

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Resurrection: God's Example for His Glory

When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. (John 11:4, KJV 1900)

If we stop to think of what life might have been like had we lived in Jesus' time and had been a close friend, our imagination could easily run out of control. Rather than chase imaginations, Scripture gives us occasional glimpses of that life. John devotes a lengthy chapter to one incident in the life of a family that enjoyed a close friendship with Jesus. We shall linger with this lesson.

When we face grave danger or loss, we long for our close friends to be with us to help us work our way through the trial. Thus, when we read that Lazarus became ill, likely a grave illness of some kind, his sisters, Mary and Martha, send word to Jesus. They likely had more in mind than merely His comforting company, for later we read that they believed, had He been present, Lazarus would not have died. They believed that He who had healed so many other people and even raised some from the dead could heal their brother. Although Jesus healed many people during His brief public life, we read the inspired notation that an incident occurred for the glory of God on two special occasions. The other occasion appears in John 9 with the man born blind. Jesus gives him sight. But, when the disciples asked Jesus the nonsensical question about the man's blindness being caused either by sin committed by the man's parents or by the man himself, Jesus corrected their error. The man was born blind for a good reason, "...that the works of God should be made manifest in him." (John 9:3b)

Occasionally, sincere believers will run their minds off the track of God's truth in Scripture and adopt a pagan-originated fatalistic attitude. In such cases as these two in Scripture, they will leap from two men who experienced major illness or untimely death, stated in the Scripture as occurring for God's purpose and glory, to the fatalistic and illogical idea that all illness, all birth defects, and all death occurs by God's causing intervention for His glory. This wrong-headed conclusion egregiously commits the parts-to-the-whole logical fallacy. This fallacy examines only one part of a larger and more complex system and errantly concludes that, since this one part manifests certain characteristics, the whole system must also possess the same characteristics. In this case, these folks conclude that since the man born blind in John 9 was so born so that God's works should be manifest in him, all birth defects are caused by God for the same reason. And, since Lazarus became deathly ill for

the glory of God, all illnesses are divinely caused for the same reason. Let me give you a simple illustration that clearly shows the illogical thinking of this fallacy. If I walk into my garage and examine my automobile, I notice that it has four round wheels covered with rubber tires. If I follow the parts-to-the-whole logical fallacy, I then conclude that my whole automobile consists only of round wheels covered with rubber tires. I errantly think that this one part of the car makes up the whole car. As I ponder the various errant ideas that I have encountered over the years, I have never seen any single error that must rely on so many logical fallacies to support its bizarre house of cards errors as various threads of fatalistic belief. At the heart, all forms of fatalism eventually make God the active cause of all events that occur. No surprise, when put to the test, advocates of this fatalistic view of predestination must spend large amounts of time trying—unsuccessfully—to explain how God can cause illness, death, and all acts of cruel and diabolical human depravity without being, in the end, the actual cause of those things. He causes them, but He isn't the cause of them? The idea is utterly nonsensical and as utterly unsupported by Scripture. Jesus tells us that these two occasions are special situations that God intended to use for His glory, a revelation that would be wholly unnecessary if He taught that all birth defects, illnesses, and deaths, untimely or otherwise, were divinely caused. In the case of Lazarus, Jesus didn't cause the illness, but He was obviously aware of it and knew that He would intervene and raise Lazarus from the dead.

John 11:5 tells us that Jesus loved these three people. Thus, His reaction, described in Verse six, catches us by surprise. Rather than immediately leaving to go to his beloved friends, Jesus remained in His present location for two whole days. Only after two days does He tell the disciples that it is time to go to Lazarus and his two sisters. Given that Martha tells Jesus that Lazarus has been dead for four days when He arrives, we may conclude that Jesus and the disciples are at least a two day journey from their home. When someone is gravely ill, much can change in four days, and so it does with Lazarus.

"Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." (John 11:11b) Folks who believe in the errant idea of "Soul-sleep" often quote

this sentence as supposed proof of their idea. Wrong citation; in this comment, Jesus refers to Lazarus' body, not to his soul. The reference to Lazarus sleeping when, in fact, Jesus knows that he has died, conveys a comforting and simple truth to our minds, a truth that Jesus specifically states in the comment. Jesus is now going to Bethany to awaken Lazarus out of his sleep. Even though Lazarus is dead, like natural sleep, Jesus will awaken him and restore him to his former life.

Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. (John 11:14–15, KJV 1900)

When Jesus referred to Lazarus as sleeping, the disciples likely thought that Lazarus' illness had broken, and he was now sleeping restfully in recovery. How often during those three and a half years the disciples failed to understand what Jesus said to them, though He spoke quite simply and clearly. However, we should remember that He often spoke words to them of things so heavenly and so far beyond the norm of this world that they found it difficult to grasp, just as we would have struggled similarly with His words, had we been with them.

