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"I GO THAT I MAY AWAKE HIM"

- JOHN 11:1-57. - APRIL 12 -

Golden Text: – "I am the resurrection and the life."

– V. 25.

TOWARD the conclusion of our Lord's ministry the opposition of the rulers of the Jewish Church became very bitter, causing Jesus to leave Judea for Berea. He remained for some little time near the place where John was preaching at the time of his own baptism. It was while he was there that word was received from Martha and Mary at Bethany, saying, "Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick." From this we know that Lazarus, their younger brother, was a very dear friend of Jesus. The message was brief; it did not urge him to come nor ask a miraculous intervention; it merely stated the fact. [R4160 : page 103] In some respects it was a grand model of a Christian prayer. The Lord's people may always go to him with full confidence in his sympathy and loving interest in all of their affairs, temporal and spiritual. At first they may feel disposed to ask that their own wills be done on earth if not in heaven, but subsequently, if their spirit of consecration and growth in grace continue, they should reach the place where, like Mary and Martha, they would be content to state their troubles to the Lord and wait for him, thankfully accepting as wisest and best whatever he may be pleased to grant.

Then Jesus said, doubtless in the hearing of the messenger that he might report the same, "This sickness is not unto death, but that the Son of God may be glorified thereby." We are not to suppose that our Lord was mistaken, that he expected that Lazarus would not die, rather that the result would not be continuous death, knowing that he would awaken him. When,

two days later, Jesus proposed returning to Bethany in Judea, and the disciples were fearful, our Lord indicated to them that there would be no particular danger. He foreknew all the circumstances and perceived that the miracle he intended to perform would disconcert his enemies long enough to permit of his return to Berea a little later. He explained to them the reason for the visit saying, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep." Later he brought this statement down to their comprehension by saying to them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

There is so much in the view point on every subject. From the standpoint of actual fact, barring the divine purpose of mercy and resuscitation, it would have been proper to speak of Lazarus as being dead in the same sense as we would speak of a brute as being dead. But from the standpoint of faith in God and in the promise made to Abraham, that in his Seed all the families of the earth should be blessed – from this standpoint Lazarus was not dead as a brute beast, but was merely inanimate for a time, awaiting the Lord's due time to call him forth, to re-animate him, to awaken him from the sleep of death. Our Lord stated this on another occasion to the Sadducees, who denied a future life, denied a resurrection, saying, "That the dead are to be raised, Moses showed at the bush, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." (Luke 20:37.) Our Lord's argument on this is that if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were dead in the sense that a brute beast is dead, without hope of an awakening, a resurrection, he would not call himself their God. Our Lord closes up the argument by saying that from God's standpoint all live unto him.

And our standpoint must be the divine standpoint; we must learn to think in harmony with this divine testimony. Hence we have hope, not only for Christians, saints who have died in Christ, but we have also hope for the world of mankind – "asleep

in Jesus." Their condition would indeed be actual death, the same as a brute beast, were it not that the Lord has provided in Jesus for their resuscitation. But since such provision has been made, we are to think of the world of mankind as not being extinct, but merely asleep. All those, therefore, who accept the teaching of the divine Word, "sorrow not as others who have no hope; for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, let us also believe that those who sleep in Jesus [those who are included in the benefit of his sacrifice, those who are redeemed by the precious blood, all the race of Adam] will God bring from the dead by him." (I Thess. 4:13,14.) By him the Church will first be raised up, to be made partakers of his resurrection, the First Resurrection, the Chief Resurrection, sharers of his glory, honor and immortality. By him, then, during the Millennial Age, all the families of the earth shall be awakened, brought forth from sheol, from hades, brought to a knowledge of the truth – yea, and if they will receive the message into good and honest hearts, they will be lifted entirely out of sin and death conditions up to the full perfection of restitution and life everlasting through him. Well, indeed, may all those who trust in Jesus rejoice in him and sorrow not in the presence of death, as do others.

"FRIENDS SORROWING AND JESUS GLAD"

The celebrated Charles Spurgeon, preaching on this subject, took this as the title of his discourse from the text, "I am glad for your sakes I was not there, to the intent that ye may believe; nevertheless let me go unto him." It is well for the Lord's people, when in a time of stress and trouble, sickness, pain and sorrow, to look with faith toward the Lord, remembering that their tears and troubles may be made to them, under the Lord's providence, a great blessing. We have an illustration in this lesson: Martha and Mary, ministering to their sick brother, thought of how the Lord loved him and sent him a message respecting Lazarus' condition, leaving the matter in his

hands, trusting to his wisdom and grace, and yet were allowed to pass into the still darker shadows of the sepulchre. The brother died and was buried. Yea, the Master whom they trusted **[R4161 : page 103]** in as the Messiah had not alleviated the sickness, had not hindered the dying, had even allowed several days to elapse without a message to them, and Jesus, speaking of all this, said, "I am glad." How shall we understand this? The explanation is given further in our Lord's words, "I am glad for your sakes." So with us it may likewise be true that the Lord will be glad to permit our trials and sorrows and tears and difficulties for our sakes, that we may thus receive some important lessons which we could not otherwise so well learn. One of our lessons is that we must trust the Lord where we cannot trace him, that we must remember his promise that "all things shall work together for good to them that love him." In the case under consideration the sickness and death of a brother were part of the all things, and doubtless were inscrutable providences to the two sisters. Nevertheless, these very experiences no doubt helped in the working out of valuable lessons, and no doubt were preparations for closer communion with the Lord and for the eternal things.

The noble devotion of the Lord's apostles is well illustrated in the words of one of them: Thomas, addressing his fellow-disciples, urged that they should not abandon the Master, that if he intended to go to Judea they should go with him – "let us also go, that we may die with him." This was the spirit of courage which the twelve shared when they accompanied the Lord, and it helps to reconcile us to their apparent cowardice on the night of his betrayal, a cowardice which was incited by our Lord's own refusal to accept **[R4161 : page 104]** assistance. It was these men who risked their lives to accompany the unpopular Prophet, as they supposed, to death, and who later forsook him and fled. The lesson to us in this connection is that some of us who feel courageous for the Lord and his cause and ready to die

therefor, need indeed to watch and pray that we maintain this disposition and not succumb in the hour of stress.

THE JEWS WAILED, JESUS WEPT

It was the custom of the time to have a funeral service of mourning for seven days. Apparently Martha and Mary and Lazarus were of a wealthy, influential family and on the occasion of their bereavement many friends came to sympathize with them, to mourn with them. Jesus did not consider it the part of wisdom to go to the home, which he knew would be crowded with mourners, and then go to the tomb, so he remained a little distance from Bethany and sent word. When the word came that Jesus was nearing, Martha went out to meet him; but Mary, bowed with her grief and perhaps disappointed that the Lord's word, "This sickness is not unto death, but unto the glory of God," had seemingly failed, still sat in the house, went not to meet him, as though by her actions she would say, "We hoped much, Lord, down to the very last, but now it is too late; you allowed the favorable opportunity to pass. We are in the midst of our sorrow. How could anything now avail us? Lazarus is dead." Martha's greeting, when she came to the Lord, was, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother would not have died; but I know that even now whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, he will give thee." There was in this remark something of a suggestion of chiding, as though she had said, Why did you not come? but still I have faith in you, I realize that you are the Messiah. Our Lord's reply was,

"THY BROTHER SHALL LIVE AGAIN"

It should be noticed that our Lord did not say, Thy brother is not asleep, thy brother is not dead, but that he pointed her mind to the resurrection. Are we wiser than he? May we, as his disciples, teach anything different or in contradiction to what he said? Martha's answer showed that she understood him well and

that she had the general view of all believing Jews at that time, namely, that there was a hope for the dead, both of the just and of the unjust, in the resurrection, at the last day, at the end of the age when the last great day of the great seven-thousand year week shall be ushered in. Our Lord did not contradict her thought, but wished to lead her gradually to a realization of what he desired to do on this occasion and therefore explained that the resurrection power by which all the dead should be awakened in due time was lodged in himself – "I am the resurrection and the life." Every believer in him, even though he were dead, shall yet live, and whosoever then shall live and still believe in him shall never die. Our Lord inquired of Martha if she believed this view of his power and future work. She replied that she did, that she accepted him as the Messiah, the Son of God foretold to come. Then she went secretly to her sister Mary, saying, "The Master is here and calleth for thee."

Whatever disposition Mary had to resent our Lord's apparent indifference and carelessness of their interest, it all vanished now when she heard that the Master had called for her. She went forth to the place where he was, which evidently was in the direction of the tomb, for the Jews who were mourning with her in the house followed her, saying, "She is probably going to the tomb to weep there." And so when later on our Lord inquired, "Where have you laid him," we are not to take it as an indication that he did not know, but rather that it was his polite manner of saying, Shall we now go to the tomb? Lead the way. Truly he who saw Nathanael under the fig tree not only knew that Lazarus had been dead four days, but also knew where he was buried. He who "needed not that any man tell him what was in man" would surely know of lesser matters more easily discerned.

When Mary saw the Lord all thought of resentment fled; she fell at his feet and embraced them and through her tears

merely said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother would not have died." The occasion was a soul-stirring one – our Lord's beloved friend in tears at his feet, numerous Jews weeping with her, or, according to the Greek original, wailing. What effect did this have upon our Lord? Was he cold, stern, forbidding? No! True to the record, he was "touched with a feeling of our infirmities." (Heb. 4:15.) He was full of sympathy, he fully appreciated the real meaning of death – that it is a curse, an awful curse, which rests upon our race. He said nothing by way of assuring Mary that Lazarus was in heaven, for he spake the truth, declaring on another occasion, "No man hath ascended up to heaven." – John 3:13.

On the contrary, entering deeply into the affliction that is resting upon our race, under which the Apostle says "the whole creation groaneth," our Lord wept. This verse, "Jesus wept," the shortest in the Bible, brings to us a wealth of assurance that our Lord is sympathetic, that he knoweth our frame, that he remembereth that we are dust; and it is one of the best assurances that he appreciates all that he has promised us in the declaration that our trials shall all work together for good to us if we are his and if we are rightly exercised thereby. It is worthy of note here that while the word used in connection with the weeping of the others indicates wailing, it is not so with the Greek word which refers to our Lord's weeping; he shed tears, but lifted not up his voice in grief; he groaned in spirit and was troubled, he heaved sighs, he entered fully into the sorrow of his friends. And is not this a lesson to all of his followers, that they, with propriety also, may weep with those who weep, as well as rejoice with those who rejoice?

The Jews who were with Jesus noted and commented upon his sympathy, saying, "Behold how he loved him," but others criticised him saying, This is the miracle-worker. Could he not have helped his friend if he really loved him?

So there are some to day inclined to criticise the Lord for permitting sickness, sorrow and death and who inquire whether the power of God is lacking or the willingness of God lacking that he does not overthrow, restrain these adverse influences now afflicting the human family. The language of faith is, –

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face."

The tomb was a grave with a stone at its mouth, and Jesus directed that this should be moved. Of [R4161 : page 105] course, the same power that could awaken the dead would have been quite sufficient to roll away the stone also, but it seems to have been a rule with our Lord never to do anything by miraculous power that could as well be done by human agency. We may profitably apply this lesson to all the affairs of life and, in harmony with it, when we come to our Lord with our griefs and troubles and perplexities and ask for his blessing and overruling providences, should not expect any special intervention in matters that are possible to us. Indeed, we doubtless would lose a blessing thereby. Who can doubt that the men who rolled away the stone from the mouth of that sepulchre had a blessing afterward in connection therewith as they thought over the matter or told others that they themselves had rolled away the stone! Who can doubt that it helped to impress the importance of the miracle upon them! Let us, then, do with our might whatever we may be able to do and wait patiently for the Lord in connection with things for which our arm is too short.

