

Lazarus, Come Forth!

*Bible Commentary by Joseph F. Harwood
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In John 11:1-45 we read the account of the death and the resurrection of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. It was Mary who poured costly perfume on the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair (John 12:1-3). The sisters sent word to Jesus saying: "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." (John 11:3). Mary and Martha knew that Jesus had healed many, and they wanted Him to come and heal their brother, too.

When Jesus heard this, He said to His disciples that this sickness would not end in death, but it was for God's glory, that His Son would be glorified through it. The Scripture says that Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, and yet when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He waited two more days before He returned to Judea to see him.

When Jesus announced that He would be going back to Judea, His disciples questioned Him, because the Jews there had recently tried to stone Him (Verse 8). But Jesus responded to them saying, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." (Verses 9-10).

Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12), and His response here should be a lesson to every believer. Just as there are only so many hours of daylight during which a man can work, so we also have been allotted just so much time and opportunity to live on this earth and to do the work that God has assigned for each of us, work which will bear fruit to His glory.

As the passage continues, we learn that Lazarus had died between the time the sisters sent word to Jesus, and the time He went back to see him (John 11:11, 14). When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to see Him, but her sister Mary remained at home.

Beginning in verse 21 we read:
Martha then said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”
Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”
Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”
Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”
She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.” (John 11:21-27)

Clearly here we see from Martha’s answer the response of faith that all those who love Jesus will have. Despite suffering in our lives that we know God could have spared us from, we continue to believe and to know that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of God even He who comes into the world.” (John 11:27. Also consider John 6:66-69.) This steadfastness in the lives of God’s people is the work of God Himself, and not our own. (1 Peter 1:1-5, many others).

Continuing in this passage, we read that Martha went back home and called her sister Mary aside, saying to her: “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” (Verse 28). When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Him. When she reached the place where Jesus was, she also, as Martha had done, said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” (Verse 32).

When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who had followed her also weeping, He was deeply moved, and He wept as well. Jesus then asked where they had laid him. When He had come to the tomb, which was a cave with a stone placed across the entrance, Jesus told them to take away the stone.

At this point Martha was concerned that there would be a stench because Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days, but Jesus reassured her saying that if she believed, she would see the glory of God. After they had taken away the stone, Jesus looked up and prayed to His Father, thanking Him that He heard His prayer and always heard Him. He prayed this prayer for the benefit of those who were present, that they might believe God had sent Him.

Beginning in verse 43 we read: “When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, “*Lazarus, come forth.*” The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a

cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” (Verses 43-44, emphasis added).

Concluding this passage, we see in verse 45 that many of the Jews who had followed Mary to the tomb believed in Jesus, when they saw what He had done. And so we see yet again from the Scriptures the principle of spiritual fruit bearing through the “death” of the grain of wheat, as Jesus taught in John 12:24-26. Lazarus suffered, Mary and Martha suffered, and Jesus also suffered with them when He saw their grief, but as a result of this suffering and what God brought about through it, many of the Jews who were present and witnessed these events believed in Jesus.

The calling forth of Lazarus from the dead is a clear figure or representation of the effectual calling of God that occurs in the life of everyone who comes to faith in Christ. This is the same effectual calling of God that Jesus spoke about in John 6:44 when He taught that no one *could* come, no one is *able* to come to Him, unless the Father who sent Him draws them, or calls them to faith in His Son. And in this same verse, Jesus revealed that all those who are drawn to Him by the Father *will* be raised up on the last day.

As we are considering Jesus’ words in John 6:44, we should also consider John 6:37, where He revealed that all those whom the Father has given to Him (the elect) *will* come to Him. These elect individuals are those who have been appointed to eternal life (Acts 13:48), and they will all be called by God to faith in His Son, in God’s time.

Paul taught that we were *dead* in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1), but God, because of the great love and mercy that He showed to us, “even when we were *dead in our transgressions*, made us alive together with Christ.” (Ephesians 2:5, emphasis added). Paul then taught: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; *and that not of yourselves*, it is the gift of God; *not as a result of works, so that no one may boast*. (Ephesians 2:8-9, emphasis added.)

Just as Lazarus was most certainly dead and unable to help himself in any way whatsoever, so also unregenerate man is dead in his trespasses and sins, and completely unable to help this condition in any way whatsoever, unless and until God calls him to faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. At this point, he has been made alive together with Christ, just as was the case with Saul of Tarsus when he was called to faith in Christ on the Damascus Road, even while he was clearly dead in

his trespasses and sins, and “still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1).