

::R3529 : page 91::

“LAZARUS, COME FORTH.”

—JOHN 11:32-45.—APRIL 9.—

Golden Text:—“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life.”—John 11:25.

IT has been supposed by some that the rich young ruler who came to Jesus for advice and subsequently went away very sorrowful was his friend Lazarus, who, with his sisters Martha and Mary, resided at Bethany, near Jerusalem, and at whose home our Lord was frequently entertained—a welcome guest. Lazarus was taken sick suddenly, probably with one of the fevers common to that part of the country, similar to the one from which our Lord recovered Peter’s wife’s mother. The illness developed very rapidly, and about the time the messenger from Bethany reached the Lord beyond Jordan, a distance of only about thirty miles, Lazarus had died. Even then our Lord made no haste to reach Bethany, but on the contrary tarried two days. According to his own statement, this matter of Lazarus’ death was a part of the divine program, as was also his subsequent awakening from the tomb.

The message sent to Jesus was, “He whom thou lovest is sick.” It was not a prayer that he should come to his relief nor that he would exercise power for his recovery; it was merely a statement of the facts, submitting the whole matter to the Lord. This message alone

::R3529 : page 92::

tells us of a deep work of grace in the hearts of the family of Bethany—that their intercourse with the Lord had been profitable, that they had learned of him. We commend the words of their message to all spiritual Israelites as the proper form for bringing before the Lord’s attention our various burdens and troubles. We are not wise enough to direct the Lord as to what should be done in respect to our affairs. If we have committed our all to him, a proper faith bids us trust him, bids us rely upon the divine wisdom and love and power, which promises to make all things work together for good to us—better than we could ask for. It was quite sufficient to say, “*He whom thou lovest is sick.*”

Let the Lord do as seems best to him. And so it is quite sufficient in respect to our dear ones who

are sick, to comfort our hearts by going to the Lord in prayer and making mention of the facts, although we are sure that he knows them. Our burdens should be left at the Lord's feet and our faith should firmly trust him, come what may, and accept the results as of divine providence—meantime, of course, doing all that we know how to do reasonably and properly in the aid of the ailing ones or to rectify the troubles, just as we may be sure that the sorrowing sisters, while sending this message to the Lord, neglected not to do everything in their power for the relief of their brother from his illness, for the assuaging of his pain.

It speaks volumes for the character of Lazarus as a man that he had the love of the Lord Jesus. We remember that in the record concerning the rich young ruler it is written that after he had related to the Lord that he had at least outwardly kept all the commandments from his youth, Jesus beholding him, loved him—even though he was not in the condition of heart to make a full consecration and thus to become a true disciple. So we are bound to love all in whom we see the beauties of a noble character, whether they be of the consecrated ones or not—but our love and esteem for them of course increases as we see them recognizing their "reasonable service" and presenting their bodies living sacrifices to him who redeemed us.

Let us all more and more cultivate such elements of character as will make us lovely and lovable in the estimation not only of the brotherhood, who overlook our imperfections and cover them with the robe of Christ's righteousness, but also in the estimation of the world, that they may behold our good characters and glorify our Father in heaven on our behalf. It has been inferred that later on Lazarus did become a fully consecrated follower of the Lord.

"OUR FRIEND LAZARUS SLEEPETH."

Although the messenger brought word that Lazarus was sick, our Lord reported the matter to his disciples according to the facts of the case, for Lazarus had already died. He said, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." The disciples did not at first catch the import of these words, and thought that he referred to the taking of rest in sleep; and then, coming down to their comprehension, Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead." Here we have the two standpoints of viewing death: actually, "plainly," death is the complete cessation or discontinuance of life, of being, and this discontinuance would have been eternal death, eternal non-existence for the whole human family, had it not been for the divine favor which provided the ransom-price for Adam, and incidentally for all of his race, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In view of this purpose on God's part to ultimately call forth the dead from the tomb, he uniformly mentions the subject of death to his people as a sleep—a cessation of consciousness, which, however, would not be eternal but from which they would recover consciousness and being in the

glorious resurrection morning which the Father had purposed in himself from the beginning. As many as exercised full faith and confidence in the resuscitation promised, spoke from the Lord's standpoint, and hence throughout the Scriptures we find death repeatedly mentioned as a sleep—Abraham slept with his fathers, so did all the prophets and kings of Israel, that nation having much advantage every way over other nations in that the Lord had revealed to them through the covenant promises and prophecies that, although weeping endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning.

Tarrying two days, in order that the miracle might be more pronounced, our Lord and the apostles spent portions of two more days in reaching Bethany. Martha learning of his coming, went down the road to meet him in advance. While greeting him, the burden of her salutation indicated a measure of disappointment. She was still sorrowing for the loss of her brother, and her heart was pained additionally with the thought that the Lord might have prevented this calamity, yet had not done so. She said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother would not have died." How apt we all are, while laboring under the weight of sorrow, disappointment and trial, to look to the Lord and wonder why his omnipotent power does not intervene on our behalf to save us from some of the ordinary experiences common to the world,—feeling that because we are his special friends we should have had special consideration.

"BE NOT FAITHLESS, BUT BELIEVE."

Let us learn a lesson on this point from the experience of Martha and Mary. Let us learn to trust the Lord even where we cannot trace his providences in all of our affairs. Let us remember the love divine which already has done so much for us, redeeming us and inducting us into the divine favor, and providing for us exceeding great and precious promises respecting the things unseen as yet. "Only believe," was the keynote of our Lord's reply to Martha. And so to each of us in the many experiences which affect our interests, we must learn the lesson of faith, confidence in the Lord's wisdom, love and power. The lesson eventually learned by Martha and Mary more than compensated them for all their tribulation, and so it will be with us if we will allow our faith to firmly trust him. In the end we shall be stronger in our faith, closer to the Lord, and full of appreciation of his favors.

In answer to Martha's expression of confidence in

::R3529 : page 93::

our Lord's power to have preserved her brother from the tomb, our Lord suggested the great consolation he had to offer, not only to the sorrowing sisters, but to the whole world of mankind, namely, that the divine power within him was not only such as could keep the sick from dying and

heal them, but a power of resurrection—a power to bring forth from the tomb and, more than that, a power to raise up out of all the imperfections of the fallen condition, up, up, up, to the original perfection, the fullness of life enjoyed before the curse of death came upon our race.

All this is in the words, "I am the resurrection and the life," the Golden Text of our lesson. These are the great lessons for all of the Lord's people to learn: (1) That death is a just penalty because of imperfection, (2) that God has had mercy upon us as a race, and has provided a ransom; (3) that the Ransomer is the divinely appointed and commissioned and empowered one who, by and by, shall, in God's due time, bid all in the tomb come forth, and he will, then, additionally grant an opportunity to all to escape entirely from all the weaknesses and blemishes of the fall, and eventually, if they will obey him, secure the perfection of life which he purposed for all at the sacrifice of his own life.

As faith is able to recognize Jesus as the Redeemer whose sacrifice is sufficient for the satisfaction of Justice—as faith discerns that this ransom-sacrifice was made to the intent that the blessing of the Lord might reach every individual of our race,—as faith is able to look forward to the second coming of this Redeemer as the Life-Giver to his people, in that proportion faith is able to rejoice and to permit even in the presence of sorrow, sighing, tears and dying, the looking forward beyond the tomb to the glorious morning of the resurrection. In proportion as faith can lay hold of the precious promises of God's Word, it is able under the most trying conditions to sorrow, not as others who have no hope, but it is able to believe that as Jesus died and rose again as our dear Redeemer, so also all who sleep in Jesus, the world of mankind, will God bring from the dead through or by him.—1 Thess. 4:14.

It has been assumed that there was a special heart-fellowship between our Lord and Mary, and it is in full harmony with this thought that we find the latter remaining at home until she received the message that the Lord had inquired for her. Our lesson opens with her response: she came to the Lord and fell at his feet, her

::R3530 : page 93::

burdened heart giving utterance to the same expression that Martha had used, "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother would not have died." If the words contained a measure of chiding or suggestion of wounded hopes, it was a very delicate one.

MARY, WHO "CHOSE THAT GOOD PART."

Our Lord gave no suggestions of the kind usually offered in consolation to the mourner in our day. He said not, Thy brother is much better off than he was before; he is in heaven amongst the holy

angels, etc. Nothing of the kind. Why? Because this would not have been the truth, and our Lord's message must be strictly true, and if error had even comforted more than truth he dare not tell the untruth. And so it is with all who are his followers—they must tell the good tidings of Jesus and the resurrection, and must do nothing to corroborate the false theories that have been received from heathendom to the effect that the dead are not dead, that they are not asleep—to the effect that at the moment of dying they are more awake, more alive and more intelligent than ever they were before. No! Those who are of the Truth must speak the truth and nothing else; they must tell plainly, "There is no work, nor knowledge, nor device, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest." (Eccl. 9:10.) They must point as the only hope of a future life to Jesus, the Redeemer, and to the resurrection power by which he will ultimately deliver from the tomb all whose ransom price he paid in the sacrifice of himself.

FULL OF SYMPATHY, "JESUS WEPT."

Travelers in the East relate that the mourning practices for the dead are most distressing:

"At the very moment of death, a wild, piercing shriek, high and prolonged, a quavering wail announced the fact. This cry is taken up and repeated by the friends of the family near and afar. Every sympathizing woman friend hastens to share the mourning, and announces her approach by the conventional shriek and then adds her voice to the shrieking chorus.