"HE HATH BEEN DEAD FOUR DAYS"

It was the same Martha who a little while before had said, Even now I know that whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, he will hear thee, and who now protested against the moving of the

stone from the sepulchre, saying, "Lord by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days." She probably knew that [R4162 : page 105] the Lord had awakened Jairus' daughter and the widow of Nain's son, but those were cases in which the animation had been suspended but a little while. In this case, after putrefaction set in, neither she nor others would expect that any power imaginable could recover the dead. It was with this in view, doubtless, that our Lord said beforehand, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent that you might believe." It was to be a special lesson not only to his dear friends, Martha and Mary, but also to his dear disciples, and more than this, to all those who would believe through his Word. It was a most stupendous miracle!

Before commanding Lazarus to come forth our Lord prayed audibly before his disciples and before the multitude of mourners. Here our Lord gave sanction to public prayer, showing that when he objected to the prayers of the Pharisees on the street corners, it was because the time and place, etc., were unsuitable and because they prayed to be seen and heard of men. But in his own case he was acknowledging the Father that all those who stood by might take knowledge that not by his own power, but by the Father's power, as the Finger of God, he worked these miracles.

"I know that thou hearest me always, but because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." After this brief prayer he cried with a loud voice, or commanded in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth" – not secret mumbling, not incantations, not legerdemain. Quite to the contrary. And this miracle in various particulars evidently foreshadowed our Lord's coming glorious work, when, surrounded by his glorified Church, the message from on high shall be to all that are in their graves, "Come forth." (John 5:28.) Then Lazarus came forth bound hand and foot, wrapped with

linen cloths. We can imagine better than describe the wondrous awe of those who stood by. And it was necessary that Jesus should call them to a realization of their privilege, saying, "Loose him and let him go," for in his burial his jaw had been bound, his limbs wrapped, etc. The miracle was well timed, not only for the benefit of the sorrowing sisters, but also for the benefit of their Jewish friends, many of whom, seeing this miracle, believed on him; and in the interest of the apostles, also, who would be better prepared thereby for the tests which were to come to them a little later in connection with our Lord's crucifixion.

Meantime, some of the witnesses went their way and related matters to the Pharisees, with the result that the latter became all the more determined that our Lord must die – not because he had done evil works, not because they believed him a bad man, but because they were so thoroughly wrapped up in their own plans and purposes in connection with their nation. Their argument was that if Jesus proceeded with his work it would not be long before the masses of the people would be ready to flock to him, with the result that the Roman government, which had given them much liberty in the control of their national and Church affairs, would take matters entirely out of their hands and thus their rebellion and their government would be entirely overthrown. It seemed to them to be an emergency case which called for drastic treatment. Similar, we believe, will be the attitude of ecclesiasticism a little later on in the present harvest time toward the last members of the Body of Christ. What the Sanhedrin there did in determining to oppose Jesus, the federation of churches will probably do in the way of opposing "Present Truth" – after the federation shall have become thoroughly organized and vitalized. (Rev. 13:15.) The plea was that we must do this for the good of the cause. Their mistake was in too much self-confidence, too much self-reliance upon their own theories as to how the Kingdom of heaven was

to be established. The mistake which will be made by the Sanhedrin of our day will be along similar lines. Praying for centuries, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done," they have entirely misconceived the meaning of the words, so that the preludes to the Kingdom will appear to them inharmonious and as causing destruction.

WHERE WAS LAZARUS?

We have our Lord's word for it that Lazarus was not in heaven, for he said, "No man hath ascended up to heaven." Indirectly we have the Apostle Peter's testimony also to the same effect, for, speaking of the Prophet David, he declares, "David has not ascended into the heavens." (Acts 2:34.) Where was Lazarus? What account did he give of himself? Not a word is there written on the subject. He had no account to give of himself; he was nowhere, he was dead. Our Lord lifted his eyes in addressing the Father in heaven, but afterwards, when he spoke to Lazarus, he addressed the tomb, "Lazarus, come forth," and the dead came forth from the tomb. This, as we have seen, is a picture, a demonstration, of the power of the Lord to testify in advance of how he eventually will be the resurrection power to the whole world. And he himself describing that coming exercise of power represented it in the same general tenor, saying, "Marvel not at this: the hour is coming in the which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth" (John 5:28), some to full perfection in the First Resurrection, the remainder to be merely awakened [**R4162 : page 106**] as was Lazarus, but, unlike him, to be then granted an opportunity for *anastasis*, raising up completely out of sin and death conditions to the full perfection of human nature – a resurrection by judgments or disciplines, rewards and stripes.

According to the erroneous view which has become so popular throughout Christendom, Lazarus, who was a special

friend of Jesus and one whom he loved, must have been in heaven – not in either purgatory or hell. But how strange it would be, if after he had been in heaven for several days, Jesus should do him the unfriendly act of calling him back to earth life – and with what haste he must have returned if he laid aside a crown or palm or harp! No! no! All this belongs to the foolish imagination and is thoroughly out of harmony with the precious lesson of our Golden Text – that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. By his death he secured for Adam and his race a right to re-live and the resurrection power is that by which he will bring mankind forth from under the dominion of death. Lazarus lost consciousness in his sickness at the time of his death, and received consciousness again at the moment of his awakening. In this interim of four days he was in death, asleep; as Jesus said, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." He was not awake in any sense of the word; as Jesus testified, "I go that I may awake him," and, as the Scriptures elsewhere declare, "The dead know not anything," "There is neither wisdom, knowledge nor device in sheol [hades, the tomb, the sleep of death], whither thou goest." – Eccl. 9:5,10.

We can fancy the awakening of the whole world, and what a joyful occasion it will be, as one after another they all come forth from the great prison-house of death to be received and welcomed by their friends, and to find the earth enjoying a large measure of restitution blessings and progressing gradually toward the full perfection of Eden, and their friends so far advanced along the way toward perfection and themselves surrounded by the blessings and privileges and opportunities which the Kingdom will afford, with the light of the knowledge of God flooding the whole earth! Oh, how different this will be from what the heathen have been taught and imagined respecting the crossing of the river Styx or their re-incarnation in other forms of animal life! Oh, how different it will be for many who have heard the false doctrine of eternal torment or

purgatorial anguish and who died in terror lest this should be their portion! What thankful hearts toward God they will have! Perhaps Satan's lie may eventually redound to the glory of God, and perhaps this is why the Lord has been silent for so long and has permitted his holy name to be so smirched and slandered and his character so traduced!

"THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE"

There is a still deeper thought connected with our Golden Text which we must not pass by. It is this: We who now believe in the Lord and are thereby justified through faith in his blood, and who have heard the call to glory, honor and immortality and who have accepted the same by a full consecration to the Lord – we are sometimes spoken of as already having a new life, the resurrection life, as already having passed from death into life. This, of course, is a figurative use of the words resurrection and life. Reckonedly, we have left the old nature and received the new nature from the Lord through the begetting of the holy Spirit, and it is this new nature which is to be perfected in the First Resurrection. And since our human natures are reckoned dead from the moment that we are begotten of the Spirit, it is quite reasonable and proper that the Scriptures should speak of our present condition as a resurrected condition; that we have risen out of the old order of life and hope and aim to new conditions; that we have started on the new way to life; that the present experiences are transforming, and that the grand consummation of all this transformation will be the actual change from weakness to power, from the natural body to a spiritual body, from dishonor to glory, when we shall participate actually in the glorious change of the Lord's resurrection.

Let us strive to enter into this rest, this blessing! Faithful is he who has called us to so high a station and privilege, he will also do for us exceedingly, abundantly better than we could ask

or think, according to the riches of his grace. "All things are yours, for ye are Christ's and Christ is God's." (I Cor. 3:21,23.) In the meantime, to us who live this figurative resurrection life, the Apostle's words are applicable, For me to live is for Christ to live, for he is represented by us; we are his ambassadors. Meantime we are also to remember that our resurrection hopes are in him; as it is written, "Your life is hid with Christ in God," and, "when he who is our life shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory."

