

## Hated without cause – Lazarus

HN/SS20/11/05 am

Reading: Daniel 6, John 15:9–16:4

Study Text: John 2: 9–11

Sing Psalms: 69:1–4, 35:4–7, 35:17–22, 69:14–18

Less than 3% of the population in India is Christian. Christians represent a tiny minority of the vast population of this land. Why then are they hated so intensely? Why are they the targets of injustice and persecution? Why are they seen as a threat to society?

A friend of mine worked in the post office in India. It can be difficult for Christians to get such jobs but he was there working hard and working honestly just as the word of God tells us to do. But simply for doing this his colleagues hated him. He would not be party to their laziness and corruption. They saw him as a threat to their corrupt way of life. They wanted to get rid of him.

*The chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also (12:10).* Lazarus had already died once. Just a few weeks before this supper, Jesus raised him from the dead. Now the chief priests wanted him dead again. Why? They were Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Lazarus was a living contradiction to their belief, to their doctrine. They sought to remove the evidence pointing to the fallacy of their doctrine – maybe hoping that in all probability he would not rise again!

These priests would have done well to heed the advice of one of their own called Gamaliel – as would those who seek to destroy the church of God today. *If it is of God you cannot overthrow it – lest you even be found to fight against God (Acts 5:39).* The chief priests would indeed be found to be fighting against God. Within the week they would have Jesus killed, but he would rise from the dead to bring all their plans and all their doctrines to nothing.

Why was Lazarus hated by those who hated Jesus? Why was he their target, the victim of another death threat?

### Work of Jesus

Lazarus was dead until Jesus came along and called him to come out of the tomb. Now he was a living witness to the divine power of Jesus. Once he was dead but now he was alive. His very life was a witness to Jesus. He was a new man because of Jesus Christ. People were coming to see Lazarus, the man whom Jesus had raised from the dead (12:9). On account of him many Jews believed in Jesus (12:11). Only by putting him to death did the chief priests hope to stop this witness of Lazarus. His very existence was a threat to them.

*If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation – old things have passed away, behold all things are new (II Corinthians 5:17).* When someone believes in Jesus Christ, when their heart is changed and they are converted, they become new people – they are born again. But they still look the

same you say – it is only the inner person that is changed. Certainly we do not get given halos or crosses to wear; we don't take on a different appearance like Moses did after he had been with the Lord (Exodus 34:29). But the change of heart may well be reflected in how you dress, in your countenance and general behaviour.

Villagers in India are often poor and look unkempt. On becoming a child of God a lady we know took a different attitude towards herself and her appearance. She washed and did her hair more frequently. She did the same for her children that previously ran around dirty and half naked. She started sending her children to school all dressed up in a school uniform. She gave up chewing tobacco and gambling. Without saying anything, everyone knew that something had changed in the life of this woman.

Is it possible to be a secret believer? Is it possible that a person can be born of the Spirit of God and their life not change? Is it possible for one who was dead to be made alive and no one to notice? Do people around you know that you are a child of God or do you try to keep it a secret?

You were born dead in sin; you *were dead in trespasses and sins* (Ephesians 2:1). If you have been made alive in Christ, if you have been raised to life by the grace and power of Jesus Christ, how can you possibly be the same person? You are a new creation. The burden of sin has been taken from you, you have freedom, and you have a glorious hope. You will not continue to live as one who is in bondage, one who is without God and without hope in this world – will you? Lazarus could not but be a living witness to Jesus – he was dead but was now alive!

## **Walk with Jesus**

*Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Jesus* (12:2). Lazarus was hated; Lazarus was targeted, because he was with Jesus. Having been made alive by Jesus he wanted to be in the presence of Jesus – he wanted to walk with Jesus. The edict has been put out by the chief priests and Pharisees that if anyone knew where Jesus was they must report it (11:57). Lazarus knew where Jesus was – he was with him! He did not fear the authorities and their evil edict.

After Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of God and returned to heaven, the disciples received the Holy Spirit and were filled with boldness. When brought before the chief priests Peter and John spoke boldly of Jesus of Nazareth. They were uneducated and untrained men – but men who had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). They were men who prayed together, men who broke bread together, men who worshipped together and men who witnessed together. They were men who walked with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who are made alive in Christ, those who have received the Holy Spirit no longer *walk according to the ways of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air* (Ephesians 2:2). They walk in the ways that *God has prepared for them* (Ephesians 2:10). Those who are in Christ walk just as he walked (I John 2:6). Old ways, old habits, old speech, old places, old friends, will be put away. *Behold all things have now become new* for those who are in Christ Jesus (II Corinthians 5:17).

The villager who believed in Jesus no longer worshipped her old idols – she threw them out of her house. She no longer went to the temple with her old friends – she went to the house of God with her new friends. She no longer used the course language she once did – she sang praises to Jesus with her family.

### **Worry to Jewish Leaders**

Because of Lazarus *many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus* (12:11). The Jewish leaders did not like people going away from their party, from their influence and domination. They wanted to keep as many as possible under the bondage of the law. They were jealous for power and authority. Lazarus by his very being, by his association with Jesus was a threat to their power and position in society.

If you think that you can be a Christian and walk in the ways of the world at the same time, then think again dear friend. *Whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God* (James 4:4). It follows that whoever is a friend of God makes himself an enemy of the world. When you walk with the Lord you will be hated by the world. This is not a just possibility, this is not something that can be avoided, and it is a certainty. *If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you* said Jesus (15:18).

See the impact of the gospel in the places where Paul went on his missionary journeys. In Ephesus the silversmiths who made idols of the goddess Diana felt the gospel of Jesus Christ was a threat to their business. They stirred up the population and started a riot. Would many businesses complain if there was to be a revival in our city? What about Star City for a start? Don't be surprised if they already are on the lookout for any hint of the gospel of Jesus Christ being witnessed.

We are not told that Lazarus actually said anything to provoke this threat against him, though a man who was given new life by Jesus would surely have praised him at every opportunity. It was his very life, his being in Christ and being with Jesus Christ that attracted the ire, the intense hatred of the enemies of Jesus. He was innocent of any wrongdoing. He was hated without a cause. *If they persecuted me they will persecute you also* said Jesus (15:20).

Do not marvel if the world hates you (I John 3:13). Do not be surprised if you as a child of God are the target of ostracism, ridicule or persecution by the world. In fact you should be concerned if you are not hated by the world. If you are not seen as a threat to those living sinful and corrupt lives then you need to ask yourself why. Why does the world not see that you are different, that you are a new creation in Christ Jesus?

The village lady I mentioned suffered persecution after becoming a Christian, but by the grace of God she stayed on in her village. Others have suffered even unto death in such circumstances. *They hated me without cause* said the Psalmist. Lazarus probably said the same thing. This lady said the same thing. Have you reason to say the same thing. *They hated me without cause*.

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