

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Lazarus Alive!

Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go. (John 11:39–44, KJV 1900)

As we observe the reality of death taking those whom we love, we can more appreciate Martha's struggle. When the proverbial "Rubber hits the pavement," can Jesus actually restore life to a man whose body has been dead for four whole days? Medical science measures the maximum time of oxygen starvation to the human body in minutes, not hours, much less days. Permanent damage occurs in the brain in less than ten minutes without oxygen. Martha does us a favor by reminding us of the degree of the miracle that Jesus shall perform in raising her brother from the dead. Jesus literally reversed the cellular degeneration that had occurred, but He did far more. He restored that wonderful mysterious link of life to Lazarus.

Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Jesus does not impose a condition on Lazarus being raised, but on Martha seeing God's glory. Take careful note. God likely works miracles far more frequently in our lives than we realize. Whether we recognize the miracle and see God's glory or not depends on our faith. Are we looking for His miracle or not? One person may experience a miracle and celebrate "Good fortune," or thank an excellent surgeon for his skill. Another person may experience exactly the same event and thank the Lord for the miracle. How often do we blind ourselves to the Lord's gracious miracles by our unbelief? Our own unbelief robs us of the joy and comfort of seeing God's glory.

When our oldest daughter was barely two years old, one Saturday morning I put her in my car (Of course, no seat belts then. Mom or Dad's arms were baby's "seat belt") to drive to the local home improvement store to get supplies for my day of chores. I had my route well memorized. I'd drive to the stop sign on Taylor and cross the street for my most direct route to the store. Taylor was a four lane through street with a 35 mph speed limit. I stopped at Taylor, looked both ways, and saw no cars approaching near the intersection. I moved my right foot from the brake to the gas pedal, fully thinking of driving straight across Taylor. Almost

immediately, my mind "Heard" as clearly as if someone had shouted at me, "Turn right!" Without thinking, I immediately sharply turned the car to my right. At that moment, a car went through the intersection, likely going in excess of 70 mph. Had I driven across the street as planned, that car would have "T-Boned" my car and killed both of us. I haven't had many such experiences, but I had one that day. To my last breath, no one could convince me that the Lord didn't speak to me to spare Kelli and me. And I thank Him often for that moment of merciful and loving deliverance.

Sadly, some folks seem to have the idea that they can ask the Lord for just about anything they wish, and, if they ask "In Jesus' name" or otherwise go through the right motions, God is obligated to grant their petition. Not so. Let's suppose that you go through all the supposedly right motions and words with Petition A, and I go through all the same right motions, but I pray Petition B, the mirror opposite to your request. Obviously, the Lord will not grant both requests. Godly prayer may well address our deepest needs and problems—and it should—but, in the end, every prayer should be framed with the desire and request that the Lord do what is most fitting to His glory. Jesus framed His prayer to the Father in this way when he responded to Martha.

Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. We are prone to think in terms of answered prayers and unanswered prayers. We chalk up our answered prayers to God hearing us and our unanswered prayers to His not hearing us. Make no mistake. The Lord hears every prayer. He may answer some of our prayers by denying our request rather than granting it. James explains, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." (James 4:3) God not only weighs our request; He also considers our motive. Do we pray for a certain thing with the

motive of greater glory to God or greater comfort and convenience for ourselves?

Don't overlook that Jesus knew that the Father always heard His prayers, along with the implication that the Father always granted them. Jesus never prayed with a bad motive or for a foolish petition to be granted. Jesus didn't pray on this occasion for His sake, but to aid His children who stood by and observed the events of the moment. When Lazarus revived and came out of the tomb, Jesus intended that they know why. Bless Martha; she needed this prayer from Jesus fully as much as others who stood by. Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit intervene in our godly, faith-filled prayers. (Romans 8:26-27) When we so pray, our words do not go before the Father as orphans. They go with the united petition of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. And the Father grants. Remember; the Father never fails to respond to Jesus' prayers. Every prayer you ever prayed that was granted went through this loving, gracious intervention and endorsement.

...that they may believe.... Jesus adds another filter to the prayer question. His intervention, His joining our prayers and sending them on to the Father aims at increasing our belief in Him, "*...that thou hast sent me.*" Think about one of your recent prayers. How much thought did you give to these two filters, God's glory and your believing in Jesus? Did you think in these terms at all? Or were you absorbed in your personal pain or sense of need so deeply that you neglected these filters?

Any belief that we experience is as good or as bad as the facts or non-facts that we embrace as true. If we believe that something is true when it is in fact false, our belief is nothing more than self-deception. It sets us up for cruel disappointment. It was not Mary's or Martha's belief that prompted Jesus to raise Lazarus, though He obviously felt deeply for their grief. He raised Lazarus to thereby give glory to God and to deepen the disciples' faith in Him. Believing something doesn't make that thing true or false. Our belief puts our minds in harmony with the facts of the situation. Our belief in Jesus' power to raise the dead doesn't cause the resurrection, but it richly frames our minds to praise God and to believe all the more in Him than ever in the past.

Lazarus, come forth. Three words, just three words. You and I could utter a thousand words, and Lazarus would remain lifeless in the tomb. However, when Jesus spoke those words, Lazarus got up and stumbled out. Notice the description of Lazarus' burial state. His body was bound, similar to the Egyptian method of preparing the body for burial. That same body that had reached a pervasive state of degeneration came back to life. That brain that was dead for four days processed the sound of Jesus' voice, understood its meaning, and obeyed. He got up and, despite the grave wrappings, walked out of the tomb.

And he that was dead came forth. Occasionally people who claim to believe the Bible to be God's

inspired word try to deny that it teaches anything at all regarding a literal, physical bodily resurrection. They have a major problem with this passage! Lazarus didn't revive in another body, but in the same body that he occupied up to that point in his life. When Jesus confronted and refuted the Sadducees who denied the truth of the resurrection, He charged them with two foundational problems that fed their unbelief. They didn't know the Scriptures, and they didn't understand the power of God. He cited one simple passage from the third chapter of Exodus to prove that they didn't know the Scriptures. In addition to denying the resurrection, the Sadducees also denied any life after death. When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, He told Moses "I AM" was His name. He enlarged the point.

Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God. (Exodus 3:6)

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead literally for centuries when God spoke these words to Moses. Yet God didn't say, "I was the God of...." He said, "**I am** the God of...." Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, though their bodies were dead, were very much alive in glory with the Lord. By making this point, Jesus refutes the Sadducees' denial of life after death, and, by implication—Jesus' implication, mind you—He also affirmed the resurrection. Any belief system that acknowledges continuing life after death, but rejects a literal, physical, bodily resurrection is no better than first century Sadducee error. Scripture affirms that the resurrected body shall undergo an amazing change, but it affirms that it is the same body in which we lived—and died—that shall be so changed.

*Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but **we shall all be changed.*** (1 Corinthians 15:51; emphasis added)

You can't "change" something unless you are dealing with that same "Something" in the first place. If God didn't raise the body in which we lived, He couldn't "Change" it, could He? If God gives His children a new heavenly or "Spiritual" body at death or at the resurrection, there is no resurrection, and there is no "Change." Job states this fact. The same eyes that saw the world around him while he lived shall see his Redeemer in glory. (Job 19:25-27) Job also reminds us that this glorious view of his Redeemer shall occur after his body has decayed. In likely the first book written that makes up our Bible, and in John's gospel, one of the latest books of the Bible to be written, God affirms the same truth; the resurrection is real, and it involves His reviving and glorifying our literal, physical, human body, that same body in which we lived our lives.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor