verse 1. Then Jesus, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead.
- There they made him a supper, and Martha served. But Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.
- And especially these words in verse 2. But Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.
- Bethany must have been a wonderful place. That little village, which was about two miles from Jerusalem. The one who had no place on earth whereon to lay his head, often turned his footsteps thither.
- [1 : 22] For to the Savior, Bethany was a place of retreat from the pressures of the crowd, and a place of refreshment for body and for soul.
- And there was at least one home in Bethany, which had the beauty of holiness for the light of its dwelling.
- The home of Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. For its open door and its warm welcome spoke eloquently of their love to Christ and of their loyalty to his cause.
- Now as we would meditate on these words for a little time this evening, we would like to see that we have here first of all a remarkable sight.
- A remarkable sight. Then Jesus, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead.
- [2 : 45] There they made him a supper and Martha served. But Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.
- What a strange sight we have here. A man brought back from the dead. It was but a few days ago that his sorrowing sisters sat by his bedside.
- And poor Lazarus was beyond all human aid. And they sent an urgent message to the Savior who was carrying out his ministry in another part of the land.
- And the message was urgent. Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick.
- His life is in danger. And we have no other hope but thee. And then we read some strange words.
- [4 : 04] That on receipt of this message, our Lord abode two days still in the same place where he was.
- And he also spoke some mysterious words. This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby.
- And so Christ intimates that there is a divine purpose in human suffering.
- All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose.

Do you remember the words of the Apostle Paul? Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

[5 : 22] And now, when Christ arrives at Bethany, Lazarus has been buried for four days.

And you recall his words to the sorrowing friends. Our friend Lazarus sleeper.

Our friend Lazarus sleeper. Have no fears for him. He is in safekeeping.

He is in the hands of God. Our friend Lazarus sleeper. But I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

[6 : 26] And we read in this chapter that there were many who came to Bethany to comfort Martha and Mary concerning their brother.

And because of him, because of Lazarus, many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus.

many of them went away and believed on Jesus. Now these Jews who came to Bethany were not prejudiced in favor of Christ.

No, it was exactly the opposite. But because of him, because of him, because of Lazarus, many of them went away and believed on Jesus.

Lazarus, ah, my friend, I wonder if there is a Lazarus to whom you owe a great debt.

[7 : 45] Ah, there are those and they have been reared in the homes of godly parents. they have seen a consistent Christian example in their father or in their mother.

Ah, is it the case that because of them that you too have come to believe on Jesus? It is related that in a certain college, a few of the divinity students were discussing the merits of the various modern translations of the New Testament.

One would say, well, I prefer the revised version. Another one, I prefer the New English Bible. Another, the revised standard version and so on.

And there was one quiet lad there and he said, well, I prefer my mother's version. And the other said, John, what do you mean?

Does your mother know Greek? Did she write a translation of the New Testament? Oh, no, he said. No, but I love the version that was presented to me in her daily life.

[9 : 28] Because of Lazarus, many went away and believed on Jesus. In the biography of H.M.

Stanley, Stanley, who was the hard-bitten American newspaper reporter who was sent out to Africa to find David Livingston when he had disappeared for more than two years.

And Stanley was a very cynical man. but he went out to fulfill the commission for his newspaper. And at length he discovered Dr. Livingston.

And this is what H.M. Stanley said. I was with him as he ministered to the sick in the leper colonies.

I heard him earnestly preaching the gospel to the natives. I saw his concern about the needy.

[10 : 44] And he said, that man of God did not pressurize me in any way. But in that man's company I became a Christian because of him, because of Lazarus, many went away and believed on Jesus.

The poet Tennyson wrote of the words of gratitude of Mary, her eyes are homes of silent prayer, no other thought her mind admits, but he was dead and there he sits and he that brought him back is there.

Ah, Christ has come to Bethany. Christ has come to share in the sorrow of human nature. See him there at the grave site.

Oh, what astounding words John writes there in the shortest text in the Bible. Jesus wept.

Jesus wept. Oh, isn't that a mystery of mysteries? He is the prince of life. He is the conqueror of death.

[12 : 17] And yet by the grave side of his friend, Jesus wept. Ah, why did he weep my friend? Was it not because of the ravages of sin?

Because of what sin had done? Because that sin had defiled God's noblest handiwork, man made in the image of God?

And our Lord was about to command death to yield the prey. And yet Jesus wept.

Jesus wept. Ah, mourning believer, should this not comfort you? God when there are times perhaps when you feel that no one cares, that the world after all is a very cold place.

Ah, remember friend, remember that your exalted Lord has a fellow feeling for you in all your infirmity.

[13 : 39] And Jesus came to that tomb and the stone was rolled away and he said, Lotharus, come forth, come forth.

And at the command of Christ, he that was dead came forth. He was bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and he said, loose him, loose him and let him go.

And it is an emblem of the greater deliverance. It is an emblem of his breaking the fetters of sin and setting free the prisoners of Satan.