"Oriental wailings before the funeral include a calling of the dead by name: 'O, my father! O, my glory! O, my strength!' as David wailed over his son, 'O, my son Absolom! My son, my son, Absolom!' The mourning continues violently for three days, and then for four more feastings and wailings are the prominent characteristics."

While a certain amount of this emotion was of a perfunctory kind, but, nevertheless, had in it the element of sympathy for the bereaved, it illustrated in a most forceful manner what the Apostle expressed, saying, "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together, waiting."

Such was the scene upon which our Lord entered on reaching the house of mourning on the fourth day. The grief of the sisters broke forth afresh in the Lord's presence as they thought of what might have been if the Lord had been there before their brother died. Likewise we are all more or less inclined to think of what might have been if something had been different—apt to forget that our Lord and Master has full charge of all of our affairs if we are truly, consecratedly his, and that no "if" of chance has to do with the little flock.

When Jesus looked upon the scene of sorrow, we may well suppose that it brought vividly before

his mind the abject sorrow and despair of the groaning creation—"Jesus wept." Indeed we may suppose that, being perfect, all the circumstances and conditions of fallen humanity would be much more weighty and impressive upon the Lord than upon those whose minds were less acute to the situation. We are glad of those words which constitute the shortest verse in all the Bible—"Jesus wept." They tell us as no elaboration could have told of the sympathies of our Master's heart; they tell us that

::R3530 : page 94::

we have an High-Priest who can be touched, who was touched, who is touched still with a feeling of our infirmities, a sympathetic feeling. How unlike all the great ones of this world, whose greatness so often is represented in their coldness, stoicism, and really represents their lovelessness, their lack of sympathy. The Lord presented to us in the Scriptures is the only great and sympathetic Immanuel known to the world—"To us he is precious."

It is worthy notice, however, that the Greek word translated wept, when referring to our Lord, is not the same word used in respect to the weeping of the sorrowing sisters and the Jewish friends. Theirs was the weeping of wailing or emotion, our Lord's was the silent tear of sympathy. The friends of the sisters, who were not yet believers in Jesus' Messiahship, took note of his tears and commented, "Behold how he loved him," and these queried why he had not in some manner interfered to save him from dying.

The tear of sympathy is not to be understood as a sign of weakness. Our Master's tears proved this, and additionally we have his exhortation that we should be moved with a sympathy for others in their sorrows as well as in their joys. He himself has bidden us weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. The cold, stoical hearts which neither weep nor rejoice are not after the fashion of our great Pattern. Let us be more and more like to him and permit our sympathies to have some reasonable measure of expression. Nevertheless let us remember that great wailing and weeping are not appropriate to us, for, as the Apostle says, "We sorrow not as others who have no hope;" our blessed hope, confidence and trust moderate our expressions of both earthly sorrows and joys as well.

"TAKE YE AWAY THE STONE."

The tomb of Lazarus we are told, was a cave, the doorway of which was closed by a large stone which our Lord directed should be removed. In answer to his call Lazarus came forth, still wrapped in the grave clothes or the winding sheet customary at that time. He was in a measure bound, although loosely—what we would call swathed. Our Lord directed that assistance be rendered for the setting of him free. This stupendous miracle, which testified to our Lord Jesus as the special

messenger and representative of the heavenly Father and authorized to use divine power, was not one whit abated but rather intensified by the fact that he permitted those about him to do as much as was in their power in connection with the miracle—first the rolling away of the stone and subsequently the loosing of the winding sheet. Undoubtedly the same power that could restore the dead to life could much more easily roll away the stone and could subsequently have loosed the clothing.



TOMB OF LAZARUS—BETHANY.

One lesson to us in the matter is that we should not call upon nor expect divine interposition in matters which we are competent to control. It is ours to do whatever is in our power for our reasonable protection from sickness and poverty and accident. It is ours also to do everything in our power toward recovery from any of these, but it is also for us to look to and to trust the Lord in connection with all of our experiences, and to realize that he is able to make all things work together for our welfare; that with him our extremity becomes the Lord's opportunity, as his people have often proven by experience. Furthermore, true faith is inculcated and developed along these lines—a faith that is not merely credulity.

“IN ALL THY WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM.”

Before performing the miracle our Lord lifted his eyes to heaven in acknowledgment of the Father's power and that he was acting as the Father's agent and representative. What a manifestation we have in this of true humility. It was so in all of our Lord's utterances; he freely acknowledged that he had come to do the Father's will and not his own; that the Father was above all, and that what he did in the way of wonderful works was but the Father's power. His prayer was in the nature of a conversation as between a Son and his Father, "I know that thou hearest me

always; but for the sake of them which stand by, I said it."

