

Lazarus

by Lewis Williams

Jesus' delay in coming to Lazarus' aid was a plan to bring glory to God and demonstrate His power and authority.

Scripture: Isaiah 1:2, Matthew 13:58, John 11:45, Romans 8:28, Colossians 1:19, Hebrews 2:6

Topics: "Resurrection Power", "Faith And Obedience"

Description

Lewis Williams preaches on the powerful example of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, emphasizing the need for believers to show a living example of Christ's power to save from sin in order to lead others to believe in Him. Through the story of Lazarus' resurrection, Williams delves into the deeper meanings behind Jesus' actions, highlighting the glory of God and the importance of faith and obedience in experiencing supernatural transformation. He challenges listeners to roll away the stones of sin and unbelief in their lives, allowing Jesus to bring forth new life and freedom, ultimately leading to belief in Him.

Transcript

"When they saw the things that Jesus did they believed on Him." Jno. 11:45.

If you want folks to believe in your Christ, you must show them a living example of His power to save from all sin. I presume nearly all present this morning are acquainted with the portion of the Gospel from which we have taken our text. This was at the resurrection of Lazarus. Now keep your Bible in hand and we will study it for a little while. In the opening verses we read that there was a home in the town of Bethany, near Jerusalem, where there lived two girls, Martha and Mary, with their brother Lazarus. While Jesus was away on one of His evangelistic tours, Lazarus was taken sick, and immediately they send word to Jesus that their brother, "he whom thou lovest, is sick."

Jesus did not go at once; but in the 6th verse it says, "He abode two days still in the same place." In the 5th verse it states that Jesus loved these three young people. We have read that they were orphans and that Lazarus was a scribe, one who was engaged in copying the Scriptures, and their whole support depended on him. In their dire distress they send for their greatest Friend, but the Book says "He abode two days still in the same place." That does not seem to be a very good example of His love toward them. If you were in deep distress, i. e., one of your darlings was lying at the point of death, and you had one who professed great love toward you, one who was a great physician, and you sent him word to come immediately and he did not, would you still feel that his love and affection for you were real? Some one asks, "Why did not Jesus go at once? Why did He allow that brother to die, and thus crush the hearts of

those two sisters?" Over in the 37th verse we read that the Jews said, "Could not this man that opened the eyes of the blind have caused that even this man should not have died?" Why did He allow their hearts to be broken and torn, crushed down with this great sorrow? Does this look like He really loved them as He professed?

Ah, we are so short-sighted, we know so little of the Divine mind and the ways of God. In the 4th verse, Jesus, speaking to His disciples, said, "This sickness is not unto death," but Lazarus did die. What does Jesus mean? Again in the 14th and 15th verses He said, "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there." What! Glad that He was not there? Why, Jesus, do you mean to talk behind the back of those two broken-hearted girls? Do you mean to give your disciples to understand that you thought they needed your presence more than those two sorrowing hearts over there in Bethany? What can He mean? It would seem that even the Jews thought it strange that He had not caused that Lazarus should not have died.

Many times we had read over this chapter, and had pondered long on the above questions, when one day the light broke through. In the 4th verse Jesus said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." For the glory of God! How? Why, through the Son. Jesus was God's gift. God's Christmas gift to this poor lost world. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever would believe on Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Glory be to God for His gift! "For the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." Through that death Jesus, the Son of God, was to be glorified, thereby bringing honor and glory to God the Father. Then to His disciples He said, "I am glad for your sake's that I was not there."

Ah, friends, as we are gathered here this beautiful Christmas morning, how little some of us appreciate God's wonderful gift to us, and how 'slow of heart' we are to believe all that the prophets have written. How many times when bowed down with cares, sorrow and bereavements we are apt to question just the exact meaning of the word of that old battle-scarred warrior when he wrote, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." (Rom. viii. 28.) How often things transpire that brings to our hearts so much of sorrow and trial, and some way we cannot see where or how they can possibly be for our good.

Surely we have a case of this in hand in this lesson this morning. If any one was ever so placed that they felt they had a right to question, these girls would think they were the ones. Where could any good come out of all this to them? Was not Lazarus their only support? Were they not left alone in a cold, bleak, barren. world? Were not their hearts torn and bleeding and broken? And, oh, was not there a form, a loved one absent! That vacant chair, that loving voice now still in death, that form now rotting in the grave! Oh, where or how could there be any good in all this for them? But listen to the words of the Son of God -- He that said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall never pass away" -- hear Him speak, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

Friends, do you know that man's greatest good and God's highest glory are much the same thing? Listen! Away back in the first chapter of Genesis, in the 25th verse, we read that after God had created the world and all therein, "God saw that it was good." Then He created man, and in the 28th and 30th verses we read that He put man over all; gave him dominion over all that He had created and pronounced it "very good." Man was the chief of all that was created; God's great masterpiece, made in His own image, the image of God. Hear the Apostle in his Epistle to the Hebrews, when he speaks of David as saying, "What is man that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little

lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands." (Heb. ii. 6-7.)

