

CHRIST'S LORDSHIP OVER LIFE AND DEATH

John 11:1-46

As the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus was approaching its close, the lines were drawn very sharply between His friends and His foes. It was dangerous for one to be known as one of His devoted followers. At least in Jerusalem, it was popular to be among those who hated Him.

About two miles from Jerusalem was the village of Bethany, where Martha, Mary and Lazarus resided. Their home was one of true family love and one in which Christ was always a welcome guest. These two sisters and their brother were the friends and followers of Christ. To this well-ordered home, which was so much to His liking, the Master frequently resorted as a visitor. These friends were ever ready to give their very best to the Lord Jesus. His beautiful love for the three members of the household is an abiding inspiration to every student of the New Testament. How pleasant it must have been to Christ to have a place to which He could go and feel "at home," and at the same time find love, cheer, relaxation and seclusion!

Like all others in this respect, those who are in close fellowship with Christ are not immune to illness. Sooner or later sickness and sorrow come to every family. Such was the case with this family in Bethany. Lazarus became desperately ill. Doubtless he received the very best care that loving hearts and tender hands could provide, but he did not improve.

Because of their love for him in his great need, the sisters naturally and promptly decided to appeal to Christ in behalf of their brother. At that particular time He was abiding in Bethabara, which was some twenty miles away and beyond the Jordan River. Meanwhile a messenger was sent to Him with the laconic message, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." That was all that was deemed necessary, inasmuch as the sisters fully believed that He would do the right thing. Since the Saviour was such an intimate friend of the family, it was, of course, to be expected that He would hasten to Bethany and minister to the needs of Lazarus. But that was not the program which He followed.

Christ's reaction to this message was rather surprising. He merely said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." Instead of departing promptly, Christ continued His activities there for two days. One reason for His delay was to convince His disciples and the people of His divine power. He wanted to allow death to have its full sway, and then His victory over it would be all the more convincing.

When anxiety, trouble and sorrow visit a happy home the arrival of a loving and trusted friend always brings a wonderful strength and comfort. We can imagine something of the feelings of the two bereaved sisters when they were informed that at last the Master was coming to see them.

When Christ finally reached Bethany Lazarus had been dead and buried four days. As soon as the word reached Martha that the Saviour was approaching her home, she went out to meet Him. Her statement, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," indicated that she had sufficient faith to believe that if He had arrived before the death of Lazarus that he would not have died. But there her faith stopped. She did not see in Him the same sovereignty over death which He held over disease.

Christ gave Martha's faith another test by declaring, "Thy brother shall rise again." Instead of interpreting His statement to mean that Lazarus was going to rise immediately, Martha thought that He meant that he would rise on the resurrection day. She and Mary believed in the resurrection at the last day, but they did not know that He had the

power to raise the dead then and there.

Our Lord proceeded to give one of the astounding revelations concerning Himself saying, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." These matchless words have brought untold comfort and assurance to countless sorrowing hearts. Just as soon as Martha received comfort from Christ, she rushed back into her home and called her sister, Mary, and said, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." Mary "arose quickly, and came unto him," trusting Him more fully and loving Him more devotedly.

Mary's sorrow was deep and poignant, but her grief was mingled with hope. Lazarus had died, but, with her Lord present, Mary believed that anything could happen. Christ promptly inquired as to where they had laid Lazarus. Observing Mary weeping, Christ's great heart of sympathy and compassion was so touched that He wept also, even though He knew that ere long He would change her sorrow into joy. How marvelously this reveals to us the tender concern and compassion with which Christ now intercedes for us!

Those who saw how Christ sympathized with the bereaved immediately began to criticize Him. They thought that He could have kept Lazarus from dying, and therefore, because He did not, they inferred that His delayed action was wrong. How natural! Whatever the Lord does, if it is not in accordance with what people think He should do, is immediately the subject of criticism.

Christ, the sorrowing relatives and some friends moved out to the tomb where Lazarus was buried. Taking charge of the situation, He at once requested the friends to remove the stone from the entrance to the tomb. This seemed to be a request which they wondered if it should be granted. Martha remonstrated with Him, reminding the Lord that Lazarus had been dead for four days, and that, by this time, the body would be decomposing; therefore, to remove the stone would be to pollute the very air.

In spite of Martha's protest the men removed the stone. There lay the body of Lazarus in full and open view. Those who stood by and witnessed the scene must have had strange feelings. The Saviour lifted His voice in thanksgiving to God, expressing appreciation for answered prayer. Then, He called forth Lazarus from the grave. He restored him to natural life. Still bound in the garments of the grave, Christ commanded them to "loose him, and let him go." This was something that human hands could not do by themselves. What people can do for themselves Christ will not do for them, but what they cannot do for themselves He will do for them.

This mighty miracle of the raising of Lazarus was a splendid demonstration of Christ's power to give life to souls that are dead in trespasses and sins. As the time for the crucifixion was drawing near, our Lord went to Bethany to spend the night with His friends, Martha, Mary and Lazarus, in whose home He always found relaxation and encouragement. That evening a feast was given in His honor in the house of "Simon the leper." In all probability Simon had been miraculously cleansed of his terrible disease by Christ, and therefore wanted to show his appreciation to the great Physician by having Him as a guest in his home. Among those present were Christ, the apostles, Martha, Mary, Lazarus and others. Martha served and Lazarus sat at the table with Christ, who had informed them that He was going to be put to death.

Realizing that He was about to be taken from them, Mary thought that this was the last chance she would have to express her great love for Christ. While the meal progressed she decided to pay her grateful homage to her Lord. Entirely disregarding what any might think or say, Mary went to the Lord Jesus, Who was reclining at the table, and broke the seal of an alabaster box of precious ointment of spikenard and with its contents anointed His feet and wiped them with her hair, as an act of adoration and devotion. She wanted to express her grateful love to her wonderful Saviour because of the many things He had done for her and the other members of her family.