

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>The Miracles of Jesus</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Number:</b>	<b>5</b>		Gary L.W. Johnson
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### THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

All we have to do to be bereaved in this world is to live long enough, and all we have to do to die is to be born. No one argues these points; they are plainly self-evident. Try as we might, we cannot prevent death from eventually invading our circle of family and friends. Yet grief and pain always seem to catch us by surprise. Funerals, burials, cemeteries<sup>1</sup> – these are unpleasant terms that are associated with the terrible picture of death. Death is no accident. “Death,” writes D. A. Carson, “must be seen, not as the supreme instance of a cosmic lack of fairness, but as God’s well-considered sentence against our sin.”<sup>2</sup> We cannot read our Bibles without coming face to face with this fact (cf. Genesis 2:17; Psalm 90:3-11; Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23). To many people this is most disturbing. In Eugene O’Neill’s play, *All God’s Chillun Got Wings*, there is a line that has been used repeatedly ever since. One of the characters asks another, *Will God forgive me?* The answer comes back, *Maybe He can forgive what you’ve done to me; and maybe He can forgive what I’ve done to you, --* and here is the famous line – *but I don’t see how He’s going to forgive – Himself.* In the best-selling book by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen To Good People*, he counsels bereaved people to forgive God once they discover that God is not perfect and is unable to prevent bad things from happening in the world.<sup>3</sup> There is a serious failure here to see humanity’s lostness. Death is the result of sin – our sin. To point the accusing finger at God, as if He were either unfair or impotent in the face of death, is the height of folly. *Our rage is better directed at the ugliness of death, the wretchedness of sin, our sense of betrayal and self-betrayal.*<sup>4</sup> In the eleventh chapter of John’s Gospel, we see the Lord Jesus dealing with death and bereavement, and we see Him addressing them as only the Son of God could.

- I. ***THE CRISIS AND THE URGENT APPEAL (11:1-3).*** Martha and Mary seek the help of the only One who could help. Their brother is at death’s door. The tense of the verb “is sick” (*ēn asthenōn*) is a periphrastic imperfect, which denotes a protracted illness. He was continually losing strength. Note how they identify their brother, “the one you love.”
- II. ***THE RESPONSE OF JESUS (11:4-16).*** He purposely delayed. This was not done because He was indifferent to the requests of the family. These people were His dear friends (v. 5). Why did He delay? The text tells us that He waited because this would further the glory of God (v. 4). We should also note that Jesus is moved solely by His determination to do the will of His Father. “As on the occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles (7:3-10) Jesus went up to Jerusalem as and when He Himself determined, not at the dictates of others. At the marriage in Cana (2:1ff) Jesus had been urged by His mother to take action. In all three cases the urge to action came from those near or dear, in all three their request was refused, in all three Jesus in the end did what was suggested, but in all three only after it had been made clear that what He did he did in God’s time, and according to God’s will.”<sup>5</sup>
- III. ***THE ANGUISH OF MARTHA AND MARY (11:17-32).*** Both sisters are grief-stricken and both substantially use the same language of bitter disappointment with Jesus (v. 21, v. 32).

Martha displays her aggressive personality by going to meet Jesus, while Mary remains in the house lost in sorrow. “Let us settle it in our minds,” wrote J. C. Ryle, “that saints on earth are not perfect angels, but only converted sinners. They are sinners renewed, changed, sanctified, no doubt; but they are yet sinners, and will be till they die. Like Martha and Mary, their faith is often entangled with much unbelief, and their grace compassed round with much infirmity.”<sup>6</sup>

IV. **THE RESPONSE OF JESUS (11:23-44).** The scene that Jesus stepped into was full of despair. All hope had been buried with Lazarus. They knew Jesus had raised two others from the dead (the daughter of Jairus, Matthew 9:18-26, and the widow of Nain’s son, Luke 7:11-17), but they had not been entombed.

A. **Jesus with Martha.** Notice how the Lord elicits from Martha her understanding of His person and how He corrects these feeble and inadequate notions. “He reasons with Martha, draws out her faith from a vague, blind trust to a distinct and conscious confession.”<sup>7</sup> He presses her with questions that force her to recognize that He is the resurrection and the life and apart from Him there is no resurrection unto eternal life.

B. **Jesus with Mary.** Remember that it was Mary that sat at the Lord’s feet and received His commendation (Luke 10:41ff.).<sup>8</sup> Now she falls at His feet drenching the ground with her tears of grief. The word that is used of her weeping (*klaiousan*) refers to loud, almost uncontrollable wailing.

V. **JESUS AT THE TOMB.** We are confronted here with Jesus’ own emotional expression. It is easy to misread this passage, especially because our English Bibles fail to adequately capture the full meaning of what is described in John’s language.

