

ALIVE AGAIN

John 11:1-46

The beloved disciple saved the best for the last. His series of seven "signs", designed to convince all men of the deity of the Christ, came to the crowning climax in the raising of Lazarus. There is nothing like it. It was the best and most convincing of the signs. It would be asking too much to expect that any seeker could come out from a reading of the eleventh chapter of John's Gospel without a firm faith in the Saviour. That was in the center of John's purpose as he began the writing (John 20:31).

THE HOME IN BETHANY. Love reigned in that home. Martha and Mary and Lazarus lived there and demonstrated the qualities that go far toward proving that "life may be beautiful". It was always open to the Messiah. They loved him and provided the atmosphere that brought peace and calm and serenity to their best friend. Martha enjoyed doing for him. She was overjoyed at the thought of making her visitor happy. Mary delighted in sitting at his feet in rapt attention while he taught those wondrous truths. Lazarus provided something that was unspeakably precious to the Man from Galilee. John reveals the fact that Jesus loved all three of them. The message that went from the sisters to the Lord indicated that there was a sweet relationship existing between Jesus and Lazarus. Pure and holy love was in evidence. Eternity alone can reveal what that home in Bethany contributed to the life and being of Jesus of Nazareth. Beautiful friendships grew in that holy atmosphere.

RETIREMENT INTERRUPTED. What started out to be a quiet season of rest and teaching ended abruptly by the message from Mary and Martha: "He whom thou lovest is sick." The sisters knew of his love for their brother. He would want to have the news. They had no thought other than the certain assurance that he would hurry on back to their home. They knew of his healing power. They were sure that he would come quickly and that he would heal Lazarus. They watched the dread fever as it weakened the sufferer. Surely the Master would come to bring healing. In the meantime the sisters suffered silently. Jesus' answer was a quietly spoken soliloquy: "This sickness is not unto death." Some hope could be

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gathered from it to be taken to Bethany for the sisters. It was a strange utterance but carefully concealed was a clear hope for some divine assistance. A keen observer would see that the Lord was not dismissing the request completely. Physical death was not the final stage. The Lord of life was concerned that they might advance the glory of God in order that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. ⁱⁿ Perea the disciples listened to further light from the Master and in Bethany the sisters hoped until the messenger of death called for the spirit of Lazarus. Jesus gave an illustration of the "delays of love" until the moment when his help would mean most to each member of that wonderful circle. The delay and the return to Judea came out of the same affection and the same divine knowledge. He knew of the death. He knew his own purpose and plan. He was set to raise the dead and ~~not~~ to heal the sick. All of that remarkable work in Perea was fully accomplished. He set himself to provide the most perfect good in the hearts of Mary and Martha, the disciples, and the crowd that would be present. The disciples must come through it with a stronger and clearer faith.

LET US GO TO JUDEA AGAIN. The decision to leave Judea had been reached because of the hostility that breathed out from every hill. Unbelief and hatred and danger must be faced when he chose to return. The authorities were determined to end his career. Yet the Lord decided to go into the midst of all of these dangers. The disciples were frightened. They were unanimous in the decision to stay away from the perils of Jerusalem. To them it seemed suicidal to venture among those inflamed enemies. They were thinking of the precious life of their Lord. They were also ^{concerned} ~~concerned~~ for their own lives. Again he reminded them that the time was limited. The work must be finished within the limits. He was completely in the will of the Father and in ^{his} keeping the divine plan could be consummated.

He announced to his disciples: ² "Our friend, Lazarus, has fallen asleep, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep". Even though Lazarus was in the spirit world he could still be called "our friend". It was a lifeless body in the tomb at Bethany but Jesus

interpreted the miracle before them as the gentle calling of a genuine "friend" back to life. What a treatise on immortality! The disciples did not understand his language.

To them it meant that the fever had broken and health was ready to return. They could breathe a sigh of relief and continue their stay ^{beyond} across the Jordan. The perilous journey would not be necessary. Jesus found it necessary to give a further statement that bluntly announced the death of the sufferer.

Strangely enough Jesus said: "For your sakes I am glad I was not there". What did he mean? He did certainly not mean to say that he was glad Lazarus had died. He was now able to help the disciples and the sisters since they knew that he was in another part of the land at the time of the man's death. Great good was to come from the signal display of the divine power.

It is also strange that he said: "Let us go unto him". Notice that he did not say "unto the sisters". The tenement of ^{lay} ~~lay~~ lying cold and stiff in the tomb was the object of his trip to Bethany. That body must be brought to life again by bringing the spirit back to it. He knew all that awaited him. "He was not rebellious, neither turned back." Watch him as he prepared to lead his followers across the river and up the long hill to Lazarus.

LET US ALSO GO THAT WE MAY ^{DIE} ~~DIE~~ WITH HIM. Do you realize what Thomas was saying?