If the son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed, if the son shall make you free, he has the power, he breaks the power of sin and sets the prisoners free.

But then, friends, also, we see in our text an honoured position, an honoured position. Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.

[15 : 09] He sat at the table with him. Oh, what a glorious experience that must have been for Lazarus, to sit at the table with him.

Lazarus could truly say, the sorrows of death encompassed me, and the pains of hell took hold upon me.

But I am set free, I am set free. He has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto the Lord. He is singing the new song, the song of the redeemed.

Death fled at the approach of the Prince of Life. There they made him a supper and Martha served.

Martha served. She was an honorable woman. She rendered a woman's service for surely to make domestic comfort and happiness, to make a contented Christian home is one of the most honored of services and Martha was an honorable woman.

[16 : 38] Ah, but for Lazarus there is reserved a higher honor still. He was one of them that sat at the table with him.

For you see, Lazarus could not bear to be out of the master's presence for a moment. He wanted always to be with Christ.

He did not want to be where Christ was not present. Ah, no, no, Lazarus, Lazarus found all his joy in the master's presence.

Ah, my young friend, that place of sinful amusement, you can't expect Christ to be with you there.

You cannot expect his presence where his name is blasphemed, where his word is dishonored, where his people are scoffed at. Ah, see, see that you have this love, this love for the Lord that was evident in Lazarus.

[17 : 57] He could not bear to be for a single moment out of the master's presence. And is this not always true of the Christian?

Do you remember how Moses said that a peculiar moment in the history of Israel remember how he prayed if thy presence go not with us then carry us not up hence.

When the queen of Sheba came from the ends of the earth to Solomon to see the glory of his kingdom and to hear his words of wisdom you remember what she said happy are these thy servants that stand in thy presence continually and see the king's face they see the king's face ah Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him and I often feel as I grow older that there is not a more lovely saying in the Bible concerning the redeemed of the Lord than this they see his face and his name is in their forehead they see his face that is heaven friend to see his face to be with him to be with him to be with

Christ is far better and his name is in their foreheads and that means that they have been completely sanctified as the catechism puts it they are made perfectly like Christ to the full enjoyment of God to all eternity they see his face his name is in their foreheads and you remember how when David was crowned over the united kingdom of Israel and Judah how he asked are there any still alive of the house of Saul that I may show them kindness for Jonathan's sake and

Mephibosheth was brought into his presence the lame man and he trembled before the king for it was customary for these eastern kings when they came to power to put to death all the male members of the previous royal house so that there would be no chance of a rebellion against them poor Mephibosheth trembled but do you remember what David said foreshadowing the new testament David fear not I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake and he said Mephibosheth shall eat at my table continually as one of the king's sons as one of the king's sons adopted into the royal family given all the honors of the house of

[22 : 10] David given all the privileges of the palace oh how wonderful for the lame were excluded from the king's presence ah but you see grace grace reached down to Mephibosheth and brought him near as John Newton said amazing grace amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me I once was lost but now I'm found was blind but now I see but then friends think of Christ's joy in Lazarus Christ's joy in Lazarus in the gospel of Luke in chapter 15 we have three wonderful parables the parable of the lost sheep and of the lost coin and of the lost son and these three parables are held together by a single connecting thread and the connecting thread is the love of

God and you remember that in that chapter there is a constant refrain where Christ said there is joy amongst the angels in glory over one sinner that repented joy over one sinner that repent Christ joy in Lazarus and the apostle Paul wrote to some of his converts and he said ye are our glory and joy our glory and joy for surely the shepherd of souls has no greater joy than seeing a sinner turning from the paths of sin and setting out on the way that leads to

Zion ah yes think of the joy of Christ over Lazarus but then friends think too of what Christ meant to Lazarus himself ah this no tongue can tell of mortals here below the love of Jesus what it is none but his loved ones know ah yes friends he was one of them that sat at the table with him now there is a sense in which this is true of every believer my friend are you one of them that have sat at the table with him and has it not been for you a soul enriching experience to sit with him at that table words are out of place to sit at the table with him

Lazarus was a new creature ah yes and we are new creatures in Christ Jesus we were dead in trespasses and sins we were dead towards God we were dead towards the things of the spirit ah yes we were dead dead as far as Christian experience was concerned we were lifeless towards God we were doing him no service we brought no glory to his name and furthermore Lazarus death in the tomb was offensive ah yes you see there was a foul odour and even his own dear sister was afraid of the opening of that tomb perhaps for fear of the spread of infection that dead corpse was offensive and oh when we walked in the ways of the world when we were with the ungodly we were offensive we were offensive not only were we ourselves travelling in the road to hell but we were a stumbling block to others we may have been the means of keeping them back from seeking the saviour because of our worldliness because of our love of the pleasures of sin but oh friend here here is amazing grace that while we were yet sinners

