

JESUS CHRIST: THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

11 Now a certain man [named] Lazarus was sick; he was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. **2**This Mary, whose brother Lazarus was sick, was the same woman who had anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair. **3**So the sisters sent [word] to [Jesus], saying, Lord, the one whom you love is sick. **4**But when Jesus heard this, he said, This sickness is not for death, but for the sake of the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it. **5**Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. **6**Yet when he heard that [Lazarus] was sick, he stayed at that time in the place where he was for two more days. **7**Then he said to the disciples, Let us go back to Judea. **8**The disciples replied, Rabbi, just recently the Jews were trying to stone you; and yet you are going back there? **9**Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours of daylight? If a man walks during the daytime he will not stumble, because he sees by the light of this world. **10**But if a man walks at night he will stumble, because he does not have the light in himself. **11**After he had said this, he went on to tell them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going so that I may wake him out of sleep. **12**The disciples replied, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will get better. **13**Now Jesus had been speaking about his death; but they thought he meant taking rest in sleep. **14**Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus is dead. **15**And for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe; but [now] let us go to him. **16**Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, so that we may die with him.

17Upon his arrival, [Jesus] found that [Lazarus] had already been in the tomb for four days. **18**Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, **19**and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them [in the loss] of their brother. **20**When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him; but Mary stayed at home. **21**Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. **22**But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask of him. **23**Jesus said to her, Your brother shall rise again. **24**Martha replied, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. **25**Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection, and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; **26**and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? **27**She said to him, Yes, Lord; I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into the world. **28**After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside, telling her, The Teacher is here and he is asking for you. **29**When Mary heard this, she quickly got up and went to him. **30**(Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.) **31**When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, consoling her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. **32**When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

33When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her [also] weeping, he groaned in his spirit and was troubled. **34**He asked, Where have you laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see. **35**Jesus wept. **36**Then the Jews said, See how [much] he loved him! **37**But some of them said, Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have prevented the death of this man? **38**Jesus, again groaning within himself, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, with a stone laid against [the entrance].

³⁹Jesus said, Remove the stone. Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to him, Lord, by this time the body stinks, for he has been dead for four days. ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? ⁴¹So they removed the stone. Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me; but I said it for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me. ⁴³After having said this, [Jesus] cried out in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out. ⁴⁴The one who was dead came out, wrapped hand and foot in grave clothes; and there was a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, Unwrap him, and let him go. (Jn. 11:1-44)

Introduction

Fog has followed the vacationers for days, enveloping their little rented Opel as they make their way along the narrow, winding roads of southern Germany's Bodensee. The mist is thick and depressing, and they find it hard to muster much enthusiasm for the trip to Bavaria. They ride for several hours in a gray, monotonous fog; the only realization that they are beginning to climb into the Bavarian mountains is the whine of the engine that causes them to shift into lower gear.

As they continue to climb they are suddenly flooded with the warm rays of the golden sun; they have emerged out of the fog and now find themselves in the crystal clear mountain top environment. They find themselves in an ancient hilltop village with gray cobblestone streets and white church spires that tower into the blue sky—there is not a trace of fog. They have entered into sunshine, and worship. It is Sunday, and through the streets come the worshipers: the clergy in flowing white robes, followed by the choir in purple and gold, and then come the villagers marching to the toll of the bells. The moment—and the experience—is glorious and sacred (*POWER*, 7/22/90, p.8.)

What these summer vacationers experienced in their journey to the top of the Bavarian Alps, their journey through thick, depressing fog into brilliant sunshine and worship, may well depict the Christian's pilgrimage. We must appreciate the fact that Christ leads His people **through** tribulation into resurrection life.

As we enter the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of John, we are met with the report of sickness and death—the sickness and death of one very dear to Jesus. As we continue in this chapter of Scripture we find the initial actions of Jesus to be confusing and contrary to all expectation. As we progress still further in the chapter, we find ourselves surrounded by grief (Mary and the Jews wailing, Jesus Himself weeping) and despair (vs. 21) and death. But it is in this very situation that the Lord Jesus Christ makes His greatest claim—*"I am the Resurrection and the Life"*—and performs His greatest miracle.

We must appreciate the fact that the Lord Jesus leads His people **through** tribulation into resurrection life. Because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, we can trust Him to bring us safely through tribulation and into life.

I. Although Christ may Lead You through Tribulation, Do Not Doubt His Love

Seeing the serious nature of Lazarus' illness, seeing that his life was ebbing away, the sisters (Mary and Martha) send an urgent message to Jesus: *"Lord, the one whom you love is sick"* (vs. 3.) Verse 5 informs us of Jesus' love for this family and for each individual member of it: *"Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."* This word of commentary and assurance is important in the light of Christ's unexpected response as recorded in verse 6.

When Jesus received word that Lazarus was sick, He remained *"at that time"*—that critical time, that time when Lazarus' life hung in the balance, that time when Lazarus' life was ebbing away—in the place where He was. *"At that time"* Jesus stayed right where He was until the crisis had passed, and the one whom He loved had succumbed to death. Can we even begin to imagine how difficult that must have been for Jesus? He loved Lazarus; He had the power to heal him; He had enough time to get to his bedside. Indeed, He did not even need to come personally; He had only to speak the word, as He had done in the healing of the nobleman's son (John 4:49-53.)

Despite the fact that our Lord does not deal with us in the way we would desire—He does not allow us to be exempt from the variety of trials and griefs found in this world—and despite the fact that He does not immediately rush to our aid to shield us or deliver us from pain of body or soul, His Word assures us of His unfailing love and concern for us as His blood-bought children. As He assures us through the prophet Jeremiah, *"Jehovah appeared to me in the past, [saying,] 'I have loved you with an everlasting love'"* (Jer. 31:3a.)

Then—after the critical hour had passed—Jesus determined to return to Judea, (where the village of Bethany was located), despite the protests and warnings of His disciples (vs. 7-8.) The disciples were concerned that Jesus would be risking His life by venturing back into hostile enemy territory. Indeed, out of love for His own, Jesus would do more than risk His life, He would voluntarily lay down His life:

*I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep ...
18No one takes it away from me, I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. I received this commandment from my Father. (Jn. 10:11,18)*

Upon arriving at Bethany, Jesus is received by Martha with the words, *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died"* (vs. 21.) These were words filled with regret: if only Jesus had been present, if only Jesus had acted sooner, this loss would not have occurred. These words may also have contained a mild rebuke: Lord, we were really counting on you to come; Lord, you let us down. Here is the sentiment sometimes thought but seldom spoken: If only Jesus would act, if only He would show more concern, our pain and grief could be avoided.

Arriving at the gravesite of His beloved friend, Lazarus, Jesus broke into tears, *"Jesus wept."* This display of emotion and love was so tender and gripping that it caused those who observed it to exclaim, *"See how [much] he loved him!"* (vs. 36.)

Although Christ may lead us through tribulation and trial, let us not doubt His love.

II. Although Christ may Lead You through Tribulation, Do Not Doubt His Ability

When we read the words of verse 6—having received word that Lazarus was gravely ill, Jesus stayed where He was for two days—we may be tempted to question Jesus' compassion. When the disciples are informed of Jesus' decision to return to Judea (vs. 7,) they question Jesus' wisdom (vs. 8.) They probably reasoned that it was wise and prudent of Jesus to restrain Himself when He received word of His dear friend's illness. But now, getting caught up and carried away with emotion, it is foolish for Jesus to venture back into enemy territory when the Jewish leaders would be waiting for the opportunity to put Him to death. When Jesus informs His disciples that Lazarus has *"fallen asleep"* and that He must now go to awaken him out of sleep (vs. 11,) the disciples are even more confused (vs. 12.)

