

Power to Raise the Dead

John 11:1-44

The things that seem like unexplainable tragedies to us will sooner or later become explicable, and will bring glory to God. The Lord Jesus Christ had developed a close relationship with Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, a family living in the village of Bethany.

Word came to the Lord that Lazarus was ill. His reaction is interesting and sheds much light on the purposes of God in what may seem to us to be small things happening in small, and perhaps insignificant places. “But when Jesus heard it he said, this illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” (11:4)

Lazarus would “die” in the sense that his heart would no longer beat and his lungs would no longer fill with air. But he would not see decay. The Lord’s ways are not our ways. They certainly are not the ways of this world. When the rulers of this world decide to do things they seek the widest forum available. But when the Lord of heaven and earth decides to bring glory to himself, he often does so through ordinary people in out of the way places. So it was in this case, and yet glorification would come to the Son of God through it.

Jesus waited two days and then told his disciples that it was time to return to Judea. They protested, reminding him that it had not been long since the Jews of Judea had sought to stone him. But fear of persecution should never keep us from doing the will of God. The Lord Jesus Christ had light within that caused him to walk without fear into the very stronghold of Satan.

And so, after telling his disciples that Lazarus had fallen “asleep” the Lord started out for the south. The disciples went with him thinking that the time had come to die, for all of them. When they arrived they found that Lazarus had already been in the grave for four days. Martha, knowing the miraculous power of Jesus told him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (11:21) And then she added these words of great faith, “But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” (11:22) The Lord assured her that her brother would rise again. She confessed her faith in the future resurrection of the dead at the last day.

I once lived near Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington, the first president of the United States. He and his wife (who was named Martha) are buried not far behind the house overlooking the Potomac river. Inscribed on Washington’s tomb are the words of our Lord, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” Do you believe this?” (11:25-26)

Standing by the tomb I would watch as the tourists passed by. I wondered how many of them thought that the words were those of Washington. I wondered how many of them had no idea who first spoke those words.

Christ Jesus has the power that is needed over physical death. But, more than that, he has the power that is needed to conquer spiritual death for all his people. The Lord went to the tomb of Lazarus and told them to remove the stone. This normally would have led to the revelation of a foul stench coming from the grave. But Jesus prayed for the intervention of the Father, and then he called on the dead man to come out. Hands and feet bound with the burial linen, Lazarus emerged from the tomb!

So it is that when the Lord speaks the word calling us to arise from spiritual death and calling us to be set free from the bondage of the world, flesh, and devil, we emerge into the light of life. This is no less a miracle than that which happened when Lazarus arose from the grave.

Do you believe in the future resurrection of the dead? Do you have a confidence that you will be raised to life? All of the dead will be raised, but some will be raised to eternal life and others to everlasting ruin, suffering, and decay. It is Christ who has the power to raise us to life. We much put our faith, our confidence in him alone. And, if we are spiritually raised to life, the day will come when our bodies will arise from the grave, no longer to decay but fit for eternal loving fellowship with Lord.

by Joe Nesom