

Back To Life (Part One)

The Story of Lazarus

Martin G. Collins

Given 05-May-18; Sermon #1431

Dishonest sinful men who cannot win the argument against God's existence, resort to accusing Him of not doing enough to convince them of the truth of His revelation when, in fact, God has done a great deal. Nevertheless, it is never enough and they admit that He has acted but they declare that it is not sufficient.

In Christ's day the argument went: "If you are the Christ then prove it, do a miracle great enough to prove that you are who you claim to be." So the overwhelming facts on the subject are that people do actually have sufficient evidence and if they do not believe it is because they *will not* believe, not because the evidence is lacking.

Despite this however, we now go to the most impressive visible miracle in all of the gospels, the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead.

About a month before His own death and resurrection Jesus visited Bethany and performed His third miracle of resurrection: raising Lazarus from the dead. No one know how often Jesus visited the home of the sisters, Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus, but Scripture records some of His visits to their friendly, peaceful, loving home.

This resurrection is the most extraordinary of all His great works while in the flesh. It foreshadowed His own resurrection and made a profound impression in Jerusalem and in contrast brought the wrath of the Sanhedrin to a head, stirring them to decide to murder Jesus. After performing this miracle, He withdrew to the wilderness of Ephraim for some private time with His disciples before the Passover and His final hours.

How are we to take this miracle? Is this a miracle given by Jesus as one last attempt to convince His enemies that He is indeed God? If so, it was unsuccessful because the narrative ends with an even greater determination by Christ's enemies to have Him killed.

Or was it performed largely out of compassion for Christ's friends? On the surface this seems reasonable, but if this is the case, then why did Jesus delay His return to Bethany for two days, as the records indicate?

As we plunge into this story we find that the real motive was so that God's glory would be revealed and that God's Son may be glorified through it. In other words, precisely the motive that John gives elsewhere for the other miracles.

Now in this case the miracle is given to reveal Christ as the resurrection and the life. It is only an incidental reason to this that some believe and that other hearts are hardened.

John 11:1-2 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.

Of the three friends, Martha is the last one mentioned. But we will begin with her because in many senses, she was the most prominent person and the effect of the miracle, for her, was the most notable. In fact, her brother Lazarus' resurrection seems to have been a turning point for her.

More information about Martha is contained in the story of a visit by Jesus to Mary and Martha's home told in Luke 10. Jesus had gone to Bethany and was invited to the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus for dinner. Lazarus is not mentioned in this story, but we are told that Mary sat at Jesus' feet to learn from Him, while Martha was encumbered by substantial serving. So immediately we see a comparison, or contrast.

Luke 10:38-42 Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him

into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part [that is to learn of God's way of life], which will not be taken away from her."

Now it is not the fact that she was serving that was the problem, rather it was that she was all worked up about it and was being unkind to others as a result. Here was one guest, Jesus Christ, but Martha was so worked up about His visit that she wanted Mary to leave Him alone in the living room until the chores were done. So we see here that Martha valued the physical concerns of the world rather than God's truth and the spiritual and eternal things to come that Christ was teaching.

With this story in mind we will turn to another story, the story mentioned by John in the opening verses of chapter 11, but actually told by him in chapter 12. It is also told by Matthew in Matthew 6 and by Mark in Mark 14.

Once again, the setting is Bethany, the town of Martha and Mary. But the home is not Martha's home, it was the home of Simon, identified as "the leper" by Mark, a man who had undoubtedly been healed by Jesus. Again, the occasion here is a dinner party of sorts.

John 12:1-2 Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.

Notice two things here. First is that it was a large party, there were a lot of people there. On this occasion Jesus was present with His disciples (verse 4), that alone makes 13 people. In addition to these were: Simon, Mary, Lazarus, and Martha, and that makes 17 at that point, but 16 if Martha is not counted.

Secondly, notice that Martha once again is serving. However on this occasion she does not seem to be the least bit troubled, but rather seems to be serving with a light spirit and upbeat attitude.

In the former occasion she had one guest and was troubled, now she has 16 guests and is not troubled. What made the difference here? Obviously only the resurrection of her brother, which occurred between the two suppers, in which she learned to get her mind off of herself and onto Jesus Christ.

We are not left to surmise this because there is a clue to this interpretation in the early story. It is the use of the pronouns “my” and “me” in her complaint to Jesus. In all, they are used three times. Three times she emphasized that she was concerned about herself, thus showing where her focus.

Martha did not have her mind on Jesus at this point or even on the welfare of Mary, she was focused entirely on herself and because of that she felt unappreciated, neglected, and abused. Later, when she had gotten her mind off of herself and onto Jesus, she lost those feelings and did what she did cheerfully. She served with all that she could for others and not for herself.

Now what if we apply that to ourselves? Is it easy to do it, particularly if we are the ones who, like Martha, have a gift for serving? There is nothing wrong with serving, that much is very clear in the Scriptures. So the question is not should we or should we not serve, rather it is who am I serving and how. Are you serving yourself or are you trying to build up a reputation for yourself? Or are you serving Jesus Christ and is your mind on Him?

Now I can assure you that if you are bothered about countless things, or if you feel neglected, your mind is on yourself and you need to reestablish your relationship with Christ who imparts new life and who causes us to forget ourselves.

If you are truly serving Him you will count such service as pleasure and if others are not helping, then that is fine, because you are not serving you or them primarily, but rather you are serving Christ. Our mind must always be

that we are serving God and Christ. It does not matter what others think or if others appreciate what is done, because you are not doing it for them, you are doing it for Christ.

This brings us to the second of these three friends, which is Lazarus, the man whom Christ raised from the dead. It is interesting that never once is it recorded, in John or the other gospels, that Lazarus says a word. He appears to be silent.

We see Martha and Mary talking, but Lazarus says nothing, he is perfectly silent. Yet when we come to the end of the story at that supper at Simon's house, recorded in John 12, we find that Lazarus has become a great and effective witness to Jesus.

How did Lazarus become such a great witness if he said nothing? It is evident that he became a witness in the first instance by the fact that Jesus had raised him from the dead.

In Jesus' time funerals were public affairs and were well attended. Everyone knew that Lazarus had died. We read several times of the crowd that had joined Martha and Mary in mourning for Lazarus, that accompanied Mary when she left the house to go to Jesus.

Now Lazarus was alive and anyone who wanted to see him, hundreds, perhaps even thousands, came to Bethany and left marveling. Besides, Lazarus was a witness to Christ in the fact that he was with Christ and was identified with Christ. And in the story of the dinner given at Simon's house, we are told that Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him, that is, with Jesus Christ.

In other words where he was and what had happened to him was a testimony, because by his presence at the table he indicated that his life was identified with the One that had accomplished his resurrection. This too is easy to apply. Neither you nor I have been raised from a physical death by Jesus and since we understand the miracles in this gospel, we can understand the raising of Lazarus as a type of a spiritual resurrection.

The Bible teaches that before believing in Christ men and women are spiritually dead. Dead in transgressions and sins, as Paul indicates in Ephesians 2:1. But after believing in Christ, they are made alive. If you are a Christian, you have been made alive spiritually.

Now every Christian should be able to give a verbal witness to what Jesus has done, but not everyone can give a witness by words all that easily; not every one is gifted with speech in such a way that they can explain God's truth.

We do not always have to speak well, but we do need to be careful that our life itself demonstrates the reality of that change, that "resurrection" that Jesus has performed in you, so that others might turn to Him and believe in Him because of what they see.

Some people have great verbal witness but they produce very little "fruit" to be seen. On the other hand it is possibly to say very little yet have a deep and lasting witness, because the life itself is evidence of Christ's great grace and power and the work that He is doing in each and every one of His people.

Third and finally we come to Mary, who is in some respects the most delightful and rewarding character of all. We are going to be seeing more of her later in chapters 11 and 12, nevertheless at this stage it is worth noting some of the important things about her.