Jesus brings the disciples back to the reality of the situation, a reality that they were not at all prepared to witness. Their friend Lazarus had died. By the time they arrived back in Bethany, he would have been dead four days. Nevertheless, Jesus would raise Lazarus from the dead and restore him to his life with his two sisters. Be honest. Had you been with Jesus and the disciples at the time, would you have understood the imminent miracle that was soon to unfold? Perhaps if someone died, and Jesus almost immediately arrived and spoke to him, revival might occur, but four days. This lapse of time stretches our material perceptions beyond comprehension. If the human brain is robbed of oxygen for a bare few minutes, permanent damage occurs. But, in four days, all of the body's intricate systems would have fallen into significant decay. Any thought of revival would be the last thing we—or they—could imagine. But the fact of this record in Scripture, in Jesus' own words no less, teaches us undeniably of His power to raise the dead, however long they may have been dead.

In this comment, still in their distant location, Jesus doesn't specifically tell the disciples that He intends to raise Lazarus from the dead, but He distinctly tells them that He intends to do something that will convince them to believe things about Him that they do not presently believe, even after spending those three years with Him.

Contemporary Christianity sadly holds a myopic view of belief in Jesus. Based on much of this accepted teaching, if you have, even for a moment, a shred of unbelief in Jesus, you are probably not

even born again. This thinking grows out of a belief that people control their new birth instead of God controlling it. So if they think they are born again, and the contemporary preacher thinks they may not be born again, they can just, for the benefit of the doubt, run themselves back through the same routine that they followed to cause their new birth initially. This idea, first of all, contradicts Jesus' categorical teaching regarding the new birth. We do not control it, and we do not do things to produce it.

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. (John 3:8, KJV 1900)

Jesus didn't say—or even remotely hint at the idea—that we “blow” where we please and produce our new birth. Exactly the opposite; He said that the wind, translated from the same Greek word as “Spirit,” blows, breathes, where He pleases, not where people “invite” Him to blow. Further, Jesus also eradicates the notion that people may gain the new birth by one of any number of vehicles. “...so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” The new birth occurs exactly the same way in every single case with every child of grace. And that way is the work, the personal, intimate breathing of the Holy Spirit, not by something that we think or do. When God formed Adam of dust, He “...breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (Genesis 2:7) Likewise, when the miraculous moment arrives, the Holy Spirit breathes the breath of eternal life into the soul of a child of grace, and that breath produces immediate eternal life in that individual. We add no more to our new birth by what we think or do than Adam added to his becoming a “...living soul” by thinking or doing something. How could he do anything before that moment? He was a glorious composition of dust! Nothing more. He could think and act only after God gave him life. Likewise, our spiritual thinking, acting, and believing occur after our new birth, not before.

Based on the teachings of Scripture, this lesson included, the disciples struggled with unbelief toward Jesus even after His resurrection. Jesus prepares them for an event related to Lazarus' death that will enable them to believe, an obvious commentary to the fact that they did not then believe as they should.

Just a few days later, as Jesus was preparing the disciples for His departure from them, He reinforced this same reality with them.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. (John 14:1, KJV 1900)

In both first century Greek and contemporary English, “believe also in me” is a directive, a

commandment to the disciples to do something that they were not, at the moment, adequately or rightly doing. Respected New Testament Greek authority, A. T. Robertson, affirms what a simple and believing read of the King James language already tells us.

Ye believe ... believe also...So translated as present active indicative plural second person and present active imperative of πιστευω [*pisteuō*]. The form is the same. Both may be indicative (ye believe ... and ye believe), both may be imperative (believe ... and believe or believe also), the first may be indicative (ye believe) and the second imperative (believe also), the first may be imperative (keep on believing) and the second indicative (and ye do believe, this less likely). **Probably both are imperatives** (Mark 11:22), “keep on believing in God and in me.”¹ (Emphasis added, “Probably....”)

At the moment, the disciples believed in God, but apparently, based on Jesus' words, even more simply stated in our King James text than Robertson's technical explanation, they did not yet believe in Jesus, in the same way that they believed in God. And Jesus teaches them that they need to believe in Him as God, just as they believe in God. Ah, if the modern salvation by human cooperation theologian had been present, he would have immediately warned the disciples, “If you don't believe in Jesus, you may not be born again. Get to work.” Not Jesus, His words instruct and nurture the disciples to grow in their belief. They are born again. They are His children and His disciples, but they, as you and I, needed to grow in their belief in Jesus.

God help you and me to study the lesson of Lazarus and thereby come to believe in Jesus more fully and deeply than we have ever yet believed in Him.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
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Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder Pastor

¹ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Jn 14:1.