



Lights and Shadows in Christian Experience

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"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us". — Romans 8:18.

(This article by Brother A. L. Muir, who ended his earthly pilgrimage in March, 1972, is reprinted from "The Herald of Christ's Kingdom" by permission of the "Herald" brethren.)

The Christian life is light and shadow, cloud and sunshine; tears in the evening, joy in the morning. In sickness of body we have sanctification of heart; in pain in the outer man, we have great peace in the inner man. Thus our sufferings in the present life, even when greatest, have interwoven in their texture, and intermingled with their current, and ever bubbling up from their depth, constant compensatory joys; but in the life to come, our joy will have nothing to interfere with it. It will be undiluted, unmixed ecstasy, perpetual happiness, unclouded joy. Moreover our present sufferings, even the worst, never exceed the strength of our powers of endurance. In the glory of the Kingdom our capacities will be infinitely enlarged, our susceptibilities of bliss made infinitely sensitive, and the joy that we shall experience will rise to the measure of the great capacities that our Father will give us. And in that wonderful Kingdom what delight it will afford to renew the sweet counsel we have taken together, to recount the toils of the combat, the labour of the

way, and to approach, not the house, but the throne of God, in company, there to join in the symphonies of heavenly voices in the hallelujah chorus.

Bethany

One of the most beautiful and touching scenes in the Bible on this subject is to be found in Bethany, the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. There are many sacred memories associated with our dear Redeemer in His earthly sojourn: Bethlehem, the scene of the nativity; Nazareth, where Jesus grew to manhood; the river Jordan, where He was baptized; Tiberias, an area He frequented much; the Mount on which He uttered the beatitudes and announced the principles of His Kingdom — the place where He spent whole nights in prayer; Calvary, where He poured out His soul in death for us. However, wonderful and blessed though these and many other associations may be to us, there is yet one other place where love fondly dwells in sanctified thought — the home and village of Bethany.

It is only a memory now, and yet the place is fragrant with His presence, the echoes of His voice, the kindness of His manner, His sharing of the burdens and anxieties of others for their encouragement. If the story of Joseph and his brethren in the Old Testament is invested with surpassing interest, here is a Gospel home scene in the New, of still deeper and tenderer pathos, a sweet oasis in the toilworn pilgrimage of the

Master. We follow Him to Bethany from the courts of the Temple — the busy crowd, the lengthened journey, the miracles of mercy, the hours of vain and ineffectual pleading with obdurate hearts, and see Him in the midst of a peaceful family, spirit blending with spirit in sanctified communion.

Doubtless many incidents of the Lord's sojournings at Bethany have been left unrecorded, because more than once the inspired narrative makes the simple statement that Jesus retired to the village of His friend Lazarus. We certainly can be grateful for what is recorded, giving a comprehensive intermingling of doctrine, consolation, comfort and instruction in righteousness. At first glance it may seem strange that the story of Bethany and the resurrection of Lazarus, forming so noble and important a phase in our Lord's life, should have been recorded only by the Evangelist John. Two reasons have been suggested: (1) that John narrates the work of Christ in Judea and especially in Jerusalem, while the other evangelists restrict themselves to His Galilean ministry; and (2) that John was the best qualified to do justice to this matchless picture. Baptized himself with the spirit of love, his inspired pen could best portray the lights and shadows in this lovely household. Here for a brief moment he lifts the veil which enshrouds the private life of our Lord to exhibit Him in the character of a true and loving friend.

Martha, Mary, and Lazarus

Let us visit the home in Bethany and be introduced to the members of the family that we may better understand the lessons as they unfold. It is thought by some that the head of the family was Simon the leper, the husband of Martha, and now deceased —Matt. 26:6. Martha has been accurately represented as a type of activity; bustling, energetic, impulsive, well-qualified to be the head of the household, and to grapple with the stern realities and routine of actual life; quick in apprehension, anxious to give a reason for all she did, and requiring a reason for the conduct of others; one who combined diligence in business with fervency in spirit.

Mary was a type of reflection; calm, meek, devotional, contemplative, sensitive in feeling, ill-suited to battle with the cares and sorrows, the strifes and griefs of an engrossing and encumbering world. Her position was at her Lord's feet, drinking in those living waters which came welling up fresh from the Fountain of life; asking no questions, declining all arguments, gentle and submissive, the picture of a childlike faith which “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things.”

Of Lazarus we have fewer details to guide us in giving individuality to his character. Some think he was the rich young ruler who came to Jesus to inquire what he should do to inherit everlasting life. However, while he did not then possess the spirit of sacrifice

necessary to enable him to carry out the instructions of Jesus, the Lord nevertheless loved him for his many excellent qualities. Whether or not he was that young ruler, we may think Lazarus as being gentle, retiring, amiable, forgiving—a very fine member of a closely knit family.

And then, most wonderful of all, we find Jesus personifying true friendship. While He loved the world and gave Himself a ransom for all, yet He had sinless partialities for individuals whose spirits and minds were more congenial and kindred with His own. Thus He had an ardent affection for all of His disciples, but even among them there was an inner circle of holier attachments—Peter, James, and John. And even of these three, there was one preeminently beloved—John 13:23. Do we not find it true that there are some heart sanctuaries where we can more readily rush to bury the tale of our sorrows or unburden our perplexities, that in communion together there might be found peace! What was it but a noble and touching tribute to the longings and susceptibilities of His own heart for human friendship that, on entering Gethsemane, He thus sought strength in His hour of need—“Tarry ye here and watch with me!”—Matt. 26:38.

Jesus in the Midst

But to return. Such was the home and its members about whom we love to think. Perhaps the Lord had Bethany in mind when He said; “Where two or three are

gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"—Matt. 18:20. We can fancy, but no more, these oft happy meetings, when the Lord, weary and worn, was seen descending the rocky footpath of Olivet—Lazarus, or his sisters, from the flat roof of their dwelling, or under the spreading fig tree, eager to catch the first glimpse of His approach. Standing back in the shadows we watch and listen with deep interest to the conversation, unchronicled by the inspired penmen, dealing, we may be sure, not with the sordid details of Jewish enmity toward the Saviour, but with sublime and heavenly truths which sank deep into the hearts of His listeners, preparing them for a time of unexpected sorrow. If we find pleasure and comfort in fellowship one with another, what must it have been to be seated in His presence drinking in the wonderful words of life!

May we pause here to ask ourselves the nature of our own fellowship when we meet together. Do we ourselves come together conscious of the need to get away from the bustling affairs of the world that we might refresh our spirits with the sublime promises of the Kingdom? Alas, are not our meetings spoiled sometimes by the introduction of the things of the world, the things that we have done or said; sometimes, indeed, by an argumentative spirit which turns the searching for truth into a debating society.

Not so at Bethany. There would be no interruption of the Saviour there as He

discoursed on His Father's plans and purposes; as He explained the need for the Ransomer and Redeemer; as He underlined the certainty of Messiah's Kingdom with its wealth of blessing for the Jew and also for all men everywhere. That we cannot all grasp the truth to the same extent or depth is shown as the story unfolds. The principle enunciated by Jesus still holds good: "According to your faith be it unto you." It is, therefore, as we grow in grace and understanding, and as the ripened character of the Christian develops, that the depths of the Lord's teachings become understood and we "lean not unto our own understanding, but in all our ways acknowledge him" trusting Him to direct our paths—Prov. 3:5,6. In this modern, materialistic day, we need the more to "enter our closets"—Matt. 6:6—and "open our window toward Jerusalem", as did Daniel—Dan.2:10—and commune more and more with our Father and our dear Redeemer. From such communion we derive strength and grace to fit us for the burdens of life, and to enable us to do what St. Paul urges us to do: "having done all, to stand"—Eph.6:13. Let us remember that the Lord can be served in the lowliest as well as in the most exalted stations, and we can become a centre of holy influence to all around us.

At the Master's Feet

One of these hallowed seasons of the Lord's presence is referred to in Luke

10:38-42, where Martha and Mary are first brought to our attention. It was natural that the presence of the Lord would cause some stir in the little household, and Martha, the busy, eager-hearted hostess, hurried to and fro with excited energy to prepare for His proper entertainment. Mary, likewise, intent on welcoming the Lord, and knowing that her sister was only too happy in attending to His material comforts, sat at His feet and listened to His words. Martha enjoyed the task which she had chosen and was quite able, without any assistance, to do everything required. She was not to blame for her active service, but a little touch of jealousy disturbed her peace of mind, when she saw Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus. It seemed to her that there was a certain amount of injustice in the situation, although we can be sure that if Martha had appealed to Mary for help, the help would have been forthcoming immediately. Being vexed in spirit, Martha, somewhat impatiently and not quite reverently, hurried in to ask Jesus if He really thought it all right for Mary to sit before Him while she, herself, was taking care of all the work, and would He please tell Mary to give some help with the evening meal. How true is this picture of the Lord's people down through the Gospel Age even to our own times! The little petty jealousies which have plagued the household of faith and brought discouragement to so many! Yet, as we more nearly attain the measure of the stature of the perfect man in Christ, there grows a calmer and gentler

view of these weaknesses and more patience and understanding in reproving them.

First Things First

The answer of Jesus—"Martha, Martha"—makes us imagine the half-sad, half-playful, but wholly kind and healing smile which lightened His face—"Thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." In saying this, Jesus did not mean to exalt the contemplative life over the active life. Either may be necessary—both must be combined. Jesus was reproving the spirit of fret and fuss—the lack of repose and calm in His follower, and He wanted Martha to understand that at the time of His visits to their home she should provide only for their simplest needs, so that the remaining time could be devoted to higher things. In this sense Mary had "chosen" the better part. It was the decision she made in putting first things first that brought the Lord's approval. Martha, on the other hand, while properly filled with the true spirit of hospitality, was nevertheless overdoing the part, and thus her mind was troubled and she would be unable to enjoy the evening's fellowship.

Has not this same thing been true in our experiences? Can we not think back over the years to the occasions when greater preparations seem to have been made for the "natural" man to the detriment of the

“spiritual” man? In our meetings from week to week we are but reproducing the Bethany scene over and over again. Do we find Christ drawing us to the meeting? Is He the centre of our thoughts, the object of our devotions, the altogether lovely One? And when we leave our “upper rooms”, do we carry with us the fragrance of the Lord’s presence and the blessings He has left with us? Are we growing in that gentler, kindlier spirit, and thus increasingly becoming what St. Paul once said—“fellow Helpers” of the truth? Here is the measuring rod to indicate our progress in the way of the Lord, an activity working from within and reaching outward unto the everyday affairs of life. As St. Peter would say: “If ye do these things ye shall never fall.” This is the true test of character and something we each can watch and pray about day by day.

“Our Friend Lazarus Sleepeth”

Our next scene is to be found in John, chapter 11. In verse one we are told of the sickness of Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and Martha. It is instructive to note, in verse 5, that although Jesus had previously approved of Mary sitting at His feet, John here records that “Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.” Thus does the noble Apostle beautifully show the impartiality of Jesus; His appreciation of the sincerity of those who serve Him and seek to please Him.

This experience with sickness and sorrow was evidently anticipated by the Lord and in

an effort to strengthen the members of the family, He had visited them as discussed previously, lifting their thoughts to the true and eternal verities. And is not this always the way of the Lord toward His people? As we look back over our Christian experience, do we not find that the Lord prepared us for each heavy trial, by first bringing us a great blessing. Sometimes this came through the medium of a gathering of His people. Perhaps at other times as the result of a personal visit in our home by a fellow-saint, or some other rich Christian experience was sent us which buoyed us up and gave the silver lining to the clouds of trouble. Hence the couplet:

“The inner side of every cloud
Is bright and shining;
I therefore turn my clouds about,
And always wear them inside out,
To show the silver lining.”

At first the sickness of Lazarus came as a surprise to the two sisters. As they discussed the matter they could not understand it. But of one thing they were very sure—if the Lord had been present, it would not have happened. And so, as they watched Lazarus slowly sinking, they decided to send a message to Jesus. Notice the message they sent; it is evidently reported in their own words: “Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.” Here is no complaint; no urging of immediate action; just a simple statement of the facts. No doubt the message veiled an unexpressed prayer. But they could trust Him to read the unexpressed longing of their

hearts. Even in their great sorrow, they could not press Him to come, aware, as they were, of the dangers which awaited Him in Judea. They merely informed Him of the situation, leaving Him to decide how He should act.

How is it with us? When we send messages to the Lord concerning our personal matters, are we not inclined, sometimes to say: "Lord, he who loves you is sick—come at once." The sisters knew the love that Jesus bore them and that if anything could be done for Lazarus, Jesus would do it. So too, we, knowing full well that Jesus loves us, should realize that when we cry unto Him in the hour of need, it is enough that we remind Him of our knowledge of His love, and assure Him of our abiding confidence in Him.

Ascertaining the Father's Will

Jesus received the sisters' message, but made no immediate attempt to return to Bethany. Instead, He said: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God." (Our Lord's words here would seem to be as much for the benefit of the disciples present, as for the absent sisters.) He then remained two days longer in the wilderness of Perea, whither He had fled from the enmity of the Jews.

Perhaps we may never know just why Jesus delayed His departure these two days. We do know that the direct result of His miracle in awakening Lazarus from the sleep of death, was His own condemnation and

death. No doubt He had a presentiment that such would be the outcome. In all probability, therefore, His delay was deliberate—designed to afford Him special opportunity of communing with the Father, to make certain that He fully understood His Father's will concerning Him, and that grace sufficient would be supplied Him for every step of the way.

Having gathered the meaning of the providential circumstances associated with Lazarus' sickness, Jesus promptly decided to return to Judea. But at the word "Judea" the disciples are ready to object, contending that it would mean suicide. "Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?" To this, however, Jesus replied in words of deep significance:

"Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not." These words, applied to His own case, very evidently mean: "If duty calls, I may fearlessly go. While the time allotted to me by my Father has not yet expired, no harm can come to me, in the path of duty. My twelve hours of work are not quite over. Mine hour is not yet come—John 2:4; 7:6. The duration of my earthly life is meted out and secured to me by my Father. The Jews will not be able to shorten, by a single moment, the time assigned to me for accomplishing my mission. During these twelve hours I am walking in daylight, and therefore will not stumble. However, if, as you seem to be proposing, I should ar-

bitrarily endeavour to prolong my life, by refusing to go where duty calls me, I would be as one walking after daytime has ended — in the nighttime. Real danger of stumbling would then reach me, for I would be without the light of my Father's countenance."

This saying of Jesus applies to all the members of the Church, in their measure, for "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints"—Psa. 116:15. No harm can come to us, in the line of Christian duty, save in God's own time, and as He may permit. On the other hand, if, by failing to do our duty, we did succeed in prolonging our life—if, for example, we were to deny the faith in a time of religious persecution, our life, thus lengthened, would no longer be illuminated by the light of God's will. In such a condition, we would seek in vain for wisdom from above, to direct our course. In such darkness, we would "stumble"; i.e., morally perish. Or again, in time of comparative peace, if, shrinking from trouble or unpleasantness, one seeks to prolong his life, and refusing what he realizes is God's will, turns into some softer and easier path, then indeed danger threatens. He may prolong his life, but his "day" is done.

"Our Friend Lazarus Sleepeth"

Our Lord next proceeded to discuss the case of Lazarus further: "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." These words did but serve the disciples as yet another reason why

they should not go to Bethany. Surely, they reason, if Lazarus had been sick and is now resting in sleep, it would be wiser to wait for him to awaken in the normal way, at which time he would be recovered from his ailment. Then Jesus told them plainly: "Lazarus is dead."

From our Lord's procedure here, we may learn a lesson on how to present the truth. It should be adapted always to the hearer's ability to receive it; beginning with the simpler lessons, and only after these have been grasped, proceeding to the more difficult. Thus, instead of announcing two days earlier that Lazarus was dead, and thereby bringing a shock to the minds and hearts of His disciples, our Lord breaks the sad news gently, gradually leading up to it, preparing their minds to receive it.

This is still His method of dealing with His people. He prepares them for their hour of trial, and does not lay upon them more than they can bear. He considers their case—teaching them by slow and gradual discipline, leading on step by step.

Jesus next informs the disciples that, for their sakes, He was glad not to have been in Bethany at the time of the sickness and death of Lazarus. Had Jesus been in Bethany, it is more than likely that He would have been led to heal him. Because of His absence, Lazarus had been without the benefit of our Lord's presence and healing touch, and thus had been permitted to die. But in the overruling providence of the

Father, this would prove advantageous, not only to Lazarus and his sisters, but also to the disciples; the faith of all being greatly strengthened, when they saw “the glory of God” as, in the exercise of the Father’s power, our Lord awakened Lazarus from the sleep of death.

If Thou Hadst Been Here

In verse 19 we are told that many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother. They needed all the sympathy they received, for all the past bright memories of Bethany seemed buried in desolation and sorrow. We may picture the scene: the stronger and more resolute spirit of Martha striving to stem the tide of over-much sorrow; the more sensitive heart of Mary, bowed under a grief too deep for utterance, able only to indicate by her silent tears the unknown depths of her sadness.

Thus they are employed, when “Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him.” It requires no small fortitude in the season of sore bereavement to face an altered world, but again we have illustrated the strong character of Martha, her quick apprehension and vigorous action. When Martha reached Jesus just outside the village, she stood before Him and said: “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.”

These words were not intended as a reproach on Martha’s part, for she could

not have been ignorant of the fact that her brother was dead before Jesus had received the news of his illness. Moreover, would she have allowed herself to complain of our Lord's course of action, just at the time when she is about to make the very greatest of requests? On the contrary, she merely expressed her regret that Jesus had not been there at the time of her brother's illness, and this regret only helped to prepare for the petition she was about to make: "But I know, that even now (although so late), **whatsoever thou** wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." On these words of Martha, the eminent scholar Godet comments: "The reticence of this indirect request is admirable." How wonderfully restrained is Martha, in this great sorrow. Of course she hoped that, included in her "**whatsoever**", would be the awakening of her brother. But she is too reticent to say it. The Master—her Lord—will know best what to do.

Thy Brother Shall Rise Again

Jesus responds to her faith with a word of promise: "Thy brother shall rise again." This assurance was capable of being interpreted either in a general sense as referring to the general resurrection (which all devout Israelites believed would take place at the inauguration of Messiah's reign) or in a particular sense (as having reference to the approaching awakening of Lazarus). It is more than likely that Martha sensed the reference to the approaching awakening of Lazarus, but not being sure, she applied our Lord's

words to the general “last day” resurrection, which she did regard as certain. This gave Jesus the opportunity to explain His words further, and to declare expressly, what she had hardly dared to hope: “I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”

Here Jesus speaks words that have echoed down the corridor of the Gospel Age, bringing hope and comfort to millions. In these few words we have the core of the Gospel, Jesus expressing the confidence of His final victory over sin and death, and the glorious work of the resurrection, first for the Church which is His body, gathered in the Gospel Age, and later for all mankind during the Millennial Kingdom, as it holds sway over all the earth. Freed from the confusions of the creeds of Christendom, we see clearly that all not now disciples of the Lord have, nevertheless, the hope of a share in the general resurrection in the Millennial Kingdom (whether they understand it now or not); whereas those living during the Gospel Age, who had been footstep followers of Jesus—who have consecrated themselves to do the Father’s will, even unto death—these have already, by faith, passed from death unto life. They have been made alive unto God as new creatures in Christ Jesus. To these the very crown of life—immortality—has been held out as their hope.

They are to share in the throne of God and of the Lamb. These things, of course, were hidden until after Pentecost, when the holy spirit was shed abroad in its begetting and anointing power, at which time it took the teachings of Jesus and made them known to the Apostles, and through them to the early Church, and to us.

Let us consider again the words of our Lord spoken to Martha at the tomb of her brother Lazarus: "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"

To the Master's searching inquiry she replied: "Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world"—John 11:27.

Following this noble confession, we read: "And when she had so said, she went her way." The record does not indicate but it is probable that Jesus Himself had directed her to go, for she said to Mary: "The Master is come, and calleth for thee."—Verse 28.

This message she delivered "secretly." The secrecy, too, may have been part of our Lord's instructions; but likely as not it resulted from Martha's own wise and loving thoughtfulness—first, to avoid unnecessarily alerting our Lord's enemies to the fact of His return; and second, to provide her sister with the opportunity for a private talk with Jesus.

Martha and Mary

It is instructive to observe the characteristic differences in temperament between Martha and Mary, as they are portrayed by the Apostle John. These differences we previously noted, when studying the Bethany family, in this article. There, indeed, in the familiar passage—Luke 10:38-42, where Martha appears as the practical, bustling housewife, and Mary as the devout, contemplative disciple who chooses “the one thing needful”, the contrast, which is summarized in one brief incident, is direct, and with the evident intent on the part of the writer, that we should regard Mary as the one possessing those traits of character most worthy of emulating.

Here, in the 11th chapter of John, this contrast is also to be noted. But instead of it being direct, it is developed gradually. As the beloved Apostle John unfolds his story, the distinctive characters of the sisters are seen, not so much in contrast, as blending into each other. He does not forget to mention that both are loved by our Lord (verse 5); that they each show deep sorrow for the loss of their brother; that they both send to the Lord for help, and both alike express their faith in Him. And yet, notwithstanding this, “the difference of character”, as the eminent scholar, Lightfoot, has observed, “is perceptible throughout the narrative. It is Martha who, with her restless activity, goes out to meet Jesus, while Mary remains in the house weeping. It is Martha who

holds a conversation with Jesus, questions Him, remonstrates with Him, and in the very crisis of their grief shows her practical commonsense in deprecating the removal of the stone. It is Mary who goes forth silently to meet Him, silently and tearfully, so that the bystanders suppose her to be going to weep at her brother's tomb; who, when she sees Jesus, falls down at His feet; who, uttering the same words of faith in His power as Martha, does not qualify them with the reservation. In all this narrative the evangelist does not once direct attention to the contrast between the two sisters. He simply relates the events of which he was an eyewitness, without a comment. But the two were real, living persons, and therefore the difference of character between them develops itself in action."

If Thou Hadst Been Here

Under the impulse of her devotion, Mary, as soon as she had heard the message, arose quickly and left the house. The formal sympathizers, who were gathered, but not knowing the reason for her departure, assumed that she was going to the grave to weep, and decided to follow her. Such, however, was not Mary's intention. The music of her Master's name and the word that He was near, and wished to see her, brought joy to her heart, and she sought His presence, there to obtain the strength and comfort which only He could give.

When she reached Jesus, she fell down at

His feet, saying, in the identical words used by Martha, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." But, as already noted, there was no attempt on her part to discuss her grief. Her action, in falling at His feet, itself expressed the urgency of her prayer. (X) Moreover, in the few moments that elapsed before the professional mourners arrived, she was apparently so overcome by emotion, that conversation was impossible.

Jesus, who loved both Martha and Mary, was well aware of their differences in temperament, and adapted Himself to them. With the one, He was able to enter into a discussion—to lead Martha's lively, but not too enlightened, faith in the doctrine of the resurrection, to faith in Himself, as the one in whom was life, and through whom resurrection and life should come; to the sensitive spirit of Mary, on the other hand, He responds with silence, joining His tears with hers. Scholars tell us that the word translated "wept" in "Jesus wept" (verse 35), is not the same word twice translated "weeping" in verse 33. There the meaning is "sobs", but here "tears" are to be understood; it is the expression for a calm and gentle sorrow.

The Sympathizing Jesus

This text, which shows our Lord to be the "Sympathizing Jesus", is held by some

(X) See Mark 5:22,23 for a parallel case, in proof of this.

critics to furnish proof that the entire narrative of the raising of Lazarus is spurious. Such maintain that since Jesus knew He was soon to bring Lazarus back to life, He could not have shed genuine tears, or experienced sincere sorrow. Certain it is that if John's Gospel, instead of being the inspired Word of God, were merely the result of speculative thought, as some claim, it would not have contained verse 35. Jesus, as the true Logos, with nothing human except the outward appearance, would have raised His friend with triumphant looks and unmoistened eyes. But those who hold such views fail to appreciate the significance of John's earlier statement that "the Word was made flesh" John: 1:14. As one able writer has remarked: "It is not with a heart of stone that the dead are raised." To us there is real significance in the fact that the very Gospel in which the divine Sonship of Jesus is most clearly asserted, is also the one which makes us best acquainted with the profoundly human side of His life.

Jesus' tears were occasioned, first, out of sympathy for the bereaved—not merely for those then present, but for the suffering borne by the entire human family, since the reign of sin and death began. Reflect, if you will, on the number of breaking hearts there are, throughout the wide world, and on how loud the wail of suffering humanity, could we but hear it ! Bethany processions, pacing with slow and measured step, to deposit their earthly all, in the cold custody of the tomb. Then too, His tears would flow, as

He thought of the triumphs effected by the enemy, death. The body of man, pronounced "very good" in the case of Adam, father of the race, is now ruined, and resolved into a mass of humiliating dust. What must have been His reflections, as He thought of men as they had now become—devastated wrecks, mouldering in dissolution and decay, with Satan sitting, as it were, in regal state, holding high holiday over the vassal world! Again, He was about to perform His greatest miracle, and yet knew that, while some of its witnesses would believe, many then and later would despise Him, and discount His work—yea, would even connive with others to put Him to death. It should not surprise us to read that "Jesus wept".

Take Ye Away the Stone

To the tears of Jesus, the reaction of those present was twofold. There were those who said feelingly, "Behold, how he loved him"; while others said cynically, "If he loved him so much, why did he let him die?"

They have now reached the grave. It was a rocky sepulchre. A flat stone lay upon the mouth of it. "Jesus said, Take ye away the stone."—Verse 39.

Here Martha voices an objection: "Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he hath been dead four days." It seems clear from these words that Martha was not anticipating the miracle the Master purposed. Evidently she supposed that our Lord's only reason for

opening the tomb was to look one last time on Lazarus. This, however, will be no consolation to her, now. Moreover, as the dead man's sister she would quite naturally shrink from seeing the ravages of death upon one so dear to her. Nor would it assuage her sister's grief, or that of Jesus. Both for His sake, therefore, and for Mary's as well as for her own, and for the sake of others present, Martha recoils from the thought of such a painful exposure.

However, in response to her objection, Jesus gently recalls His earlier promise: "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"—Verse 40.

Many expositors understand our Lord to be referring to the conversation He had with Martha, recorded in verses 21-27. And indeed, His words "if thou wouldest believe" (verse 40), do remind us of expressions to be found in that passage. But the expression, "the glory of God", prominent in verse 40, is absent from verses 21-27, whereas it forms the salient feature of verse 4. Evidently, then, it was the promise in verse 4, of which Jesus now reminds Martha. He well knew that it had been reported to the two sisters by their messenger. Hence the expression: "Said I not unto thee", stands for: "Did I not send thee word?"

This Bethany utterance has a voice reaching down through the Age, to our day. Ofttimes the Lord lets our need attain its extremity, that His intervention may appear

the more signal. He permits His own promises to apparently fail, that He may test the faith of His waiting people; tutor them to "hope against hope", and to find in unanswered prayers and baffled expectations only a fresh reason for clinging to His all-powerful arm and frequenting His mercy seat.

Father, I thank Thee That Thou Hast Heard Me.

The stone being moved from the grave, "Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always" (Verses 41, 42). At first glance these words may seem strange, yet when we recall that the two previous days had been spent by our Lord in seclusion, in the wilderness of Perea, it is not difficult to realize that He had there received assurance from His Father that the great moment was at hand for Him to manifest the power of God in resurrection life. Having this assurance, and being full of faith and of the holy spirit, Jesus now offers thanks to His Father in advance of the miracle.

This is the ideal set before us in our prayers at the throne of grace. May it be ours, truthfully to take upon our lips these words of the Master, and speak them in the ears of God; "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me." It is most difficult for us to emulate the Lord in this way, for well we know that our faith, at times, is weak and faltering. Yet the lesson surely is that we

should strive to reach that condition of “the perfect man in Christ Jesus” whereby we pray with full assurance of faith and hope, and in believing prayer, give thanks to our Father in advance of the desired blessing.

Lazarus, Come Forth

Now the great moment has arrived. Every eye is fixed on Jesus. What will He do? Eyes are strained; necks craned; every one is watching in silence. Then comes His authoritative voice: “Lazarus, come forth.” At the word of command, “he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes; and his face bound about with a napkin.” Again comes the calm voice of Jesus: “Loose him, and let him go.” Thus, in simplicity and yet with wondrous grace, Jesus performed His greatest miracle, to the glory of God, and as an illustration of the power which He will exercise, when He comes in the power and glory of His Kingdom.

How beautiful is this illustration! Lazarus, it is very apparent, had been really dead for four days. Now he is awakened from the sleep of death. (Not brought back from heaven, purgatory, or hell, but from the unconscious, death condition, in which he had known nothing.—Eccl.9:5.) “Marvel not at this”, said our Lord in another place, “for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his (Jesus’) voice, and shall come forth”—John 5:28. In that day, the Word of the Lord will not be obscure, or cor-

rupted by false teachers, or by Satan's counterfeits. Instead, no evil shall be there; no dangerous errors to fall over, no sickness, sorrow, pain, or death, and, as Isaiah puts it: "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever"—Isa. 32:17. "Hallelujah! What a Saviour!"

We once more visit, in thought, a peaceful and happy home scene in the same Bethany household. The severed links in that broken chain are again united. It was on a Sabbath evening, the last Sabbath but one, of the waning Jewish dispensation, when Spring's loveliness was carpeting the Mount of Olives and clothing with fresh verdure the groves around Bethany, that our dear Redeemer was seen approaching the village.

Imagine the joy with which the announcement would be received that the Lord was approaching, and the welcome which would be given to Him in a home consecrated alike by His love and power! Now every tear was dried. Feelingly alive to all they owed Him, the restored brother and rejoicing sisters, with hearts overflowing with gratitude, could say with the Psalmist: "Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever."—Psalm 30:11,12.

The Anointing

But does the love and affection of that household find expression in nothing but words? No, indeed! Supper is being made ready and the Apostle John, in his delightful way, adds a few words so full of meaning—"and Martha served"—John 12:2. We can be sure the lesson learned by Martha on a former occasion remained with her, and that now her service was within the bounds of sanctified common sense. During the course of the evening, the gentle spirit of Mary prompts her to a significant proof of the depth of her gratitude. Some fragrant ointment of spikenard (contained, as we gather from the other Evangelists, in a box of alabaster) had been procured by her at great cost; either obtained for this anticipated meeting with her Lord, or it may in some way have fallen into her possession, and been carefully kept among her treasured gifts till some befitting occasion occurred for its use. With her own hands she pours it on His feet. Stooping down, she wipes them, in further token of her devotion, with her loosened tresses, till the whole apartment was filled with the sweet perfume.

And what was it that constituted the value of this tribute—the beauty and expressiveness of the action? It was this: She gave the Lord the best thing she had. The poet Tennyson has expressed it:

“Her eyes are homes of silent prayer,
Nor other thought her mind admits;
But, he was dead, and there he sits,
And He that brought him back is there.

“Then one deep love doth supersede
All other, when her ardent gaze
Roves from the living brother’s face
And rests upon the Life indeed.

“All subtle thoughts, all curious fears,
Borne down by gladness so complete;
She bows, she bathes the Saviour’s feet
With costly spikenard and with tears.”

Are we willing to give our Lord the best of what we have—to consecrate time, talents, strength, life, to Him? Not as many, to give Him the mere dregs and sweepings of existence, but, like Mary, anxious to take every opportunity of testifying the depth of obligation under which we are laid to Him? Let us not hold back, saying: “My sphere is lowly, my means are limited, my best offerings would be inadequate.” Hundreds of more imposing deeds may have been left unrecorded by the Evangelists; but “wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her”—Matt. 26:13. Would that this love for Jesus were paramount with all of us! “Lovest thou me more than these?” is His own searching test and requirement—John 21:15. Happy for us if it be so. There will be a joy in the very consciousness of making the effort, feeble, and unworthy as it may be, for His sake, and in acknowledgement of the great love where-with He loved us. Again, the poet has expressed it:

“Thou hast thy record in the monarch’s hall,
And on the waters of the far mid sea;
And where the mighty mountain shadows fall,
The alpine hamlet keeps a thought of thee.
Where’er, beneath some oriental tree,
The Christian traveller rests—where’er the child
Looks upward from its mother’s knee,
With earnest eyes, in wondering reverence mild,
There art thou known. Where’er the Book of Light
Bears hope and healing, there beyond all blight,
Is borne thy memory—and all praise above.
Oh! say what deed so lifted thy sweet name,
Mary, to that pure, silent place of fame?
One lowly offering of exceeding love.”

Let it be our privilege and delight to give Him our pound of spikenard, whatever it may be; let us offer the fragrance of holy hearts and lives revealed by kindness, gentleness, amiability, unselfishness, flowing from a principle of grateful love to Him, who, though unseen, has been to us as to the family of Bethany—Friend, Helper, Guide, Deliverer, and Portion. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”—Psa. 51:17.

The Lord’s Supper Instituted

The two days preceding the beginning of our Lord’s betrayal seem to have been spent at Bethany. We may still follow Him in imagination as He and His disciples quietly rested for the coming turbulent experiences. We have no recorded incidents in connection with these two days. We are left only to realize in thought the refreshment alike for body and mind which our Lord enjoyed. The last evening that He spent there must

have been full of sorrowful thoughts. He left the threshold on the Thursday of that week, not to return again until death had claimed Him. On that same morning He had sent two of His disciples into the city to make preparation for the keeping of the Passover Supper. He Himself followed with the other ten, probably towards the afternoon, and joined them in the upper room, where, after celebrating for the last time the old Jewish rite, He instituted the Lord's Supper, a Memorial of the antitype. This ended, the disciples, probably, contemplated nothing but a return, as on preceding evenings, by their old route to Bethany. Singing their Paschal hymn, they descended the Jehoshaphat ravine, by the side of the Temple. The brook Kedron was crossed and they are once more on the Bethany path. They have reached Gethsemane; their Master retires into the depths of the olive grove, as was often His wont, to hold secret communion with His Father. The crisis hour has at last arrived! