

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 39 CHRIST RAISING LAZARUS (CONCLUDED)

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Transcript

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CHAPTER 39

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John 11:28-44

The following is submitted as an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:— 1. Mary goes to meet Jesus, verses 28-30, 32. 2. The Jews follow her, verse 31. 3. Jesus groaning and weeping, verses 33-35. 4. The comments of the Jews, verses 36-38. 5. Martha's unbelief and Christ's rebuke, verses 39, 40. 6. Jesus praying and praising, verses 41, 42. 7. The raising of Lazarus, verses 43, 44. The central design of John's Gospel is to present Christ to us as the Eternal Word become flesh, the Lord of glory in the likeness of men. Two things are made prominent throughout: His Divine dignity and His human perfections. Wonderfully perfect is the blending of these in the God-man: everything is there in Him to draw out our hearts in adoring love and reverent worship. Here we are shown His mighty power, and also His blessed tenderness. Here we behold not only His absolute authority, but also His entire dependency. It is not only that we gaze upon one of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, come down from heaven to earth, but also on One who entered fully into the conditions and circumstances of men, sin only excepted. Strikingly do these two lines of truth meet in John 11. The very chapter which chronicles His mightiest "sign" reveals the principles by which He walked—submission, dependence, obedience. Side by side with the record of His omnipotent voice calling the dead to life again, do we read of Him groaning and weeping. Absolutely unique is this wondrous Person. The blending of Christ's Divine glories and human perfections meet us at every turn in this fourth Gospel. If John is the only one of the four Evangelists who enters into the pre-incarnate dignities of Christ, showing Him to us as the One who subsisted in the beginning, both being with God, and God Himself: the Creator of all things; if John is the only one who contemplates Him as the great "I am," equal with the Father; he also brings before us details concerning His humanity which are not to be met with in the Synoptists. John is the only one who tells us of Christ being "wearied with his journey" (John 4:6), groaning as He beheld the tears of His own, and thirsting as He hung upon the Cross. Christ became Man in the fullest sense of the word, and nowhere do we behold His human sympathies and perfections more blessedly displayed than in this very Gospel which portrays Him as God manifest in flesh. It is in John's Gospel, pre-eminently, that we see the antitype of the veil, which speaks so plainly of

the Son of God incarnate. "And thou shalt make a veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work" (Ex. 26:31). This order "blue, purple and scarlet" is repeated over twenty times in Exodus, and is never varied. The blue and scarlet are never placed in juxtaposition in any of the fabrics of the tabernacle. This of itself is sufficient to show that the Holy Spirit intimates there is an important truth here in connection with the person of Christ. The "blue" is the color of heaven, and speaks of Christ as the Son of God. The "scarlet" is both the color of sacrifice and human glory. The "purple" is a color produced by the mixing together of blue and scarlet. Without the purple, the blue and the scarlet would have presented too vivid a contrast to the eye; the purple coming in between them shaded off the one extreme from the other. Now the antitype of these colors is found in the incarnate Christ. He was both God and man, and yet these two vastly dissimilar natures unite in one perfect Person. The "purple," then, coming in between the "blue" and the "scarlet" tells of the perfect blending or union of His two natures. The great marvel (as well as mystery) of His unique person is that in Him were combined all the fulness of the Godhead with all the sinless feelings and affections of man. And it is just this which is so beautifully brought out in John's Gospel, and nowhere more strikingly than in John 11. When the sisters sent to Christ telling Him that their brother was sinking, instead of hastening at once to him, He remained two days where He was. Did this show that He was devoid of human feelings? No; His purpose was to manifest the Divine glory. But mark the sequel. When He arrives at Bethany, His heart is profoundly moved as He beholds the sorrowing sisters. And who but the God-man would have shed tears by the grave of Lazarus when He was on the very point of restoring the dead to life! Each of the three colors of the veil are clearly seen. The "blue" in the Divine power which raised the dead; the "scarlet" in the groans and tears. Now behold the "purple." When Lazarus came forth from the sepulcher he was still bound with the grave-clothes. The spectators were so amazed, so awed, so bewildered, they made no effort to remove them. "Loose him" were the words which proceeded from Christ. And who but the God-man would have been occupied with such a detail? We witness the same thing again at the Cross; "It is finished" exhibits the "blue"; "I thirst," the "scarlet"; and the "purple" is evidenced in His tender thought for His widowed mother, commending her to His beloved John! In our previous lessons upon the first sections of John 11 we have seen the Lord at Bethabara with His disciples, and then on the confines of Bethany, whither Martha, Unbidden, with characteristic impatience rushed to meet Him. We sought to weigh her utterances as she gave expression to the first thoughts that entered her mind. We saw how that the responses made by Christ were quite beyond her depth, and how that in answer to His searching "Believest thou this?" she replied, "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ the Son of God, which should come into the world." Immediately following this we read, "And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee" (John 11:28). In her impulsive hurry to meet the Lord (John 11:20) Martha, for the time, forgot all about her sister; but now she goes to call Mary. There is nothing in the narrative to show that Christ had asked for Mary—if He had, John would surely have told us so. Was it then a fabrication on Martha's part? We do not so regard it: rather do we think she concluded that the profound words of Christ were more suited to her sister than herself. When Christ said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die," she felt that Mary must hear this; she will be able to understand. "And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee" (John 11:28). The cryptic utterances of Christ Martha considered as a "call" for the more spiritual Mary. What a tribute this was to the discernment of the one whom she had formerly criticized! She called her "secretly" so as not to attract the attention of the many Jews who were with her in the house (John 11:19). These Jews had come from Jerusalem and Martha knew that most of the people there were antagonistic to the Savior. "Christianity doth not bid us abate anything of our

