

“When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? . . . And When he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.” John 11:33-44

LAZARUS, COME FORTH

by Craig Marlatt

Of all the stories in the gospels, I think that the story of the raising of Lazarus best portrays the combination of both Deity and humanity which was found in our Lord Jesus while He walked upon the earth. Though He was Lord and had full and perfect communion with the Father at all times, yet He was human and could feel the pain and hurt of mankind. Verse 35 says simply, *“Jesus wept”*, yet in verse 43 we find our Saviour commanding with power, *“Lazarus, come forth”*.

There was no contradiction to be found in this dual expression of God. The same onlookers that saw Jesus weep also heard him cry with authority and power, *“Lazarus, come forth”*. What a wonderful Saviour is He who, though He has all authority and power, does not isolate himself from us so that He cannot feel our burdens and pains.

There are at least three outstanding things that appear in this story which, upon close observation, are very revealing concerning the working of God.

1. God Deals in the realm of impossibility- *“Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days”* (verse 39).

Bishop Lightfoot referred to a Jewish tradition concerning death and the body: *“For three days the spirit hovers above the tomb, if perchance it may return to the body. But when it sees the fashion of the countenance changed, it retires and abandons the body.”* In other words it was totally outside of the realm of possibility as far as their religious teachings were concerned. It required a miracle.

2. God wants to use believers personally in his ministry- *“Jesus said, Take ye away the stone”* (verse 39). There can be no doubt that Jesus himself could have commanded the stone to roll back or even disappear and it would have been done, but He was looking for a vehicle of faith through which He could work. He had already demonstrated his power over death with no need to be on location. Now it was time to involve the people so that they could have a faith building experience by which they could believe in him as Messiah and be saved. In verse 42 Jesus said, *“Father, I knew 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”*.

3. God uses other people to help us shed the garments of our old life- *“Jesus saith unto them, loose him, and let him go”* (verse 44). Even though Jesus had successfully called forth Lazarus from the grave He required those standing by to help him to be loosed from the binding clothes of his old dead life.

It takes people to reach people. God is ready to set men free if you and I will be willing to “*take away the stone*”. It took a special kind of friend to remove the stone that day so that Lazarus could come forth into the light. They knew how heavy that stone blockade was and that when they opened the tomb they would be confronted with the stench of a body already four days dead. But they were willing to make that sacrifice if there were any chance of Lazarus being saved. They were obviously people who cared and were not afraid of getting their hands dirty in the process.

All around us there are many people who, like Lazarus, are dead and need to be revived. Though they are not physically dead as he was, they are dead in the spiritual sense and not really prepared to die and go into the presence of God and judgement. And, unlike Lazarus, they are not friends of Jesus. They go through their daily lives some happy, some not, seemingly unaware that one-day they must stand before the Lord and give an account of their lives. Some of them may, at one time or another, have made a commitment to Christ yet after their initial step no one came forward to help them unwind the ‘graveclothes’ of their old life. They needed someone to help them to learn to walk in the newness of life, but there were no takers.

That day of Lazarus’ deliverance there were many that stood around watching to see what would happen. They were not necessarily inclined to follow Jesus but they were interested in seeing something different. Undoubtedly there were some Saducees or Pharisees there who were looking for a way to catch Jesus off guard or in an error, or to judge Him according to their traditions. There are always religious people who love to witness the miraculous, but they themselves are not willing to get involved in the process to help roll away the stone, or to help loose the captives from their old bindings.

Many people are bound to old habits and lifestyles from which they have problems breaking free. They want to serve God but seem to lack the wherewithal to do so. Because of this they soon fall back into bondage to sin, saying, “what’s the use”, or, “I tried, but it just didn’t work”. It is the job of the Church not only to “*Preach the gospel to every creature*”, but also “*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*” (Matthew 28:20). These were the final instructions that our Lord gave to those standing by before He ascended into heaven.

As active Christians and Christian leaders this is the burden that we need. A mother who conceives a child in her womb must go through months of travail and labor before her child is born into the world. So also the Church must not merely impregnate the world with the seed of the gospel but we must do what we can in order to “*bring forth fruit*”. Our travail and labor is often not unlike that of an expectant mother. We must bear both the joy and the pain of the growing kicking child if we are ever to bring forth sons and daughters into the kingdom of God.

There are many like Lazarus who have been called forth by Jesus but it is the Church who must step forward to roll away the stone, loose the graveclothes, and set them free. Only then can the promise of God, as spoken through the Prophet Isaiah, become a reality: “*Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; and the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. The shalt thou call and the Lord shall answer; and He shall say, Here I am*” (Isaiah 58:9).