Man, made in the image of God, was ruined by the fall, yet so loved of God that He gave His only begotten Son to die for man's redemption. The highest honor that can come to God is that the Son should succeed in the work God gave Him to do; redeem man and bring him back to the place of purity and power from which he fell. Should that Son fail in His mission, or that plan be found weak and ineffective, it would be to the dishonor of God. God emptied Himself out into His Son. All of love, all of that which was Divine, all of that which is like God was crowded into the Son.

Listen to the mighty theologian who was "brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers." Hear him describe the Son of God who was sent to be a Savior, who was to be called Jesus, because He would save His people from their sins: "It pleased the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell." Col. i. 19. And again: "for in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Col. ii. 9. All of God that could be put into a body was put into the body Jesus bore, and sent to this earth to redeem man from sin and bring him back to holiness, purity and Heaven. And that is the greatest good, the most beneficial thing in the universe that could be done for man; his greatest good, and the success of that Son in so doing would bring the highest honor to God.

Now turn back to the words of Jesus. "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." How little Mary and Martha knew of the tremendously important part they were taking in a transaction that would give to the world a mighty, living example of the power of the Son of God; an example of that power which they never could disbelieve. He said to His disciples, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent that ye may believe." The Holy Ghost has put it on record that Jesus loved Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus. Has He placed it on record in your heart that He loves you? Are you as certain of it as those girls? I have no doubt but that He made known His love in many ways. But listen! When their brother was sick hear this message to them, "Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick," and when Jesus heard it He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God," and, "I am glad I was not there," for I will give you something that will forever establish my power in your minds, something the world can never gainsay.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming she went to meet Him, and her first words were, "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died." And Jesus replied, "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." When Mary met Him she said the same thing, "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died." Alas, how human we are! We cannot, or some way we many times fail to see beyond our own sorrows. Why, oh, why, did this happen? Lord, you could have prevented it. "If thou hadst been here my brother had not died." Oh, brother, sister, if you know that you love God, then lean back on the Word. If you know you have been called of Him and your all is entrusted to Him, no matter what happens, trust Him, for, though you may not now see or understand, it will work out for your good, and for His own glory.

Jesus asked where they had laid him. They came to the grave and a stone was in front of it. Jesus said, "Take ye away the stone." Martha said, "Why, Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he has been dead four days." But the stone was taken away, and after a short prayer Jesus commanded and the dead man came forth. The grave clothes were removed and then many of the Jews that had come to Mary and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on Him.

Lazarus lived and died a real death, such living and dying as are going on all about us these days. And Lazarus lying dead in the grave is a type of the sinner's condition. Dead means void. When one is dead he is void of life. When God said unto Adam, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," He meant it. Adam ate, sinned and died, became void of the Divine nature or life that he had been clothed with prior to the fall, and from that day men have been void of the Divine life. I know there is a very nice, flowery sentiment abroad called the "Fatherhood of God," and it sounds pretty, but it does not bear up under the test. All are born in sin. Sinners are not born in God's family. They are void of the Divine life, dead in trespasses and sins, children of the devil, and, unless they can be resurrected back to the Divine life and get entirely rid of the grave of sin and its clothes and bands, they will remain in it forever. What a spectacle to men and angels are the fruitless efforts put forth by a very large per cent. of the professing church of today to resurrect those dead in sin and get them out of the grave.

The pews are half or more empty so something must be done; a new carpet should be put down, then the folks will come; or the choir needs reorganizing, or disorganizing, and in its place supply a quartette. There is Prof. So-and-So; of course he is not a member and they say he takes a little too much wine at times, but his singing cannot be equaled and the folks will come to hear; so they put the whiskey devil up in the choir loft, but Lazarus remains in his grave. You say I am exaggerating? I tell you I have been in pulpits on a Sunday morning where the fumes of liquor from the choir loft were so strong that I could smell it. About one Sunday was enough for me.

Or some would-be-high-toned, Paris-fashioned, screeching female, whose words could not be distinguished by six persons in the room, is stuck up there to sing. Do the dead rise? Go and see.

Maybe we need a new preacher. This church must have a very highly educated man; a man who has traveled extensively. Our people are highly educated people (yes, and just so the cemetery is full of them) and they desire one of their own class. I labored in a town during the past year where the pastor was sent away to travel; on his return the officials of the church informed him that he must give lectures on Palestine and his travels on Sunday evenings. He was doing so while lost men and women, bound by the chains of sin, were dying and being damned all about him. Lazarus remained in his grave, and the old, dead, decaying body never stirred.

What a soul-damning farce is much of which we read today as so-called "great, sweeping revivals." A nicely flowered gospel, with a few stories about "Meeting your mamma in the sky," or "Little Willie is waiting for you;" come and give the preacher your hand and sign this card; and then the report goes out that thousands have been converted to Christ, while devils hold their jubilees in Hell and nobody is resurrected. Why? Well, because nobody sent for Jesus. The Son of God was not sent for, and had He come His first command would have struck terror to their hearts. Jesus said, "Where have ye laid him?" They said, "Come and see." Jesus came to the grave and a stone lay before it. Jesus said, "Take ye away the stone."

There is a God's side and a man's side in the plan of salvation. Men cannot do God's part, and God does not do and will not do His part until man does his best at his part. Jesus said, "Take ye away the stone," and His first word to the sinner is repent. John the Baptist came preaching, "Repent and bring forth fruit meet for repentance. Jesus preached repentance, and Peter's first sermon at Pentecost was freighted with it; when souls were pricked to the heart and came to him saying, "What shall we do?" he answered, "Repent." That afternoon on their way to the temple when the lame man was healed at the Gate called Beautiful, and the crowd ran together at Solomon's Porch, Peter again preached to them to repent. This,

man must do. This is a stone that must be rolled away. There are old grudges to be fixed up and wrongs to be righted. Lies to be confessed and old debts arranged for.

One of the hardest things in repentance for sinners to do is to confess their sins, but the Book says, "Our salvation depends much on our confessing." If we confess our sins. "If" is a little word, but read it again. If we confess our sins. What must we do? Confess our sins. What is it we are to confess? Our sins. Whose sins? Our sins. Ah, that is the stone, and what a heavy one it is; but there can be no resurrection until the stone is rolled away, and Jesus will not roll it away either. No, sir, not so much as lift His hands. Take ye away the stone. Brother, sister, you may try and try, pray, plead, beg beseech, work yourself up into a frenzy of excitement, or join a meeting house, be put under the water, or a thousand and one other things, but there will be no resurrection until you "take away the stone."

I have seldom gone into a community and begun work, and especially is this true during the last few years, but what there have always been a few careful Marthas about. Why, Lord, you don't mean to uncover that grave, do you? Why, he has been dead so long he stinketh. Why, Lord, we would like to have Brother Lazarus brought out, but can't you resurrect him, Lord, without having the stone rolled away? There will be a very bad odor, Lord, he stinketh. Oh, how the careful Marthas abound these days. They want their loved ones raised, converted, brought back to life, but oh, that confessing. You don't need to confess, it will raise a bad smell. Yes it will, but until that stone is rolled away Lazarus will remain in his grave, a putrefying corpse. The sinner being dead, void of Divine life, is a stench in the nostrils of God. Made in the image of God, man by sin has marred that image, and now, dead in sin, is a disgrace to his creator.

Can any one read those verses and then fail to see what God thinks of those away from Him? What a picture of a sinner is Lazarus lying in the grave, and the careful Marthas would about keep him there; but the Book says, "If we confess our sins, and before you will and a victory that is worthy of that name, you will have to out with them all. I expect there are many who have sins the same as yours, and they are resting quietly with a satisfied air, thinking that nobody knows; but when you come out with yours, it will put conviction on them. Yes, rolling away the stone will raise a bad smell, for "he stinketh," but it is the only way to get Lazarus out of the tomb, even after Jesus has come on the scene. But doesn't Jesus know? Yes, He knows. Well won't He roll away the stone? No, sir, He won't touch His fingers to it. He says, "Roll ye away the stone," and no matter what the Jews standing about may think or not think, no matter what the effects will be on the mind of the crowds that stand by listening and looking on, Jesus makes no mistakes and knows the outcome, and He says, "Take ye away the stone."

There is also the stone of unbelief that must be taken away. How often Jesus would inquire, "Believest thou I am able to do this?" before granting the prayer of some petition pleading for His help. When the answer would come, "Yea, Lord," how quickly would fall the words, "Go thy way, that faith hath healed thee," or, "Be it according to thy faith." Unbelief will keep the Son of God from working. "He did not many mighty works there on account of their unbelief." (Matt. xiii. 58.) When Martha said, "He hath been dead four days," Jesus said unto her, "Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldest believe thou shouldst see the glory of God? Had not Jesus said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the Glory of God?" Martha's questioning was at an end. Oh, that we would have a more implicit faith in the promise, "All things work together for our good," ever remembering that "He doeth all things well."

Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was. Now all was out of the way, and with His eyes toward the Throne Jesus prayed, "Father, I thank thee," giving the Father the credit and the glory. "And I knew that thou hearest me always, but because of the people which stand by I said it."

Because of the people; the crowd that was looking on. Those unsaved souls watching Him who professed to be the Son of God. Oh, how careful He was for their sakes. Beloved, are you that careful for the sake of the poor, lost, unsaved, perishing souls about you?

And why was Jesus so careful? Listen to the last sentence of His prayer -- "that they may believe that thou hast sent me." "That they may believe thou hast done all this. That thou, Father, art the one who is doing this work. That I am only thy mouthpiece. That thou shouldest receive the glory. That they may believe that thou hast sent me." He had said to His disciples "I am glad that I was not there, to the intent that ye may believe," and then, in the presence of the crowd, gives His command to take away that which shut Lazarus in, and rebukes Martha for her not fully believing His words to her and not obeying without reasoning the human side of it.

He spake and "he that was dead came forth." The Book says he was dead. No trance there ; not just asleep, but dead. Look there! See that which but a moment ago was a putrifying corpse rise up and come forth from that old rocky tomb. Can you imagine the consternation and awe that fell upon that crowd looking on? Did you ever sit up all night with a corpse? What if in the night that corpse rose up to life and walked around in the room? Do you think that to simply say you would have been surprised would do justice to your feeling at that time? Then what must that crowd have felt and thought at the sight? But I say to you that that transaction bears no more of the stamp of the supernatural than a sky-blue case of genuine, supernatural regeneration. It is away beyond all human reasoning or powers of perceptivity. You can no more explain it than you can explain the Trinity. You can explain much, yes, a large percentage of the so called trumped-up, card signing, give-the-preacher-your-hand, join-the-church conversions of today, but a real, genuine, Holy Ghost, supernatural case of regeneration you can no more explain than to say with him that was blind from his birth, "Where once I was blind now I see." Glory be to God the Father, and Glory be to the Son, and Glory be to the Holy Ghost! Hallelujah forever!

When one sees such a resurrection from death and trespasses and sin, it tells on the crowd. Bless God forever! Did you have such a resurrection when you were converted? Was there such a wonderful display of the supernatural that it would tell on the crowd round about? Oh, I like that cry, "Back to the Bible." It finds an echo in my heart, and I cry, Yes, Lord, back to the Bible, back to the supernatural: away with the sickly, sentimental trash that we see all about us these days. Back from this high-toned, kid-gloved, devil-concocted starch of today. Back from these damning, soul-withering, worldly embellishments and human reasoning that have been instituted in the place of the Holy Ghost, and let us have that old time ear-unstopping, limb-straightening, tongue-emptying power. Let us have the supernatural that glorifies God and glorifies the Son thereby. A power that will empty the sepulchres, break the chains, take off the bands and let the captive go free.

One more thought and I am through. "He that was dead came forth bound hand and foot with grave clothes." These were all placed on him while he was dead. What would the Jews have thought had Jesus said, "There now, that is enough, now we will all go home: and Jesus, Martha and Mary had gone off, leaving Lazarus standing there. Well, that is a pretty good picture of the ideas of many today. They got it all at once, there is no more for them, and so they proceed to tell us of their marvelous conversion; but if Lazarus had been left there with his grave clothes on, he would have starved to death; but Jesus had a second command; "Loose him and let him go." And the text says, "When the Jews which came to Mary had seen the thing that Jesus did, they believed on him." Brother, sister, when you were dead in sin there was something fastened to you that the brightest pardon God could give you would not remove. Jesus had nothing to say about grave clothes at first, but to that decaying, foul-smelling body, He spoke, life came to

it, and Lazarus came forth. Then He commanded the bands to be taken off. Inbred sin you brought with you from your old life. It is a result, or the marks of the grave that you have been in so long, and I care not how real nor how much of the supernatural there was about your regeneration, yet that thing, that mark of the grave is still there, and you have felt its restraining influence more than once. You have felt its desire to respond to the suggestions and temptations of the devil, but, thank God, Jesus is on hand this morning and He commands these bands to be taken off. Will you allow the work to be done? It can be done in a moment. The Blood can cleanse your heart and the Holy Ghost will come in in all His filling power, then you can go away as free as a bird. Free to do the whole will of God; free to obey Him implicitly; free to do right and to do nothing wrong. You can, like Lazarus, go away to be an example to your friends and your loved ones of what Jesus is able to do for your soul. Resurrect and let Him free you from sin. It will be for His highest glory and your greatest good, both in this and the world to come. Oh, show them such an example that, like the Jews that came to Mary, they will also believe on Him!

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. A sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters, they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they have gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more; the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." Isa. i. 2-6.

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