A. **Jesus Outraged.** “When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled” (NIV). This is a woefully inadequate translation. It conveys something other than what John wrote. The word translated “deeply moved in spirit,” as D. A. Carson has noted, is “without linguistic justification.”<sup>9</sup> The word *embrimaomai* was used in other Greek sources to refer to the snorting of horses. When applied to humans, it means to be angry, outraged with strong emotional indignation. It occurs here and again in 11:38. In both cases, the word refers to anger, and not to sorrow. What made Jesus so angry? I submit that Jesus is angry at two things:

1. He is angry at grief that degenerates into despair and hopelessness. How else could the Son of God respond to unbelief?
2. He is angry as well at the devastation that sin has wrought. Sin brings misery. It wreaks so much havoc and generates so much sorrow.

B. **Jesus Wept.** The shortest verse in the Bible, and one of the most profound. The verb translated “wept” is not the same as that used of Mary and the Jews. It is *dakryō*, to shed tears, usually as a lament. Why did Jesus weep? He certainly wasn’t weeping for Lazarus. Again it is to be attributed to the same thing that caused His anger – unbelief, sin, and death. “The spectacle of the distress of Mary and her companions enraged Jesus because it brought poignantly home to his consciousness the evil of death. . . . It is death that is the object of his wrath, and behind death him who has the power of death, and whom he has come into the world to destroy. Tears of sympathy may fill his eyes, but this is incidental. His soul is held by rage: and he advances to the tomb, in Calvin’s words . . . *as a champion who prepares for conflict.*”<sup>10</sup>

VI. **THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS (11:38-44).** Jesus has declared Himself to be the resurrection and the life and has issued a challenge to Martha and Mary to believe in Him. The moment of truth has come.

- A. **The Prayer of Jesus.** It was remarkable, as Tenney has noted, “for He offered thanks before seeing any results, just as He asked Martha to act in anticipation of what He would accomplish.”<sup>11</sup> As J. C. Ryle has noted, this is really not a prayer, but praise.<sup>12</sup>
- B. **The Command of Jesus.** Jesus speaks like no other (cf. John 7:46). He speaks with absolute authority and here the Lord of Lords shouts to death His sovereign command.

**CONCLUSION:** Do you see the sufferings of Christ in this passage? Do you see Him groaning and deeply troubled by what made others weep and wail? “Nothing could so much afflict the Savior of men,” wrote old Bishop Hall, “as the sins of men . . . No injury goes so deep as our spiritual provocations of our God.”<sup>13</sup> See how His emotions bring out the perfections of the incarnate Son! He did not raise Lazarus until He had entered in spirit into the awful solemnity of death. “Mark 8:12 intimates that the miracles which he performed cost Him something. Plainer still is the testimony of Matt 8:17: *himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses* – He felt the burden of sickness before He removed it.”<sup>14</sup> Christ has by His death abolished death and brought life and immortality to light (2 Timothy 1:10). Death no more has any dominion over Him (Romans 6:9). He has the keys of death and of Hades (Revelation 1:18), and though death is the last enemy to be completely destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26), yet the time will certainly come when death will be no more (Revelation 21:4). It is because of Christ Jesus’ victory at the cross that death is swallowed up in victory – “O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? Christ Jesus has conquered, not as the Pale Galilean as depicted in the poem by A. C. Swinburne,<sup>15</sup> but as the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:4).

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Actually our English word “cemetery” is derived from the Latin *cemētērium*, which in turn is traceable to the Greek *koimētērion*, a sleeping place. Cemetery was the word early Christians used for a burial place.

<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering & Evil* (Baker, 1990), p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> H. S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen To Good People* (Avon Books, 1981), p. 148.

<sup>4</sup> Carson, op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1979), p. 540.

<sup>6</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts On the Gospels III* (rpt. Zondervan, 1947), p. 78.

<sup>7</sup> John Laidlaw, *The Miracles of Our Lord* (rpt. Baker, 1956), p. 357.

<sup>8</sup> It is significant to note that unlike the Rabbis who refused to instruct women, Jesus had a number of female disciples. Cf. Morris, op. cit., p. 553.

<sup>9</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1991), p. 415. He adds, “It is lexically inexcusable to reduce this emotional upset to the effects of empathy, grief, pain, or the like.”

<sup>10</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (rpt. Presbyterian & Reformed, 1950), p. 116.

<sup>11</sup> M. C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Eerdmans, 1948), p. 176.

<sup>12</sup> J. C. Ryle, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> *Bishop Hall’s Contemplations III* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), p. 415.

<sup>14</sup> A. W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John II* (Bible Truth Depot, 1945), p. 197.

<sup>15</sup> Swinburne was a 19<sup>th</sup> century poet who painted a cruel caricature of the effects of Christianity upon the world. He sought to sum them up in these lines:

*Thou hast conquered, thou Pale Galilean,  
And the world has grown grey with thy breath;  
We have tasted of things Lethean,  
And drunk of the fullness of death.*

This is a monstrous attempt to portray Jesus as some cold Stoic who was lacking an emotional life, cf. the excellent discussion by Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Are Christians Human? An Exploration of True Spirituality* (Cantilever Books, 1988).

