

“I Am The Resurrection And The Life”

The account of the raising of Lazarus is the climactic sign in the gospel of John. Edersheim states, “We have here the fullest evidence alike of His Divinity and Humanity; as regards those who witnessed it, the highest manifestation of faith and of unbelief.” A number of scholars isolate seven of the miracles of Jesus in John’s gospel: (1) The turning of water into wine (2:1-11); (2) the healing of the nobleman’s son (4:43-54); (3) the healing of the impotent man (5:1-15); (4) the feeding of the multitude (6:1-14); (5) the walking on the water (6:16-21); (6) the cure of the blind man (9:1-41); and, (7) the raising of Lazarus (11:1-45).

Each of the seven “signs” of Jesus before His death in the gospel of John illustrate some particular aspect of His divine authority, but the one in John 11 exemplifies His power over the last and most irresistible enemy -- death. They are called “signs” (John 20:30) because they point to something beyond themselves; i.e., the power and ability of Christ. In most cases, these signs were followed by a confession of belief on the part of many of the witnesses (2:11; 4:53; 6:66, 69; 9:38; 11:45). The resurrection is not placed in the above list because it did not actually take place in public sight and was performed on Jesus Himself. The draught of fishes (21:2-11), the only miracle recorded after His resurrection, is not considered in the above list because it occurs in John’s epilogue, which is not a part of the main body of his gospel.

The belief in the resurrection and eternal life was not introduced by Jesus. It was expressed by men in the Old Testament (Job 14:12-15; 19:25-27; Psalm 16:9-10; 17:15; 21:4; 49:15; 121:8; 133:3; Isaiah 25:8; 26:19; Daniel 12:2-3, 13; Hosea 13:14). We also have clear evidence from the scriptures that the issue was debated by the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 22:23-32; Acts 23:6, 8; 24:14-15; 26:6-8). William James said, “The best use of life is to spend it for something that outlasts life.” With this noble saying in mind, we will examine this final miracle recorded in John 11:1-45.

Historical Background

Bethany was a small village about two miles from Jerusalem. When Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha became sick, Jesus said, “*This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby*” (vs. 4). The time between Lazarus’s death and Jesus’ arrival at Bethany was four days. Two full days had intervened between the arrival of the messengers and Jesus’ departure for Bethany (vs. 6). The trip to Beth-

any would have taken at least a day, since Bethany was more than twenty miles distant from Jesus' "place" in Perea (10:40-42). Therefore, the death of Lazarus must have occurred not long after Jesus was first contacted concerning his illness. McGarvey states, "He delayed that he might discipline and perfect the faith of the sisters and the disciples. He withheld his blessing that he might enlarge it."

As Jesus approached Bethany, Martha came to Him and said, "*Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee*" (vss. 21-22). Although some attribute this statement to bold faith, her response to Jesus in vs. 39 shows that this is more a nebulous hope than a settled conviction.

The statement that Jesus made in response to her, "*I am the resurrection and the life,*" is not redundant. Both of these claims are followed by subsequent statements, i.e., "*I am the resurrection ... he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live*" and "*I am the life ... whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*" These parallel statements are remarkable because the second clause reinforces the first. In what is surely one of His most majestic utterances, Jesus said that He embodied the power to bring the dead to life.

"I Am The Resurrection"

Jesus was proven to be the Son of God by His resurrection (Romans 1:4). But when He stated, "*I am the resurrection,*" He meant that He had the power to raise the dead. But His statement went further, for He truly is the author or the cause of the resurrection. He had said earlier, "*And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day*" (John 6:40).

Without Christ, there would have been no resurrection at the end of time. Therefore, His resurrection is critical to the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3). Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:20, calls Jesus "*the firstfruits of them that sleep.*" He was not the first to rise from the dead. The Lord had even raised others from the dead (Luke 7:11-15; 8:40-56). But He was the only one to rise and never die again! Because of this mind-boggling power, we have assurance of His promise to raise us from the dead (John 5:28-29).

We are "*subject to bondage*" because of sin and death (Hebrews 2:14-15). But Jesus is to sit by the Father's right hand until all enemies are subjected to Him, and the last enemy is death (1 Corinthians 15:25-26). Because we are "*dead in our trespasses and sins*" (Ephesians 2:1-2), we are in desperate

need of His power over death. The Lord said, "*He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.*" Because the death of Christ deprived death of its power, the death of a Christian is not technically death.

"I Am The Life"

Where there is resurrection, there is life. In the prologue of John's gospel, he wrote, "*In him was life; and the life was the light of men*" (1:4). When Jesus stated, "*I am the life,*" He meant that He has the power to bestow eternal life (John 6:33; 10:28; Revelation 1:18). The one who believes in Christ has eternal life that transcends physical death. Faith does not preserve us from temporal death; but when we die, those who believe and obey, in an instant transition, will be restored to life in the resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). As Christ is the resurrection of the dead, so is He the life of the living -- absolute life, having life in Himself, for it has been given to Him by the Father (John 5:26).

Barclay writes, "Through Jesus Christ we know that we are journeying, not to the sunset, but to the sunrise; we know, as Mary Webb put it, that death is a gate on the sky-line. In the most real sense we are not on our way to death, but on our way to life." Jesus gave us "*abundant life*" (John 10:10) because our lives are full of death and we are powerless to stop it. Because of Christ's death and powerful resurrection, we can pass from "*death unto life*" (1 John 3:14).

"Believest Thou This?"

Perhaps this question was asked because it was time for Martha to test her own faith (cf. John 8:24). Martha's confession, "*Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God,*" follows other wonderful confessions in the Bible including Nathanael's (John 1:49), Peter's (John 6:66-69; Matthew 16:16), the centurion's (Matthew 27:54) Thomas's (John 20:24-29) and the eunuch's (Acts 8:37). Perhaps Martha did not know all which that name, "*Christ, the Son of God,*" involved, but she was ready to believe what it did involve.

Edersheim comments that this must have been a deeply touching scene: the outpouring of Mary's sorrow, the firmness of her faith and the appeal of her tears. The Jews who witnessed it were also moved and wept with her. It is recorded of Jesus that He wept three times, and in every case there is the tragic undertone of man's doom as a result of his sin. The tears of Jesus show His humanity and His deity. He came to show God's love and mercy and to reveal how God cares for us and enters into our suffering (Hebrews 2:9-10; 4:14-16). The greatest difficulty in the problem of suffering is the

fact that God suffers; yet His sorrowful love for His lost children is the crowning glory of God Himself.

But one loud command spoken into the darkness brought Lazarus forth. No one could possibly conceive of a higher power than the power of raising the dead. Barnes wrote, "Raising the dead implies not merely giving life to a dead body, but also the power of entering the spirit world, recalling the departed soul and reuniting it with the body. In the same manner Jesus will raise all the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). This miracle shows that this is possible! If we are faithful, we will be raised on the last day to spend eternity with the Lord of heaven! "*Believest thou this?*"

To believe in Jesus means to accept everything He says as true and obey His words (John 12:44-48; 14:15). When we do this we enter into two new relationships. First, we enter into a new relationship with God (2 Corinthians 5:14-17). We are reconciled to Him because our sins are washed away through baptism (Acts 22:16). Second, we enter into a new relationship with life (Colossians 3:1-11). We turn away from sin and produce the "*fruit of the Spirit*" (Galatians 5:22-23). Life is raised from the death of sin and becomes so rich that it cannot die but must find in death the transition to a higher life!

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