wariness and honest policy, yea, it requires us to have no less the wisdom of the serpent as the harmlessness of the dove" (R. Hall). And, too, she probably felt that it was more fitting that Mary should enjoy an interview with Christ in undisturbed privacy. Mark that Martha terms Christ "Master" (the Teacher), not "Lord?" "As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him" (John 11:29). With characteristic quietness and calm Mary had remained seated in the house, but now she hears that the One at whose feet she had loved to sit, was here at hand, she rises and goes forth to meet Him at once, "quickly." The knowledge that He was "calling" her lent wings to her feet. She needed not to tarry and inquire who was meant by "the Master"—she had none other, and that one word was sufficient to identify the One who was the Fairest among ten thousand to her soul. "Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him" (John 11:30). Very striking indeed is this. He was still in the same place where Martha had talked with Him. In the interval she had returned to Bethany, entered the house and spoken to her sister, and Mary had herself traveled the same distance to meet Him in whom her soul delighted. And when she completed the journey—how long a one it was we do not know—she found her Beloved awaiting her. How this brings out the calmness of Christ: there was no undue haste to perform the miracle! And how blessedly it illustrates the fact that He never hides Himself from a seeking soul. He would not disappoint this one who so valued His presence. If she "arose quickly" to go to Him, He waited patiently for her arrival! "The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out followed, her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there" (John 11:31). This too is striking. Man proposes but God disposes. Martha's secrecy came to nothing. God had purposed that the last great "sign" of Israel's Messiah should be given before many eye-witnesses. The Jews followed Mary because they supposed she had gone to the grave to weep in private, but He who doeth all things according to the counsel of His own will, drew them there, that the miracle of the raising of Lazarus should be done in public. Doubtless their intention was to "comfort" her, and for their kindness God would not let them be the losers. Has He not said, "whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward" (Matthew 10:42)? Beautifully was that verified on this occasion. The Jews who had journeyed from Jerusalem to Bethany had felt for Martha and Mary in their heavy bereavement, and came to offer what comfort they could. By so doing they reaped a rich and unexpected reward. They beheld the greatest miracle which Christ ever wrought, and as the result many believed on Him (John 11:45). "We need not doubt that these things were written for our learning. To show sympathy and kindness to the sorrowful is good for our souls. To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, to weep with them that weep, to try and bear one another's burdens and lighten one another's cares,—all of this will make no atonement for sin and will not take us to Heaven. Yet it is healthy employment for our hearts, and employment which we ought not to despise. Few persons are aware that one secret of being miserable is to live only for ourselves, and one secret of being happy is to try to make others happy. In an age of peculiar selfishness and self-indulgence it would be well that we took this to heart" (Bishop Ryle). It is significant that these Jews did not leave the house when Martha left it! "Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:32). This was the language of perplexity and grief. Like Martha, Mary was thinking of what might have happened. How often we look back on the past with an "if" in our minds! How often in our sore trials we lash ourselves with an "if." And small comfort does it bring! How often we complain "it might have been" (Mark 14:5). As Whittier says, "Of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these, 'It might have been.'" Only too often these words express the inveterate sadness of one who is swallowed up with sorrow. Ofttimes it issues from forgetfulness of the Lord: He permitted it, so it must be for the best. It may not appear so to our dim vision; but so it is. It was