Jesus' present words and actions tend to confuse us and even tempt us to question His ability and His wisdom—tempt us to question His competence. But note that in the passage before us Jesus' present actions only become intelligible when they are viewed from the perspective of His climactic act: the resurrection of Lazarus. Why did Jesus allow His dear friend to die? He did so in order that He could raise him again from the grave. Why did Jesus desire to resurrect Lazarus? His purpose was that His disciples might have their faith strengthened and increased (vs. 15.) Why was it important for the disciples to have their faith strengthened at this particular time? It was important in order that they might be prepared for the events that lay ahead: Jesus is about to allow Himself to be taken into custody by the Jewish leaders and be put to death—and thus have the assurance that despite Jesus' crucifixion, He indeed is the Resurrection and the Life.

When Jesus' present actions with regard to our lives or with regard to the church tend to confuse us and tempt us to doubt His wisdom and ability, His competence, let us remember that at times His present course of action (or inaction) only becomes intelligible when viewed from the perspective of His great climactic act (that ultimate climactic act being the great resurrection of His people on the Judgment Day.) Let us request Him to show us how His present course of action is intended to be used in our lives (or for the sake of His church.) Maybe His intention is to prune and purge us for greater fruitfulness: *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² ... he prunes every [branch] that bears fruit, so that it may bear more fruit"* (Jn. 15:1-2.) Maybe His intention is to

prepare us for some severe event that lies ahead, so that we may possess (and administer) confidence and assurance to other believers and be a witness to the world for Christ. The Apostle Paul testifies, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; ⁴who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort we ourselves have received from God”* (2 Cor. 1:3-4.) Maybe His intention is to draw you closer to Himself and cause us to rely upon Him more completely, as was the case with the trial experienced by the Apostle Paul:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, concerning the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened so that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us. (2 Cor. 1:8-10)

We must realize that His very identity—*“I AM the Resurrection”*—implies not a deliverance **from** death, but a total deliverance after death and out of death and over death. We should not expect to necessarily be delivered from trials, but we may certainly be confident that He will totally deliver us after trial and out of trial:

... after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will personally restore you, support you, strengthen you, and establish you. ¹¹To him belongs the dominion forever. Amen. (1 Pet. 5:10-11)

When the Jews beheld Jesus weeping at the tomb, they raised the same question that had been asked twice before: If Jesus had been here earlier, could He not have prevented this man from dying? The implication is that now that Lazarus is dead all hope is gone, it is now too late; Jesus can do nothing more than join the mourners in weeping over the loss of their loved one. When Jesus' course of action with regard to our lives, (or with regard to the church, or with regard to His cause in the world,) tends to confuse us and tempts us to doubt His ability—His power, His competence—remember the work He performed that day at the tomb just outside of the village of Bethany:

Jesus said, Remove the stone. ... [Jesus] cried out in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out. ⁴⁴The one who was dead came out, wrapped hand and foot in grave clothes; and there was a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, Unwrap him, and let him go. (Jn. 11:39,43-44)

Let us remember that He will employ His divine power in accordance with His wisdom, not necessarily in response to our request or desire. Let us rest assured

that He will finally exercise that divine power to rescue us—body and soul—so that we may reign with Him in His glorious new creation:

And this is the will of him who sent me, [namely,] that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰My Father's will is that every one who looks to the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (Jn. 6:39-40)

Although Christ may lead us through tribulation, let us not doubt His ability.

III. Although Christ may Lead You through Tribulation, Be Assured that It will Result in Life—to the Glory of God

Upon receiving word of Lazarus' illness, Jesus informs us, *"this sickness is ... for the sake of the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it"* (vs. 4.) God will use this adversity—this "tragedy"—in the life of His child, Lazarus, as an occasion to glorify His Son, Jesus Christ.

Note: He who did not spare His own Son, does not spare His own children either, but for His own glory He subjects us to trials, and even to the death. Consider the testimony of the Psalmist:

For you, O God, have tested us; you have refined us like silver. ¹¹You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. ¹²You caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water, but you brought us to a place of abundance. (Psl. 66:10-12)

Then, upon the accomplishment of the purpose for which the divinely ordained trial was intended, in His great faithfulness, the LORD will bestow upon us His own divine blessing:

... now for a little while, since it is necessary, you have been brought to grief by all kinds of trials. ⁷[This has happened] so that the genuineness of your faith—[being of] greater value than gold that perishes—having been tested by fire, may be verified, [resulting] in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 1:6-7)

In the words of the hymn writer, Katharina von Schlegel:

Be still, my soul; the LORD is on your side;
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.
Leave to your God to order and provide;
In every change He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul;
Your best, your heavenly Friend,
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul:
Your Jesus can repay
From His own fullness
All He takes away.

Note that all things center on God, focus upon God, and contribute to **His** glory. With regard to this trial (the death of Lazarus and the grief it brought to those who loved him,) and its final outcome, the Lord Jesus declares, *“This sickness is not for death, but for the sake of the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it”* (vs. 4.) It is only when we acknowledge and accept this truth that we are delivered from bitterness and resentment, and come to experience the blessing of God that He bestows upon those who glorify and honor Him by submitting to His will, even when it is difficult or hard to understand. Consider the testimony of Kathy Bartalsky, a testimony made following the death of her husband in a helicopter crash while serving as a missionary in Africa:

I learned that nothing we go through can in any way compare with what God has in store for us if we keep in perspective that it’s all for the glory of God and has *eternal* value. Otherwise, we become overwhelmed and end up in bitterness with anger and resentment toward God—so hurt and unable to reach out to others that we dig ourselves into a pit. That’s a separation from Christ, and we find there neither joy nor peace.

What I went through I didn’t volunteer for. Yet I believe it comes down to these basic questions. “Are you going to trust Christ or aren’t you? Are you going to stand on the Word you’ve been taught or aren’t you?” What if I had ... said, “Lord, I can’t do it. I can’t be Your child anymore. You demand too much from me?” Where else would I go? What else in the world gives me the hope that is in Christ Jesus and all He can offer?

In the years since Steve’s death ... I have returned to the States ... I’m eager to give testimony to God’s faithfulness in times of suffering.

We accept as common knowledge that God can save a sinner, but do we wholeheartedly believe that God can and will sustain a believer? If we truly believe this, then we will be able to rise to the challenge that the LORD has called us to in Christ Jesus, being molded and shaped into His very image as we offer the world a hope beyond their circumstances. (*POWER*, 3/3/91, pp. 2-ff.)

Martha is requested to trust Christ (vs. 38-41a)—which means enduring the pain of opening the tomb—and in so doing she is promised that she shall witness the glory of God.

Jesus issues the command, *“Remove the stone!”* What an unusual request! Does He want to pay His last respects to the deceased? Does He not realize the traumatic effect of such a request on the bereaved? Has He no respect for the dead? How insensitive the LORD appears to be! Martha, as the sister of the deceased, must step forward to remind Jesus that by this time the corpse stinks, for he has been dead for four days! Jesus now instructs Martha to trust Him—even though what He asks her to go through is extremely painful—and assures her that in so doing she shall see the glory of God. The faith she previously expressed in words (vs. 27) she now affirms by her actions (vs. 41a)—and true to Jesus’ word, she sees the glory of God displayed in the resurrection of her beloved brother.

Although Christ may lead us through tribulation, let us be assured that it will result in life—unto the glory of God.

Conclusion

Jesus declares: *“I AM the Resurrection and the Life.”* We must appreciate what these words mean: Christ leads His people **through** tribulation into resurrection life. Because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, we can trust Him to bring us safely through tribulation, trials, and death itself, and into the fullness of spiritual (and finally eternal) life.