Christ died for us Christ died for the ungodly he was one of them that sat at the table with him and it was an unforgettable experience because from that moment Lazarus was unmistakably identified with the Lord Jesus Christ everybody everybody knew it yes to whom he belonged and the result was that his life was a blessing his life was a blessing to the whole community many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus because of Lazarus because of Lazarus oh my dear Christian friend is that not the life that you would like to live to think that because of your walk that some other would set out on the way to

[29 : 07] Zion that some other would turn away from the path of sin and set their faces towards Jerusalem the life of Lazarus was a blessing he was one of them that sat at the table with him ah we should ask ourselves can we hold our heads high or must we bow them in shame when men say he is one or she is one of them that sit at his table are we like Lazarus is it our joy to be always in his company to be with his people to be where those that love him gather together is it true of us that wherever we go and whatever we do that men can point to us and say he is one she is one of them that sit at the table with him because of him many went away and believed on

Jesus but then friends the last thing we would see in our text is a blessed testimony a blessed testimony we're told that the chief priest consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus you see the enemies of Christ would undo his work ah but Lazarus was such an eloquent witness the very presence of that man said I was dead but now I live now

I am a new man and it was undeniable it was evident for all to see there were many many witnesses many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus Lazarus bore a blessed testimony by reason of him many went away and believed on Jesus ah what nobler tribute could any Christian desire than that ah my friend all the honors and the titles and the ranks that the world can bestow are as nothing to this nothing at all compared with this said about Lazarus the servant of Christ because of him many went away and believed on

Jesus his life was such that because of him many were drawn to Christ because of Lazarus and from what we read of him in the gospels Lazarus seems to have been a quiet and a modest man indeed his sisters are given more prominence in the gospel records he was a man of a retiring disposition there is no word of his recorded in scripture not a single word he tells us nothing about his experience beyond the grave the poet said something sealed the lips of that evangelist by reason of him many of the

Jews went away and believed on Jesus ah my friend I believe that it was not so much what Lazarus said as what he was that drew others to Christ it was what he was it was that Christ like life it was that evidence of grace it was that ascribing the glory to the Lord and because of him those who were enemies those who were enemies in their minds by wicked works they became the followers of Christ they forsook the opposition camp they came over from the enemy and they became believers in Jesus he was one of them that sat at the table with him you see

[34 : 49] Lazarus gave men to think well of Christ he gave men to think well of Christ it was seen plainly by all men what Lazarus owed to his Lord and if we are Christians then we will be hated by the enemies of Christ we must count on the opposition of wicked men if they have persecuted me said the Lord Jesus if they have persecuted me they will persecute you also oh friend if Satan never opposes us if he's never giving us any trouble surely he must be saying that worldly

Christian is no danger to my kingdom if we live just like the men and women of the world if there is no difference in our lives and theirs ah then they will sneer they will sneer as they point to us and they will say he sits at his table but I am as good as him any day ah yes because of him because of him what Lazarus was because of the holiness of that man's life because of his separation from the world because of his devotion to his Lord because of his love to the cause it was evident to all what he owed to the Lord Jesus the power the power of a transformed life a life transformed by the grace of

God do you remember the occasion when Philip introduced Nathaniel to Christ and do you remember Philip said to him come come and meet the Messiah Jesus of Nazareth and Nathaniel said can there any good thing come out of Nazareth Nazareth was a despised place Philip said come and see and when he came to the Lord Jesus Christ said behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile and Nathaniel said how how do you know me and you remember that it was one of the marks of the

Messiah that he could read the hearts of men and our Lord said when thou wast under the fig tree I saw thee in that place of secret devotion when you were there kneeling at the throne of grace meditating upon the word in communion with God then I saw thee behold behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile and Nathaniel said thou art the son of David he confessed Christ ah friend what an example Lazarus is to those that love the Lord what an evidence of grace in his life so that even the enemies of

Christ knew unmistakably whose he was and whom he served oh may we be like Lazarus may we be conformed to the likeness of Christ and may it be evident from our walk and conversation whose we are and whom we serve by reason of him by reason of Lazarus many of the Jews went away the enemies of Christ and they believed on Jesus may the Lord bless our meditation on his word let us pray oh Lord we thank thee for thy precious word and we pray that thou will make us receptive to the truth and do thou grant oh

[40 : 19] Lord that we may have the spiritual mind that we may learn its lessons and do thou Lord by thine enabling grace make us to be the followers of those who have inherited the promises and are come to the heavenly Jerusalem and oh Lord grant to us that as we look forward to gathering around thy word and thy table oh Lord teach us the solemnity of what we do and oh grant that our commitment to Christ may be whole hearted oh may there be no dubiety about our profession of faith and oh grant Lord that both by life and by lip it may be evident whose we are and whom we serve oh

Lord anoint us with the spirit that we may be a fragrance of Christ in every place grant then Lord that thy name may be glorified in our midst and that sinners around us may come to acknowledge the power of sovereign grace hide thy face from our unworthiness cleanse us from the sins that so easily beset us and Lord graciously pardon the iniquity of our holy things and the praise shall be thine in Christ forever Amen