so with Martha and Mary, as they were soon to behold. "Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." While this was the language of grief and perplexity, it certainly was not a reproachful murmur, as her casting herself at the feet of Christ clearly shows. Nor does Mary here add an apologetic reflection as had her sister (John 11:22). Her words had quite a different meaning from the very similar language of Martha. We say very similar, for their utterances were not identical, as a reference to the Greek will show. They each used the same words, but the order of them varied, and in this may be seen what was uppermost in each of their minds. The A.V. gives a literal rendering of the original language of Martha (John 11:21); but what Mary said was, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, had not died my brother." That which was uppermost in the thoughts of Martha, was her brother's death; that which was discerned by Mary was that none could die in the presence of Christ. Her words then were an expression of worship, as the casting of herself at Christ's feet was an act of adoring homage. "Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet." This was ever her place. It is beautiful to observe that each time the New Testament presents Mary to us, she is seen "at the feet of Jesus"—expressive of her worshipful spirit. But there is no mere repetition. In Luke 10, at Christ's feet she owned Him as Prophet, hearing His word (verse 39). Here in John 11 she approaches Christ as Priest—that great High Priest that can be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," who shares our sorrows, and ministers grace in every time of need. In John 12:3 Mary, at His feet acknowledged Him as "King"—this will appear if we compare Matthew 26:7, from which we learn that she also anointed "the head" of the rejected King of the Jews! "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled" (John 11:33). The Greek word here for "groaned" is expressive of deep feeling, sometimes of sorrow, more often of indignation. In this instance the Holy Spirit has recorded the cause of Christ's groaning—it was the sight of Mary and her comforters weeping. He was here in the midst of a groaning creation, which sighed and travailed over that which sin had brought in. And this He felt acutely. The original suggests that He was distressed to the extremest degree: moved to a holy indignation and sorrow at the terrific brood which sin had borne. Agitated by a righteous detestation of what evil had wrought in the world. "And was troubled" is, more literally, "he troubled himself"; He caused Himself to be troubled by what made others weep and wail. And how this "groaning" and "troubling of himself" brings out the perfections of the incarnate Son! He would not raise Lazarus until He had entered in spirit into the solemnity of the awfulness of death. Mark 8:12 intimates that the miracles which He performed cost Him something. Plainer still is the testimony of Matthew 8:17: "himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses"—He felt the burden of sickness before He removed it. "And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see" (John 11:34). What a mark of genuineness is this line in the picture! Who that was inventing a fictitious story would have introduced such a detail in a scene like this! But how thoroughly in keeping with everything else which the Gospels record about Christ. There was no ostentation about Him. He never used His Omniscience for the mere sake of display. He wished to be invited to the sepulcher. "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). The shortest verse in the Bible, yet what volumes it contains. The Son of God weeping, and weeping on the very eve of raising the dead man! Who can fathom it? Three times in the New Testament we read of the Lord Jesus weeping: here, over Jerusalem, (Luke 19:41), and in Gethsemane (Heb. 5:7). Each time His tears were connected with the effects or consequences of sin. By the grave-side of Lazarus these tears expressed the fulness of the grief which His heart felt. They manifested the perfectness of His love and the strength of His sympathy. He was the Man of sorrows and "acquainted with grief." Yet, here too was more than an expression of human sympathy. Here were souls upon which rested the weight of the dark shadow of death, and they were souls which He loved, and He felt it. "Jesus wept": "The consciousness that He carried resurrection-virtue