For one thing the gospels always present Mary as being at Jesus' feet. In the first of these three stories, the story involves Martha's rebuke, we see Mary listening to Jesus and learning from Him. In Luke 10:39 the story says:

Luke 10:39 And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word.

In John 11 we find the same thing, except here we find her expressing belief. Lazarus had died, Jesus had come and talked to Martha, and then He called for Mary who came running at once and fell at His feet.

John 11:32 Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”

So earlier when Jesus had talked to Martha, she had said nearly the same thing but her words must be understood as having expressed a complaint. The implication of what she said here was: “Lord, if you had been here, instead of wasting time with your work beyond the Jordan, my brother would not have had to die.” She did not say that outright, but because of her emphasis on herself, that is basically what she was inferring.

Mary however expressed her faith. She said, “Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died.” She did not mention herself at all in that.

In John 12:3, we see Mary in the house of Simon where she had just broken the alabaster flask of ointment at His feet anointing His head and feet and then wiping His feet with her hair. This leads us to another thought about Mary, because if we ask why Mary anointed Christ with the ointment, the answer is that she did in view of His coming death. Jesus says this Himself in verse 7.

John 12:7 But Jesus said, “Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.”

Now this means that of all those who were with Jesus during the final months of His life, only Mary at this time understood that He was going to die for sin. The rest of them were complaining about her using that valuable oil. We may ask how did Mary come to know this while the others apparently failed to understand it. The answer is found in the list of the points made about her, namely that she had spent time learning at the feet of Jesus. She seemed to have a more intense teaching and learning than many of the others. Her desire to learn as much as she could about God’s way of life and Christ was so intense that she was always found at the feet of Jesus.

Now the use of the ointment suggests that because Mary understood what Jesus was about to do and because she loved Him for it, she was prepared to

give Him her all. Two details of the story indicate this. First was the value of the ointment. This impressed everyone that was there at the dinner because the ointment was accessed at a value of 300 denarii. A denarii was a normal day's wage for a working man. So this oil would equate to 300 days worth of wages. So no wonder it seemed like a waste to many.

The second detail is that Mary broke the flask that had contained the ointment.

Mark 14:3-5 And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman [Mary] came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head. But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply.

Pouring oil on someone's head in biblical symbolism represents God's favor and is compared to the refreshment of anointing oil on the head as seen, for example in Psalm 45:7.

Here she was doing something that Christ praised, and you might be surprised at how much praise she received in doing that, and yet they were criticizing her for doing so.

Mary gave her most valuable possession and gave it so completely that she even broke the flask that none of the precious substance would not remain in it. She poured the ointment over Jesus' head and some of it ran down to Jesus feet.

John 12:3 Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

Now why was the house filled with the fragrance of the perfume? It could have drifted about naturally, but on the other hand, if Mary had wiped Christ's feet with her hair, and if she moved around then the aroma would have spread through the house because it was on her hair. It clung to her and

spread from her, and if this is so then it suggests that in giving her all to Christ, Mary had become identified with Christ and become a blessing to all.

Now this message can be applied by a series of questions. Here were three persons, all different, yet all were affected by their close contact with Jesus Christ. First there is Martha. Martha served and this was her special function and she did it well, but initially she served for herself and only later did she learn to serve for Christ.

Second there was Lazarus. Lazarus only sat, he did not say a word, however where he sat mattered and what he stood for mattered. So the question is, are you like him? Can others see that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ and that He has changed you?

Then third, we have Mary. Mary poured, she poured out the perfume of her life and so became a blessing. Again I ask, are you like her? Have you broken your flask and poured out your all for Him? Or do we just do it half-hardheartedly?

Jesus said that what Mary had done would be remembered throughout the whole world. That is quite a statement, but that was not only a statement, but also a prophecy and a promise.

Mark 14:9 “Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.”