Seeing that the Master had resolved to go, the ^{courageous} ~~courageous~~ Thomas uttered a strong challenge to his brethren. He could see nothing but ruin for them. He was in despair over the outcome but he had no thought of deserting the Master. It was a demonstration of a desperate dedication to go into the very jaws of death as Jesus led the way. He would not profess an optimism that did not exist but he would give his own life to demonstrate the love he had for his Lord. Thus the narrative pictured the quiet group of men on the way to the danger zone. Jesus walked in perfect light and therefore in perfect calmness. The men followed in love, thoroughly committed to the willingness to die for anything he proposed. As they journeyed the scene at Bethany included a bound body behind a huge stone in the sepulchre, two heart-broken sisters

still trying to know why the Master had not ^{come} ~~come~~, and a big crowd of mourners who were revealing their respect for Mary and Martha and their ^{curiosity} ~~curiosity~~ concerning the response of the prophet from Galilee. Hatred was building up on every side as Pharisees and Sadducees made plans to kill the one who had disturbed their plans and their serenity. Much depended upon the impact of the presence of our Lord.

MARTHA WITH JESUS. When Jesus turned the bend of the road and came up to the little village the watchful Martha was out to meet him. Bless her heart! How she had needed her Lord! It had been almost too much for her. She had kept busy and had carried much of Mary's load. Now she found herself in the presence of the best friend the household had ever known. Her first words were: "Lord, if thou hadst been here". She did not say: "If thou hadst come" or "Why did you delay?" It is difficult to decide whether rebuke or complaint or regret is the dominant note. There is some discontent. She did not realize that the answer to prayer could be either "yes" or "no" or "wait". She revealed a will that was not wholly subdued to the divine will. She had done much thinking but she had not been able to ^{come} ~~come~~ up with an answer. She did not understand the meaning of death. To her it was the end of her hopes and dreams. How could she be expected to resolve all her questions and see clearly into the meaning of her heart anguish? She, at least, gave expression to her sincere love and her willingness to trust ^{him} ~~him~~ for the adequate explanation.

In these words she expressed a strange confidence: "But I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it". How is that for a bold confidence? She revealed an imperfect conception of Jesus' work as Messiah but she had a firm belief in the power of God and in ^{his} ~~his~~ willingness to hear any request of His Son. She had heard of the daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow of Nain. She had also treasured up the statement brought by the messengers: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God". She moved out on a great venture of faith even though death had closed the door rather conclusively. Was she suggesting that Jesus call on the Father ~~for~~ for a special miracle?

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Jesus immediately came forth with: "Thy brother shall rise again". What did the Master mean by this brief statement? It might refer to a distant resurrection or to an immediate return of Lazarus to life. Death need not be considered the final conqueror. In her present desolation the possibility of a remote restoration to life did not satisfy Martha's active mind. Such a doctrine was a bit powerless in her present emergency. She needed help that very day. She was thankful for his clear teaching about a resurrection from the grave, but she needed more at that moment. She failed to recognize the presence of the Lord of Life and Death. He was able and willing. Solemnly he uttered the words: "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth on me though he die yet shall he live. He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

In reply the Teacher led the trusting Martha to his position and pointed her to his own sublime person as the actual resurrection and the life. The resurrection is not an abstract doctrine but a glorious fact--not future only but present. Because he is the life he ~~confers~~ ^{confers} life and is able to exert his power over death until death has no power to exist. Because of his creative power the one who believes shall never die. He is "risen together with Christ." "Because I live he shall live also". The life of heaven shall never be broken off. The body dies but the person shall never die. What sublime doctrine! He was standing ~~very~~ near the entrance to the sepulchre.

He turned his searching gaze upon the seeking woman and asked: "Believest thou this?" "Is this your belief?" He wanted a statement concerning her own personal attitude to this truth. He actually ~~sought~~ ^{sought} to draw from her a ^{clear} confession of her faith. Her reply was ready and direct. "I have made it my own". "It is my settled faith". Actually she surpassed the confessions of Nathanael and Peter and John the Baptist. She declared:

"I have believed that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, he that cometh into the world". Her spiritual insight journeyed through Old Testament prophecy and through the wonderful experiences at Bethany. She moved out into the rich areas of truth reserved for the true

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believer. Hers was a full Christian confession. She actually used three messianic titles: the Christ, the Son of God, and the Coming One!

MARY WITH JESUS. When Martha passed the Teacher's test she went quickly to find Mary with the welcome words: "The Master is here and calleth for thee". What a thrill! How she had longed for her beloved friend! Martha sought to get her away from the crowd and arrange for a quiet meeting with Jesus. The curious visitors followed. Almost immediately Mary was at her Lord's feet. It had been her place in the days of sunshine and happiness. It was now the place for her when gloom and sadness made her bow before him for comfort and consolation.

