

Lazarus Come Out

HN/SS 9/10/05 am

Reading: John 11: 25 – 45, II Corinthians 4:1-5:8

Study Text: John 11: 38-45

Sing Psalms: 115:1-9, 16:7-11, 86:11-14, 86:15-17

Jesus *cried out with a loud voice ‘Lazarus, come out!’* and *he who had died came out* of the grave. How amazing. Who would believe such a thing could be done? What authority, what awesome power – a man calling to another to come out of the grave. Never in the history of mankind had such a wonder been witnessed.

Jesus said do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come forth (John 5:28). It has been said that ‘the authority of Jesus is so great that if he had not specified the name of Lazarus all the tombs would have given up their dead unto resurrection life!’

In this passage we come to what some might regard as the climax of this chapter – Lazarus coming out of the grave when called by Jesus. But we have already said that the climax is Jesus’ declaration *I am the resurrection and the life*. This great truth was declared and now is demonstrated through a mighty work of God. It is the truth that is enduring; it is this truth that we must take hold of – not just marvel at the miracle.

Believe in Jesus Christ and you will see the glory of God. *For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them even so the Son gives life to whom he will* (5:21). This is what Jesus said earlier on. Have they now seen the greatest display of the power of God? What about the resurrection to which this miracle is pointing? What about Jesus being the firstborn among many brethren, and the glorification of the saints (Romans 8). What about being raised in glory with a spiritual body (I Corinthians 15).

In the fourth century a church was built over a tomb in Bethany supposed to be that of Lazarus. The church at that time started to focus upon outward things, upon relics and holy places. A tendency to marvel at outward things has undermined the church down through the ages. People are attracted by rituals, by pomp and ceremony. Ornate church buildings were constructed that worshipers might be impressed and feel exhilarated.

Still today people are impressed and moved by the outward things. No longer do they like ornate buildings, but they like the aura of meeting in a super dome. Hundreds and thousands go along to watch the performance, hear the beautiful music, and feel the exhilaration of the moment. Here in the record of the raising of Lazarus the emphasis is not on the excitement or exhilaration of the moment. It all seems to have been pretty low key after he came out. The emphasis was on believing in Jesus and reflecting on the glory of God.

Believe

Notice the emphasis on the word ‘believe’ in this passage (11:40, 42, 45). Right in the beginning Jesus said to his disciples he was glad he was not there *that you might believe* (11:15). He said to Martha *did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God* (11:40). This is what this mighty work was all about.

Of course the ‘if’ here does not mean that Jesus was dependent on the faith of Martha to perform the miracle. He had determined long beforehand, in communion with his Father, to wake Lazarus up. What Jesus wanted Martha to do was to ‘stop thinking about that corpse and rivet her attention on Jesus, trusting completely in him (his power and his love), and then she would see this miracle as a true sign, an illustration and proof of the glory of God reflected in the Son of God’ (Hendrikson).

Jesus came to the tomb *again groaning in himself* (11:38). He began groaning when he saw Mary and the Jews weeping and wailing. He was indignant at their unbelief and at the apparent victory of Satan in death. He came to the tomb still groaning, still indignant at what was happening. He was ready to confront *him who holds the power of death, that is the devil* (Hebrews 2:14).

Just believe said Jesus. What were Mary and Martha thinking as they came to the grave with Jesus? What were the Jews thinking? What were the disciples thinking? Was Jesus simply going to pay his respects as a good friend and to mourn like the rest of them? God forbid! Jesus was groaning not mourning. He would not let death rule any longer for he was sent into this world give life. The power of death must be destroyed, but this will necessitate dealing with sin, for death is the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). Death came through sin.

Lazarus was buried in a cave – one that was either natural or dug out of the rock. It may have been more vertical than horizontal, for they literally had to lift the stone off the entrance. When Jesus instructed them to take away the stone Martha protested that there would be a bad smell. The body of her brother would have begun to decay after four days. She was not expecting him to be alive was she! Believe said Jesus. ‘The life’ will meet death and conquer it.

You may find it strange that Jesus asked some men to take away the stone. Could he not have done this himself by his great power? Of course he could have but think about the men who did this. They obeyed Jesus and acted in faith; they were doing what they were able to do in the will of God. Let us not be among those who stand idle when the Lord calls us to action, to shoulder arms and march forth in the victory of the Lord. Let us not be possessed by a false humility – ‘not me Lord I cannot do anything’. Let us rather say ‘here I am Lord send me’.

What these men did was neither easy nor pleasant – *by this time there is a stench*. But as Jesus told Martha to believe, so they went in faith and obedience to the command of Jesus. As it must always be, action accompanied their faith. They had no idea what Jesus was going to do but they trusted him. And they saw this great wonder, they saw the glory of God.

Jesus himself was acting in obedience to the will of his Father. He was always concerned to be doing the work of his Father – *I have finished the work you gave me to do* he said in his prayer (17:4). You who are a child of God by adoption should also be seeking to do the works which

your Father has given you to do. *For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them* (Ephesians 2:10).

Glory of God

Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God Jesus said to Martha (11:40). He had apparently said this to her before. He had told his disciples also that this sickness was for the glory of God, and *that the Son may be glorified through it* (11:4). *The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory...full of grace and truth* (1:14). Jesus wanted Martha and all who witnessed this mighty work to see that what he said about himself was true, that he was the Son of God, that he was divine, and that in Jesus the glory of the Godhead was revealed.

With the stone rolled away Jesus began to pray. Jesus often went off to pray alone. In Gethsemane he went ahead and fell on his face and prayed. I trust that you always begin your work with prayer. You pray that God will be with you, that he will watch over you and help you. But here at the grave Jesus' prayer was a bit different. He lifted up his eyes and said *Father I thank you that you have heard me* (11:41). He was not praying for himself but for those standing around him – *that they may believe that you sent me* (11:42). He prayed with the utmost confidence that his Father was hearing him.

How could Jesus pray with such confidence? Can you pray with such confidence? Jesus was doing the will of his Father. Jesus only ever did what his Father was doing – *the Son can do nothing of himself – he only does what the Father does* (5:19). If you pray in the name of Jesus, if you pray according to the will of God, you can be sure that the Father will hear you and grant your request (1 John 5:14). When we walk close to the Lord we know that he hears us. If we confess our sins he hears us but if we cherish sin in our hearts he will not hear (Psalm 66:18).

Jesus knew the will of God, he knew the power of God, and he knew that God desired all the praise and the glory. With this assurance he cried out with a loud voice Lazarus come out! Keep these things in mind as you pray and you can have complete confidence that God hears your prayer. *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:16).

Lazarus emerged from the tomb still bound hand and foot. He must have shuffled along somehow until they loosed him and let him go. The binding would not have been tight – no one expected him to be going anywhere! By the power of God he was raised to life, signalling the defeat of death through Jesus Christ who is the resurrection and the life. To God be all glory, honour and praise.

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