From this we may assume that it would have been entirely consistent on our Lord's part to have proceeded to speak as the Father's representative without offering prayer, but that he offered his petition in acknowledgment of the Father's power for the sake of the hearers that they might know that he did nothing of himself, that he claimed nothing of himself. We, his disciples, have in this a beautiful example of what should be our course on every occasion. In all our ways we should acknowledge the Lord—not only whether we eat or drink or whatsoever we do, to do it to the Lord's glory, and in a manner pleasing to him, but we should be careful to glorify him, to let it be known that we claim nothing of ourselves either as to wisdom or ability in the expounding of the divine plan. Our conduct should be simple, unassuming, devoid of boastfulness, in everything manifesting humility of heart and simplicity.

"Rather be nothing, nothing—
To him let their voices be raised;
He is the fountain of blessing,
Yes, worthy is he to be praised."

As might have been expected, this wonderful miracle, the revival of a man dead more than three days, created no little stir. No wonder that we read that many of the Jews seeing these things believed. It would be wonderful indeed that they could disbelieve under such conditions. We remember, too, that subsequently the Jews sought the more to take the life of Jesus because of the fame of this miracle. Verily, the truth of God is either a savor of life unto life or of death unto death.

::R3531 : page 95::

All we know of divine power and goodness either affects us favorably or unfavorably, to draw us nearer to the Lord or to separate us the more from him if we are not at heart disposed for righteousness but are controlled by envious or wicked motives.

"ALL THAT ARE IN THEIR GRAVES SHALL COME FORTH."

Lazarus was not resurrected—he was merely awakened from the sleep of death—resurrection would signify the complete raising up out of sin and death conditions, to perfection and life conditions. The calling forth of Lazarus, therefore, is a good picture of what may be expected early in the Millennial reign, after the living nations shall have been to some extent enlightened and brought under the influence of the heavenly Kingdom. Then all that are in their graves, order by order, class by class, generation by generation, will come forth as Lazarus did to a measure of

health and a measure of strength, but not to perfection of being. Their cases, however, will be different from his, in that his release from death was merely a temporary one: later on he died again. Those in the Millennial age, on the contrary, who will come forth under the new conditions of that Millennial Kingdom, need never die again, but instead, by hearing the voice of the Son of Man, by obeying the same, going onward step by step, they shall emerge gradually from all the weight of the curse, from all the weaknesses and imperfections of the present dying condition, to the full life and perfection and joy of the life-eternal condition, at the close of the Millennial age.

Theirs will be the resurrection by judgments, by disciplines, by corrections in righteousness—by their gradual attainment under the systems of rewards and punishments then in vogue—to all the glorious perfections of human nature, as our Lord declared, "Though dead, yet shall they live." This will include not only the dead in the tombs, but also the other dead who buried their dead—those who are now nine-tenths dead and under sentence of death, but who, contrasting themselves with those in the tomb, speak of themselves as alive. Then, whosoever living shall be obedient to the Lord at heart shall never die, but will be granted an entrance to the eternal conditions beyond the Millennial age, approved by the Father as true sheep.—Matt. 25:34.

LAZARUS NOT IN HEAVEN

It would be preposterous to suppose that Lazarus was in heaven for four days and that the Lord in mercy and compassion called him away from blessed scenes there. The tears of Jesus and his failure to offer any such explanation of death, no less than his awaking of his friend Lazarus as a mark of his sympathy and love, all forbid the thought that Lazarus had been in heaven. Besides this, we have the Lord's positive declaration that "no man has ascended up to heaven." (John 3:13.) Again the uniform testimony of Scripture is that death is death, and further our Lord's declaration is that when Lazarus was dead he was asleep. In his sleep of death the four days were but as a moment; his awaking thought was next to the one he had when he fell asleep in death.

"GREATER THINGS THAN THESE SHALL YE DO."

Stupendous as this miracle was, we ourselves see in some respects still greater miracles. Many of the Lord's people have seen in themselves and in each other great transformations spoken of in Scripture as passing from death unto life. At our recent New York Convention one person in attendance spoke to the Editor after the meeting about consecration, and remarked that for some years she had been an infidel, estranged from the Lord and his book by her acquaintance with some whose conduct in life caused her to lose all faith in Christianity. She explained that the remarkable conversion of her sister-in-law by the Truth had drawn her attention to it. She added, "I never saw so great a change in any human being in my life, nor did I suppose such a change

possible. It led me to believe there was a power in Christianity, and I began to investigate the religious teachings set forth in MILLENNIAL DAWN which had so powerfully affected my sister-in-law. I am convinced of its truth, and am considering the subject of consecration, and trust that you will pray for me."

"So let our lives and tongues express
The glorious Gospel we profess;
So let thy glories in us shine,
That all may know that we are thine."

=====

— March 15, 1905 —



Jeżeli zauważyłeś błąd w pisowni, powiadom nas poprzez zaznaczenie tego fragmentu tekstu i przyciśnięcie *Ctrl+Enter*.