Her words were the same statement that Martha had used. Following the one sentence she burst into tears and continued to weep the remaining steps in the experience in front of the grave. "Jesus wept." The verb used never means to wail or groan or to cry aloud. He burst into tears. Tears fell from his eyes. They were tears of heart-compassion, of silent sorrow, of sheer human sympathy, and of genuine love. He was strongly moved. His emotions stirred within him. Even the hostile spectators said: "How he loved him!"

HE GROANED IN THE SPIRIT. HE TROUBLED HIMSELF. John took the cover off and revealed a mysterious glimpse into the heart of the Saviour. The verb can be translated "was moved with indignation in the spirit" or "to snort with anger like a wounded animal". It was some deep, compelling emotion having its source in the spirit. Pain, mingled with anger produced indignation. *It also included* ~~We could add~~ the deep sympathy which welled up within him as he saw grief and heart-suffering in his two friends and rank unbelief in the outsiders who hated him. The wailing crowd, the ignorance of the people, and the consciousness that he was soon to have his encounter with the devil and with the heartless enemy, called death, produced in him an uncontrollable emotion that poured forth as horrible groaning, deep in his spirit. The thought of that mighty relentless power which was, even at that moment arming itself to resist him, stirred his spirit to the depths. That hostile enemy must be destroyed

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He had set himself to destroy forever the evil one. He was now girding himself to the titanic struggle with death.

John declares that Jesus "troubled himself" or "was troubled" or "agitated".

Horror and indignation manifested themselves outwardly as well as inwardly. In a mysterious way he was vehemently moved with anger as if a powerful foreign power was overpowering him. It was an outburst of fiery wrath as he recognized the presence of death in the vicinity. The Lord of Life was conscious of the fact that death was at that moment holding Lazarus captive beyond that stone. His wrath flamed. His mysterious groanings were directed at the mortal enemy. He summoned to a life and death struggle the enemy of souls. As he did this he was conscious that soon he was going forth (to Calvary) to die to complete the destruction of the kingdom of darkness. He sensed the victory over his arch-enemy. It was the visible going forth of his perfect holiness as contact was made with evil. In directing his anger against man's foe he proved the reality of his love. He continued to groan within himself as he came to the tomb.

THREE IMPERATIVES. In the strong consciousness of his absolute authority he approached the place where they had laid him. Mary and Martha clung to him while the spectators, signally moved, looked on. The first call to disturb and interrupt the silent repose of the spirit that had been absent for four days was: "Take ye away the stone". It was a startling, mysterious, authoritative command. Martha, who had laid aside all present hope, clutched at his arm and begged him to turn away from his plan and leave the body undisturbed. It was a plea for decency and consideration and the sanctities of sorrow. Quickly Jesus reminded her of something she needed to remember: ^{said} ~~said~~ "I not that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?" What a wonderful promise! It was a good time for Martha to remember and qualify.

The prayer which he prayed to the Father moves hearts everywhere. It was pure praise and thanksgiving for a victory already granted. Communion with the Father was never sweeter

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or more meaningful than in that moment when he stood before the tomb of Lazarus, He prayed because of the genuine gratitude that welled up within him, that he might help those who stood about the tomb. "Because of the multitude standing around I said it that they may believe that thou didst send me".

Immediately he cried with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth". He had prayed to the Father. He now cried out to the mass of helpless clay and to the absent soul that had been freed from the body for four days. His was an imperious summons. Jesus had been weeping. He had spoken gently in bringing comfort to Martha and Mary. He had been shaken by sobs. He now stood face to face with death. He was the vanquisher of death. His voice thundered forth across the hills. It was the same voice that spoke to John on the Isle of Patmos saying: "I am he that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forever and have the keys of death and hades". He was the Mighty One who was in that mysterious conflict with the devil and with death. It was the moment of victory: "He that was dead came forth bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face bound up with a napkin." Lazarus was alive! Death had been forced to loose its grip on the one who had been dead.

The third command was "loose him and let him go". Much more was involved in this word than one usually understood. From where? Whither? What was he to do? How much of the strange ~~four-day~~ journey would be described? Tradition claims that Lazarus lived thirty years from that day and that he died a second time at the age of sixty. He was said to be bishop of Marseilles.

MANY BELIEVED. Certainly that is to be expected. How could they walk away from a display of the supreme power of the glory of God without accepting the Lord of Life? Martha and Mary and the disciples were strangely moved and their faith strengthened but out in the crowd there was a visible breaking down of resistance and the full throated response to the One who had proved his deity and his power over death and the grave and the kingdom of the devil. Some turned away with stubborn wills and hardened hearts to become more deadly as

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enemies of the Messiah. That result is a definite decision.

The incident gives the distinct lessons that: (1) Love permits pain and sorrow and heartache that individuals may be driven to the Christ and that his love and sympathy and power may be made manifest. (2) Love leaves prayers unanswered or postponed. (3) Love comes at length with blessings which are indescribably and immeasurably glorious to make certain that glory comes to the Father. It is Christ's way of dealing with his needy ones.

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