The inclusion of the story in the written gospels fulfills Jesus’ prediction that the story would be told wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world. It is important to realize what Jesus’ prophesy of this reveals. Jesus erected for her an eternal monument as lasting as the gospel, the eternal Word of God!

From generation to generation, Christ’s extraordinary prophesy has been fulfilled. And even we, in explaining this promise by Jesus, contribute to this accomplishment. Who else had the power to ensure to any work of man an imperishable remembrance in the stream of history? We are witnessing here a magnificence of His supremacy over the events and history and the world

in this proclamation. It is also a validation of the Scriptures. This simple thing in the Scripture shows us so much of God's power!

There are many kinds of memorials, monuments, books, tombstones, but the greatest is to be remembered as one who gave everything to Jesus Christ.

We have briefly looked at and learned something from the characters who figure into John 11—Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Now let us look at how the story begins. It does not start with their past associations with Jesus, nor even with expectation of their future blessing. It begins with a problem.

The problem is that Lazarus was dying. This is a problem with which we can all identify because it has either come to us already or it will come to us in the future. In this life most people develop at least some close relationships, whether friends or family, and we value these very highly, we would give anything to maintain them. Yet still from time to time the natural calamities of life intrude into our happiness and we find our closest friends wrenched from us by accidents or sickness and eventually death.

In such moments some question the presence or love of God. How could God let this happen? Others, even those who do not doubt God's love and faithfulness, find their faith tested. What are we to think in such circumstances? What should we do? Well there is probably not a better example of what we are to do than the example given to us by Martha and Mary at the beginning of this story. The answer is that sisters told Jesus of their problem.

John 11:3 Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."

The fact that the sisters did this is significant and how they did it is even more significant. Before we look at the way in which Martha and Mary approached Jesus, we need to notice an obvious point, because it is often forgotten. This point is simply that even those whom Jesus especially loves get sick and eventually die. When the sisters approached Jesus, they did so based on His love for Lazarus.

They loved Jesus and His love for them was even greater, nevertheless Lazarus was sick and failing. Now keep in mind here that there are two main words for “sick” but the main Greek word that John uses here implies that he was deathly sick; on his deathbed. In other words, we are to learn from this that sickness in a faithful person is no way incompatible with Christ’s love for us.

It may be that Mary and Martha, knowing little of God’s ways at this point in their lives, were surprised that someone whom Jesus loved could be deathly sick. There is just a hint of this surprise in the word “behold.” However they should not have been so surprised. First, because the man whom Jesus loved is after all still just a man and so is susceptible to sickness. It is the nature of being a man to suffer bodily ailments.

Now the love of God does not separate us from the common necessities and infirmities of human life. Men and women of God are still human. So let us learn from this and not be surprised when we, or those we love, suffer illnesses, even suffering till death.

Job 5:7 “Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.”

We have serious trials in our lives that is inevitable. Hebrews 9:27 says, with absolute clarity:

Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.

We should know that illnesses is often a way of God stirring our spirit and of leading us on in the Christian life. It is used by God for our own good. There is always good that comes from whatever God allows. Many have known this. David knew it, because he wrote in Psalm 119:

Psalm 119:71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.

So sickness helped him to love and understand the Scriptures. This is how it has been for thousands who have been tested. Sickness has been a trial, but it has been a trial that was used by God for good.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

We should also note that sickness in us is also sometimes used by God for the good of others and we should not be surprised by it. So it is obvious that this is what is involved in what Jesus says as He does later in verse 4 of John 11.

John 11:4 When Jesus heard that, He said, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

So if God is glorified by a Christian's illness, then the illness is for God's good and for the good of all who see His particular demonstration of His glory.

In the case of Lazarus, to give just one example, for twenty centuries believers have been receiving good from it. And even today, as we study it, we are spiritually richer because the beloved brother of Mary and Martha died.

Now we are not to desire sickness, nor does it mean that we cannot tell Jesus of our desire to have the sick ones made well. At that point the words of the two sisters provides an example to us of what we may do in sickness and of how we may pray about it. Notice that in the first place the sisters did pray, or we should say, in their case, they brought the matter to Jesus.

It is always good to bring troubles to Christ, in fact it is good to always be in communication with Him about everything. Often we go about life and think this is too inconsequential to go to God about, but quite often it is what we think are inconsequential or gray areas where we need the most help seeing clearly.

Psalm 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. [Yet, to our shame, how little we know Him as such.]

When the people murmured against Moses, we are told in Exodus 15:

Exodus 15:25 So he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet. There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them.

So we never know what God's answer is going to be or what He is going to show us when we go to Him. It might be something that we think is totally off the wall, like showing Moses a tree.

Isaiah 37:14 And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers [Rabshakeh], and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord.

He did not know what to do about these people, so he even took the letter and spread it out before the Lord. He put it before the Lord because he needed counsel. When John the Baptist was beheaded in Matthew 14 it says:

Matthew 14:12 Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

So there are endless scenarios that show that we should be taking things to Christ in prayer and to the Father.

What tremendous examples these are for us. We do not have a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Rather He is full of compassion because while on earth He too was acquainted with grief and He sympathizes deeply with His suffering people and invites us to pour out the anguish of our hearts before Him.

Mary and Martha showed great wisdom in acquainting Jesus with their problem and so do we when we do the same. It is true that Jesus already

knows our problems. He knows everything about us, but He still invites us to tell Him and to receive that heart relief that only He is capable of giving.

Now this leads us to the second characteristic of the sisters' prayer: the basis of their appeal. What was their appeal founded upon? What drove them to make this appeal? Was it that they had served Him faithfully and had been true to Him while others of the disciples had dropped away? No. Was it that they loved Him? No, that was not it either. The basis of the appeal was that He loved them!

It was in God's love rather than in the love of man that they took refuge, that is why they went to Jesus with this problem. There is no comfort in the reverse. Suppose for a minute that their appeal had been that they or Lazarus had loved Jesus? That would have been true, at least in part, because they did love Him. But if they had appealed on that basis, they would soon have been asking, "Had we loved Him enough? Has our love been a pure love? Have we offended Him?" The honest answers to those questions would have thrown them into a quagmire of self-doubt.

However, this is not what they did. They did love Him, but they knew that their love for Jesus would never in a million years be an adequate basis for their appeal. So their appeal was not that they loved Him, but rather that He loved them.

He had loved them freely when there was nothing in them to commend them to Him. He had loved them faithfully when they were faithless. And He had loved them with an everlasting love as only God can love. And this was the basis, the only grounds that any of us can ever have in approaching the Almighty.

Furthermore, in coming to Jesus in this way, the sisters came not seeking their own will, but rather the will of Jesus. For one thing they did not actually make a request, nevertheless a request was implied. There was the implication that they would like Jesus to come to their aid and there was the suggestion that He might help them by healing Lazarus. If this is not implied, then there is no point in even sending Christ the message.

At the same time, we cannot miss feeling that when they phrased the report as they did, they indicated by the wording that they were seeking His will rather than theirs in the matter. We might do something similar in our prayers. It is not so much the words you use, but rather the desire of your heart.

Certainly we would like the trouble removed, the sick one healed, but is that really what you want? Or is it that God's will might be done regardless of the outcome? Even Jesus desired that He not have to go through the suffering He knew was about to come upon Him. Nevertheless He committed Himself to the Father's will.

Luke 22:42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."

So it is only when we pray that God's will be done that we are enabled to make our request known to God. But the peace of God that passes all understanding keeps our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ.

Also we need that peace of mind if only because God does not always act in the way we think He should act, or even when we think He should act. Nothing is clearer than this from the story. No doubt when Mary and Martha first told Jesus about Lazarus' sickness, they expected to see him recover as soon as the message was received, or else they expected Jesus to come immediately to their aid. But neither of these things happened. Instead of getting better, Lazarus got worse and died. Instead of coming, Jesus remained where He was for two more days and then came to them at least a full four days after Lazarus' death.

Jesus wanted there to be no doubt that Lazarus was not only dead, but he was decomposing and on his way to dust. From this we learn that Jesus may be completely informed of our troubles, and yet act as though He were indifferent to it. So we learn that prayer for the sick may not be answered in the way that we would like.

If God always answered our prayers for the sick, no one would ever have to suffer the full effects of sickness or even death, as long as he had a friend or

relative to pray for him. So how can God possibly answer everyone's prayer for the sick immediately? It has to be according to His will and it has to be good for everyone involved.

The comfort in our prayers is not in the fact that Jesus always answers them as we wish, because He does not. Rather the comfort is in the fact that He who made us and controls all circumstances, knows best and is well able to direct sickness and death to His glory.

As the resurrection and the life, Christ raised Lazarus from the dead to physical life which was obviously to His glory. And we receive tremendous encouragement and comfort in knowing that He is the resurrection and the life for us to eternal life.

So this miracle had gone throughout history as encouragement to God's people and will continue still through history.

Does anyone know how your life story will end? No human knows, but there is one who does know, that is God the Father. He knows and allows and determines when and how we die.

We will continue reading the story here in John 11.

John 11:4 When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

The word "death" here is equivalent to remaining under death; permanent; or unchanging death as opposed to eternal life. The word that Jesus immediately adds show that Lazarus would expire and that Jesus would raise him up to demonstrate the power and glory of God. Now compare this with verse 11.

John 11:11 These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up."

Those words cannot be understood in any other way except in that Jesus expected to raise him up. Christ used expressions similar to this to emphasize what He was about to say as an explanation.

So Lazarus' sickness was temporarily fatal, but not designed for his death, but rather to furnish an opportunity for an overt display of the glory of God and to furnish an irrefutable proof of the truth of God.

It is intended to exhibit the power of the Son of God and to be an immediate proof of the truth of His work, of His friendship for His family, of His mild, tender, and special love as a Man, and of His power and glory as Messiah, as well as of the great doctrine that the dead will rise.

By the time Jesus had received the message, Lazarus had probably already died, so Jesus was announcing that the final outcome was to be a demonstration of the glory of God through His death and resurrection. So Lazarus' sickness would not end in death, that is in permanent death, instead Jesus would be glorified in this incident. This statement is ironic. Jesus' power and obedience to the Father were displayed, but this event led to His death, which was His true glory because of what it accomplished.

John 17:1 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You."

Only God knows the future and because He knows and because He loves us and is concerned for us, He enjoys revealing at least parts of that future to us.

Think of the book of Isaiah for instance. In the center of that book in a series of chapters dealing with the non-validity of pagan gods. In chapters 40-48, God taunts the idols based on their inability to tell the future. He says this:

Isaiah 41:21-24 "Present your case," says the Lord. "Bring forth your strong reasons," says the King of Jacob. "Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; let them show the former things, what they were, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare to us things to come. Show the things that

are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; yes, do good or do evil, that we may be dismayed and see it together. Indeed you are nothing, and your work is nothing; he who chooses you is an abomination.”

The point of this passage is that only God can tell the future because only God controls it. And the fact that He does tell it is one of the proofs that He alone is the true God. God does not only reveal the future to demonstrate that He is God, He also does it to warn the ungodly of judgment and to encourage those who are His own.

We find this thought as early in the Bible as Genesis 3. God placed the first man and woman in the Garden and warned them of death if they eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree, but they ate it anyway. So when God came to them, He came with words of judgment that were nevertheless at the same time words of promise. He told of the years of hardship, pain for women in childbirth, and toil for the man as he would work to earn a living.

But these same words also told of the coming of One who would eventually destroy the works of Satan. The promise so captivated Eve that she named her first son Cain, meaning, in rough translation, “here he is,” because she thought wrongly that Cain was the one whom God had promised to send.

In Hosea we find the same thing. God used the story of Hosea’s life to illustrate the pending judgment upon the scattering of the children of Israel. The symbolic names of his three children were to indicate this future. Their symbolic names were: “scattered,” “not pitied,” and “not My people.” That was a summary of the history of Israel. At the same time, God told the blessing that would come after the scattering, thereby encouraging those who would have to live through the chastisement. So we read at the beginning of the story, but as a description of the end,

Hosea 1:10 “Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ [the name of Hosea’s last child] there it shall be said to them, ‘You are sons of the living God.’”

Although He gave those three names to Hosea's children, the fourth would have been, "You are sons of the living God.." So He ended on a positive note there.

At this point we have established the background that God foretells the future in order to demonstrate His power to control it; to warn the unsaved; and to encourage the believers.

Now returning to the story, Jesus said that the outcome would be glorifying to God. Notice that while this was true, we are going to see how it was true. It was not true in the way that the sisters might have naturally expected.

Christ's words were probably immediately reported to Martha and Mary, but they came about 24 hours after Lazarus had passed away. We can picture the sisters saying, "Jesus is mistaken, if He had been here earlier, He might have cured our brother. That would have been glorifying to God, but now Lazarus is dead and it's too late." It would have been natural for them to have thought this way, but if they did, it was wrong. In fact, the outcome, though different from their plans, was going to result in far more glory to God than they could have ever imagined.

The resurrection of Lazarus was, in itself, glorifying to God. That much is obvious. To glorify God means to acknowledge Him as being who He truly is and since one of God's attributes is omnipotence, clearly the resurrection of Lazarus caused many to acknowledge His great power and in so doing glorified Him.

At the same time, however, the glory of God was seen in an even greater sense in the changed lives of those who either took part in it or those who witnessed the miracle. We see the effect on Lazarus. Nowhere in the entire Bible are we told that Lazarus said anything, but we are told toward the end of the story that he became a great witness.

John 12:11 because on account of him [that is Lazarus] many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

He had not said a word, but yet this happened. How did this happen? We know that when a person comes to the place where he is going to die,

especially if he is a converted person, it has an affect on him. So when Lazarus died and rose again, he undoubtedly emerged as one who had experienced a profound transformation and who show it by his demeanor.

You are changed when you come to the place where you have died to self and have been made alive to Christ and when you have truly become a new creation in Him, in this though, you may have to suffer greatly. The end, as Christ says, will be to God's glory.

The resurrection also had an effect on the sisters. Before it, Martha had the wrong approach when serving just one guest. After the resurrection she served Jesus and a whole houseful of people gracefully. And Mary came to understand that Jesus was going to give His life so that all the Mary's, Martha's, and Lazarus' in the world might not have to die spiritually, but might instead enter into newness of life and in joy and eternity of God's blessing.

Mary indicated this when she anointed Christ's head with the oil, because Jesus said that she did it in anticipation of His death and burial.

Now notice also that the death and resurrection of Lazarus had an affect on the disciples as well, and this also glorified God. We are not told in so many words what the effect of the miracle was, but before it Jesus was explaining to them what He was about to do.

John 11:14-15 Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him."

Taken by itself, the first half of verse 15 is astounding. Lazarus was dead and Jesus was glad? How can that be? But later Jesus teaches us that we should not be surprised by what He says nor disheartened by circumstances. We have to wait and see what He means. Sometimes, we do not understand things right away, but we have to wait until God reveals what is meant.

Nothing ever happens to us unless He first approves it and nothing is approved unless He has previously appointed it to have good results. Lazarus died, yes. The sisters were sorrowing, yes. But the end would be good even

for them in their sorrow, because in their case the outcome would be a strengthening of faith in Christ and they would eventually influence thousands of people.

So we must learn from this in preparation for times when trouble comes to us. We must not complain about the way in which God is working things out. Our attitude should be one of, "I may not see it, but I know that this trouble might have come upon me for the sake of some friend." We have to ask God to help us to trust Him and enable us to grow through the experience.

Notice that the death and resurrection of Lazarus had an effect on the immediate friends of the family. They obviously had many friends.

John 11:19 And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

So these were the family friends. We know that when there is a death the family and friends gather around the family as an act of courtesy and to express sympathy. This is part of our lives and it was a part of their lives as well.

John 11:45 Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.

They came to sympathize and they remain to believe. So the effect of Lazarus' death is seen in the family friends. What about the acquaintances, the ones that they did not know personally? What happened when Jesus reaches the tomb site of Lazarus and prays?

John 11:41-42 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me."

So here is a circle of people just standing by, they knew that Lazarus was dead, they knew that Jesus had come and many of them were important

people of the community. Did these people believe? Well, some did, and others apparently did not. We are told that these doubters went down to inform the religious authorities.

John 11:46 But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did.

To these last doubters Lazarus' resurrection was an indictment and a condemnation, because although it was irrefutable evidence of Christ's power, they would not accept it and it therefore increased their guilt. Even through this, though, God was still glorified because He had been patient in demonstrating His great love and power to sinners.

John 11:4 When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

Let us look at one more phrase that deserves some consideration. Jesus had said that the sickness of Lazarus was not unto death in the final sense, but rather that it was for God's glory. He then added at the end of verse 4, "that the Son of God may be glorified through it." How is Jesus glorified through Lazarus' death?

There are two obvious answers and one that is not so obvious. First, since Jesus is God, obviously anything that brings honor to God the Father brings honor to Christ also. This is made clear if we compare John 2:11, the verse that concludes the account of Christ's first miracle, with John 11:40, the verse that sums up Lazarus' death.

John 2:11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested [or revealed] His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

John 11:40 Jesus said to her [Martha], "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

Christ's glory and God's glory are one and the same in a sense because Christ is a member of the God Family.

John 5:23 That all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

John 14:9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Now the second way that Jesus was glorified is that the death and resurrection of Lazarus revealed Him as one who was able to deal with any situation. The story tells us that Jesus delayed His return to Bethany until Lazarus had died and been buried for four days.

In a sense Jesus placed Himself into a predicament by this delay, but He did it only so that He would have the opportunity to get Himself out of it. It seems that God does that with every one of us on a regular basis. If God wants us to trust in Him, He puts us in a place of difficulty. If He wants us to trust Him greatly, He puts us in a place of impossibility. Because when a thing is impossible then we, who are prone to try to solve things through our own force, have to admit to God that we do not have the solution, because the only solution is a miracle from Him.

The third and final way that Jesus was glorified is a point that is not so obvious. Jesus said that He Himself was to be glorified by what was to come. And what was to come was not only the resurrection, it was also His own crucifixion to which the term "glorify" often refers in John's gospels.

John 7:39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

There we are told that the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified, that He had not yet died. Now notice also John 12 when the Greeks come to Him.

John 12:23 But Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.”

It is obvious that Jesus is thinking of His death in this passage because He immediately goes on to speak in imagery of the grain of wheat that must fall into the ground and die. In the same way, a few verses earlier, we read:

John 12:16 His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, [that is had been crucified and had risen] then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.

So the raising of Lazarus was to result in Christ’s death therefore, and it did. This was the final spark needed to explode the accumulated hostility of the leaders against Him and to propel them toward the ultimate murder. As for Jesus, He foresaw the outcome and still moved towards it.

The ills of this life are no accident for a true child of God. We can be pleased that God, who knows the future, has chosen to reveal the outcome to us, but it is still hard to suffer. Nevertheless Jesus Christ went through it all before us and He asks us to suffer. He even commands us to recognize that we are to suffer for His sake.

He ordains it, but He does not ask us to do anything that He has not done first, nor does He ask us at the same time to suffer without promising to go with us through the testing. The fact that He has done it is in itself an encouragement. He died yet rose again; He suffered yet triumphed gloriously and so will we.

This present sickness, whatever it may be, is not unto eternal death but for the glory of God that the Son of God might be glorified by it.