in Him, and was about to fill the house at Bethany with the joy of restored life, did not stay the current of natural affections. 'Jesus wept.' His heart was still alive to the sorrow, as to the degradation of death. His calmness throughout this exquisite scene was not indifference, but elevation. His soul was in the sunshine of those deathless regions which lay far away and beyond the tomb of Lazarus, but He could visit that valley of tears, and weep with those that wept" (J. G. Bellett). "Then said the Jews, Behold how He loved him!" (John 11:36). How these tears demonstrated "the profound sympathy of the heart of Jesus with us in all the sorrows and trials through which we pass. Had those sisters for a moment questioned the love of Jesus for them and His sympathy with them in their sorrow, how they would be rebuked by these groans and tears! 'Jesus wept.' What tender sympathy and grace! And He is the same today. It is true the surroundings are different, but His heart is the same: 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever.' He 'wept.' How we see the reality of His human nature! Yes; it was a perfect human heart. He wept for the sorrow and desolation which sin has brought into the world; and He entered into it as no other could. Oh! what groans and tears! How they tell out the heart of our precious Lord Jesus! He truly loved these tried ones, and they proved it. So shall we if we rest in the same tender, gracious, sympathizing Lord" (C.H.M.). "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?" (John 11:37). This sounds very much like the language of men determined to believe nothing good of our Lord, insistent on picking a hole or finding a fault, if possible, in any thing that He did. Their words have a sarcastic ring about them. Some have wondered why these carping critics did not mention the raising of Jairus' daughter or the widow's son. But it should be remembered that both of these miracles had been performed in Galilee. Moreover, the healing of the blind man in Jerusalem was much more recent. It is clear that they had no thought of help being available now that Lazarus was dead, and so they openly reproach Christ for allowing him to die. And men in their petulance and unbelief, especially at funerals, still ask much the same questions: 'Why should the Almighty have permitted this?' They forget that "He giveth not account of any of his matters" (Job 33:13). "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7) is sufficient for faith. "Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it" (John 11:38). This time, as the "therefore" indicates, the groaning was occasioned by the carping unbelief of those mentioned in the previous verse. Here it was a matter of Christ "enduring the contradiction of sinners against himself" (Heb. 12:3). It shows how He felt the antagonism of those who knew Him not. It was not as a stoic that He passed through these scenes. Everything that was contrary to His holy nature, moved Him deeply. How blessed it is for us to remember this as we, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, "groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23). How comforting to know that our Redeemer felt the same thing which the new nature within us feels; only felt it a thousand times more acutely. Not for nothing was He termed "a man of sorrows" (Isa. 53:3). In us there is ever a conflict; one nature feeding on, the other repelled by, the things of this world. But with the Holy One of God there was nothing to neutralize, nothing to modify, the anguish which His spirit felt from His daily contact with evil and corruption. As Hebrews tells us, "He suffered being tempted." It is true there was nothing in Him to which Satan could appeal, and therefore there was no possibility of Him yielding. But nevertheless the temptation was a fearful reality. His holy nature recoiled from the very presence of the Evil One, as His "get thee hence, Satan" plainly intimates. His spotless purity was sickened by the vile solicitations of the tempter. Yes, He suffered to a degree we do not and cannot. Suffered not only from the temptation of Satan, but from the evil which surrounded Him on every side. The "groaning" which the Holy Spirit has here recorded gives us a glimpse of what must have gone on constantly in the spirit of that blessed One so deeply "acquainted with grief." "Jesus said, Take ye away the stone" (John 11:39). "What majestic composure in the midst of this mighty emotion!" (Stier). Though weeping outwardly and groaning

inwardly, the Lord Jesus was complete master of Himself. He acts and speaks with quiet dignity. The miracles of God avoid with the supremest propriety all that is superfluous. So often in the mighty works of God we may observe, an economy of Divine power. What man could do, he is required to do. We have little use for the hackneyed saying that "God helps those who help themselves," for God very often helps those who are unable to help themselves. Yet, on the other hand, it remains true that it is not God's general way to do for us what we are responsible and capable of doing for ourselves. God is pleased to bless our use of the means which are at hand. If I am a farmer, I shall harvest no crops unless I plow and sow and care for my fields. Just as in the first miracle of this Gospel Christ ordered men to fill the jars with water, so here He ordered men to roll away the stone. "Jesus said, Take ye away the stone." There is another lesson for us to learn here. He might have commanded the stone to roll itself away, or He might have bidden Lazarus to come forth through the impediment of the stone. Instead, He bade the bystanders remove it. Christ modestly avoided all pomp and parade and mingled the utmost simplicity with the most amazing displays of power. What an example He thus set us to avoid all ostentation! "Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days" (John 11:39). What a characteristic word was this from one who was "careful about many things," ever anxious about circumstances. Did Martha suppose that Christ only desired to view the body? It would seem so. And yet how sad is the unbelief which her utterance expressed. Lazarus' own sister would put an obstacle in the way of the manifestation of Christ's glow! She supposed it was useless to remove the stone. How solemnly this warns us that natural affections can never rise to the thoughts of God, and that only too frequently we are opposed to His workings even where it is for the blessing of those whom we love most tenderly! How often has a husband, a wife, a parent, sought to resist the Word or providences of God, as they were operating in or on the object of their affection! Let us take to heart this lamentable resistance of Martha. "Jesus said unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" (John 11:40). There is considerable difference of opinion as to what our Lord referred to when He declared, "Said I not unto thee?" etc. Many suppose He was reminding her of some word of His spoken just before, when she had met Him alone, and which is not recorded in the context. This is mere supposition, and an unlikely one at that. It seems more natural to regard it as pointing back to the answer Christ had sent her from Bethabara: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby" (John 11:4). Others think it was as though He said, "Martha, thou art forgetting the great doctrines of faith which I have ever taught thee. How often you have heard Me say, All things are possible to him that believeth." There may be a measure of truth in this as well. "Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Profound word was this. "The glory of God"! That which rejoices the soul when seen and known; that, without which we must forever remain unsatisfied and unblest; that, in comparison with which all sights are as nothing,—is "the glory of God." This was what Moses prayed to see: "I beseech thee, show me thy glory" (Ex. 33:18). The glory of God is the revelation of His excellencies, the visible display of His invisible perfections. It was the glory of God which Christ came here to make manifest, for He is the outshining of God's glory (Heb. 1:3). But the one special point to which our Lord here referred, was His own glory as the Bringer of life out of death. It was this which He came to reveal, both in His own person, by dying and rising again, and in the works of His hands—here in the raising of Lazarus. To remove the wages of death, to undo the work which sin had wrought, to conquer him that had the power of death, to swallow up death in victory—this was indeed a special manifestation of glory. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). Now it is unbelief which hinders our seeing the glory of God. It is not our unworthiness, our ignorance, nor our feebleness, that stand in the way, but our unbelief, for there is far

more of unbelief than faith in us, as well as in Martha. Those searching words, "Said I not unto thee" apply to writer and reader. He was reminding Martha of a word given her before, but which had not been "mixed with faith." Alas, how often His words to us have fallen on unresponsive hearts. Mark the order of the two verbs here: "Believe" comes before "see," and compare our remarks on John 6:69. "Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid" (John 11:41). As pointed out previously, two things stand out conspicuously all through this chapter: the glory of Christ and the failure of men; His perfections and their imperfections confront us at every, point. Christ had bidden the bystanders "Take ye away the stone"—doubtless a heavy one (cf. Matthew 27:60) which would require several men to move. But they had not responded. They paused to listen to Martha's objection. It was not until He had replied to her, not until He had spoken of the glory of God being seen, that they obeyed. "Then they took away the stone." How slow is man to obey the Word of God! What trifles are allowed to hinder! "And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me" (John 11:41). Very beautiful is this. It manifested Christ as the dependent One. Perfectly did He fulfill Proverbs 3:5, 6: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him." But more: it was the Son giving the Father the honor for the miracle which was about to be performed. He directed attention away from Himself to One in heaven. Well might He say, "learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). And too, there is another thing here. In view of His words in the next verse it seems clear that He also lifted up His eyes for the sake of those standing around. His miracles had been blasphemously attributed to Satan and Hell; He would here show the true Source from which they proceeded—"Jesus lifted up his eyes." Note also His, "Father, I thank thee." He began with this. Christ has left us a perfect example, not only of prayerfulness but of thankfulness as well. We are always more ready to ask than thank: but see Philippians 4:6. "And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me." "We now reach a point of thrilling and breathless interest. The stone had been removed from the mouth of the cave. Our Lord stands before the open grave, and the crowd stands around, awaiting anxiously to see what would happen next. Nothing appears from the tomb. There is no sign of life at present; but while all are eagerly looking and listening, our Lord addresses His Father in Heaven in a most solemn manner, lifting up His eyes, and speaking audibly to Him in the hearing of all the crowd. The reason He explains in the next verse. Now, for the last time, about to work His mightiest miracle, He once more makes a public declaration that He did nothing separate from His Father in heaven, and that in this and all His work there is a mysterious and intimate union between Himself and the Father" (Bishop Ryle). "And I knew that thou hearest me always" (John 11:42). What perfect confidence in the Father had this One here in servant form! And what was the ground of His confidence? Has He not Himself told us in John 8:29?—"He that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone; For I do always those things that please him"! The Lord Jesus never had a thought which was out of harmony with the Father's will, and never did a thing which in the slightest degree deviated from His Father's word. He always did those things which pleased Him (Ps. 16:8); therefore did the Father always hear Him. What light this throws on our un-answered prayers! There is an intimate relation between our conduct and the response which we receive to our supplications: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18). Equally clear is the New Testament. "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 John 3:22). Very searching is this. It is not what men term "legalism" but the Father maintaining the demands of holiness. For God to answer the prayers of one who had no concern for His glory and no respect to His commandments, would be to place a premium upon sin. "And I knew that thou hearest me always." Very, very blessed is this. Unspeakable comfort does it minister to the heart that rests upon it. Christ did not cease to pray when He left this earth: He still prays, prays for us, His people: "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the

uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). How much we owe to His intercession eternity will reveal—far, far more than we now realize. Read through John 17 and note the different things He has asked (and possibly, still asks) the Father for us. He asks that His joy may be fulfilled in us (verse 13), that we may be kept from evil in the world (verse 15), that we may be sanctified through the truth (John 4:17), that we may be one (21), that we may be made perfect in one (verse 23), that we may be with Him where He is (verse 24), that we may behold His glory (verse 24). None of these things are yet ours in their fulness; but how unspeakably blessed to know that the time is coming when all of them will be! The Father hears Christ "always," therefore these things must be made good to us? "But because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 11:43). How this reminds us of Elijah on mount Carmel! "Elijah the prophet came near and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God" (1 Kings 18:36, 37)! This scripture supplies the key to the meaning of the Lord's words beside the tomb of Lazarus. Like Elijah's, Christ's mission was unto Israel, and like Elijah, He here prayed that God would authenticate His mission. If the Father had not sent Him, He would not have heard Him in anything; the Father hearing Him here at the graveside of Lazarus was therefore a clear proof and full evidence of His Divine mission. "And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43). This "loud voice" was also for the people's sake, that all might hear. Lazarus was addressed personally for, as it has been well remarked, had Christ simply cried "come forth" Hades would have been emptied and every tenant of the grave would have been raised from the dead. We have here, in miniature, what will take place on the resurrection morn. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout... and the dead in Christ shall rise" (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). So, too, will it be when the wicked dead shall be resurrected: "Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice" (John 5:28). It is striking to note that Christ here did nothing except to say, "Lazarus, come forth." It was the last great public witness to Christ as the incarnate Word. And, too, it perfectly illustrated the means which God employs in regeneration. Men are raised spiritually, pass from death unto life, by means of the written Word, and by that alone. Providences, personal testimonies, loss of loved ones, deeply as these sometimes may stir the natural man, they never "quicken" a soul into newness of life. We are born again, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (1 Pet. 1:23). "Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth" (John 11:44). At the sound of that Voice the king of terrors at once yielded up his lawful captive, and the insatiable grave gave up its prey. Captivity was led captive and Christ stood forth as the Conqueror of sin, death and Satan. There it was demonstrated that He who was in the form of a Servant, nevertheless, held in His own hand "the keys of death and hades." Here was public proof that the Lord Jesus had absolute power over the material world and over the realm of spirits. At His bidding a soul that had left its earthly tenement was called back from the unseen to dwell once more in the body. What a demonstration was this that He who could work such astounding miracles must be none other than one "who is over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom. 9:5). Thank God for an all-mighty Savior. How can any sheep of His ever perish when held in such a hand! "And he that was dead came forth" (John 11:44). "This shows us what the energy, the utmost energy, of evil can do over those who are the beloved of the Lord; but it also shows us how the Lord Jesus sets it altogether aside in the energy and in the strength of His own power. We have here the full result of Satan's power, and the perfect triumphing of the Lord over that power. Death is the result of the power of Satan. By bringing in sin, he brought in death: 'the wages of sin'; this is the utmost of Satan's power. He brought in this at the commencement, he brought it in by deceit; for 'he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth.' Such has he been ever since; he is

called the old Serpent and the Deceiver; and having deceived, he became the murderer of the first Adam, and in one sense, of the last Adam. He was and is a liar; that is his character, as exactly opposed to Christ, who is the truth. In like manner all the variations of his character are set in opposition to that of Christ. He is the destroyer, and Christ is the Giver of life; He is the accuser of the brethren, and Christ the Mediator for them; Christ the Truth of God, and Satan the father of lies. In this character he is first brought before us. By misrepresenting the truth and character of God, he became the murderer of the souls of men, and brought in death—this was his power. Christ came to destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil. The Son of God came to destroy the works of the Devil by bringing souls from the power of Satan to the power of the living God. This is what is so strikingly illustrated here in John 11" (Mr. J. N. Darby). There are two ways in which the Lord Jesus has become the resurrection and the life of His people: First, in purchasing their redemption from the wages of sin, by paying Himself the full price which Divine justice demanded for their transgressions. This He did by His own voluntary and vicarious sufferings; being made a curse for us. Second, by making us one with Himself who is the very life of all being: "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). It was this He prayed for in John 17: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (verse 21). This is made good by the Holy Spirit: "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). The believer is "in Christ" not only by the eternal choice of the Father (Eph. 1:4), not only by His being constituted our federal Head (1 Cor. 15:22), but also by vital union. In this double way then is Christ unto us "the resurrection and the life," and thus has He completely triumphed over him (the Devil) who had (no longer "has") the power of death. A most striking figure of this was Lazarus. Dead, in the grave, his body already gone to corruption. At the almighty word of Christ "he that was dead came forth." The children of God are the children of the resurrection. Where Christ is made the life of the soul, there is the certainty of a resurrection to life eternal in Christ's life: when His life is communicated to us, we have that within us over which the power of Satan is unable to prevail. Dimly, but beautifully, was this foreshadowed of old in the case of Job. Afflict him Satan might, destroy his possessions he was permitted to do, but touch his life he could not! The picture presented here in John 11 is Divinely perfect. It was during the bodily absence of Christ from Bethany that death exercised its power over Lazarus. It is so with us now. What we have in John 11 is not merely an individual, but a family—a family beloved of the Lord. How clearly this prefigured the family of God now upon earth! While Christ was bodily absent, the power of death was felt, and sorrow and grief came in. But tears gave place to rejoicing. After abiding "two days" where He was, Christ came to that afflicted family, and His very presence manifested the power of life. So, when Christ returns for His people, it will be in this same twofold character: as the Resurrection and the Life. Then will He put away not only the grief of His people, but that which has caused it. In the interval, His "tears" (before He raised Lazarus) assure us of His deep sympathy! "And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin" (John 11:44). This line in the picture in nowise mars its accuracy, rather does it intensify it. Whether we view the raising of Lazarus as a figure of the regeneration of a sinner, or the glorification of the believer, the "graveclothes" here and the removal of them, are equally significant. When a sinner is born again, God's work of grace in his soul is not perfected, rather has it just commenced. The old nature still remains and the marks of the grave are still upon him. There is much to impede the movements of the "new man," much from which he needs to be "loosed," and which his spiritual resurrection did not of itself effect. The language of such a soul was expressed by the apostle Paul when he said, "to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not... For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:18, 22, 23). It was so here with Lazarus when the Lord called him from the tomb; he did not leave the

hampering graveclothes behind him, but came forth "bound hand and foot." "Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:44). How this brings out the moral glory of Christ. The fact that He had to ask the bystanders to liberate the risen man shows that the spectators were all overcome with amazement and awe. The Lord alone remained serene and collected. That the Lord invited them to "loose him" (rather than, by a miracle, cause the clothes to fall from him) points a beautiful lesson. In gracious condescension the Lord of glory links human instruments with Himself in the work which He is now doing in the world. Again and again is this seen in John's Gospel. He used the servants at the wedding-feast, when He turned the water into wine. He fed the hungry multitude through the hands of His disciples. He bade the spectators of this last public miracle roll the stone away from the grave; and now He asks them to free Lazarus from the graveclothes. And this is still His blessed way. He alone can speak the word which quickens dead sinners; but He permits us to carry that word to them. What an inestimable privilege—an honor not given even to the angels! O that we might esteem it more highly. There is no higher privilege this side of Heaven than for us to be used of the Lord in rolling away gravestones and removing graveclothes. "Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go." But there is a yet deeper and even more blessed truth taught us here. In its ultimate application the raising of Lazarus points, as we have seen, to the full manifestation of Christ as the resurrection and the life at the time when He returns to His sorrowing "family." Then will God's wondrous work of sovereign grace be perfected. No longer shall we be left in a groaning creation, but removed to His own place on high. No longer shall we be imprisoned in these tabernacles of clay, for we shall be "delivered from the bondage of corruption" and enter into "the glorious liberty of the children of God." No more shall our face be "bound about with a napkin," which now causes us to see "through a glass darkly," but in that glad day we shall see "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). Then shall this corruptible put on incorruption and mortality shall be "swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. 5:4). It is of this that the "Loose him" speaks. No more shall we wear the habiliments of death, but then shall we rejoice in that One who has forever set us free that we might walk with Him in newness of life. Then, ah, then, shall we obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. "Loose him." This was to satisfy the onlookers that they had not been deceived by any optical delusion. With their own hands they were permitted to handle his body. It is very striking to observe that in this final "sign" of Christ, conclusive evidence was offered to three of their senses—nostrils, eyes, and hands: the "stink" must have been apparent when the stone was removed from the cave; they saw Lazarus come forth a living man; they were suffered to trench and handle him. All possible deception was therefore out of question. "And let him go." The spectators were not allowed to satisfy an idle curiosity. Lazarus was to retire to the privacy of home. Those who had witnessed the miracle of his resurrection, were not suffered to pry into the secrets of the grave or ask him curious questions. "Let him go" was the authoritative word of Christ, and there the curtain falls. And fitly so. When the Lord Jesus leaves His Father's throne on high and descends into the air, we too shall go—go from these scenes of sin and suffering, go to be "forever with the Lord." Glorious prospect! Blessed climax! Blissful goal! May our eyes be steadily fixed upon it, running with perseverance the race set before us, looking off unto Him who "for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). The following questions are to prepare the student for the closing section of John 11:— 1. How explain the different actions of the spectators, verses 45, 46? 2. What important truth is illustrated in verse 50? 3. What is meant by "this spake he not of himself," verse 51? 4. What do verses 51, 52 teach about the Atonement? 5. "Gather together" in one what, verse 52? 6. Why did Jesus "walk no more openly among the Jews," verse 54? 7. What is meant by "to purify themselves," verse 55?

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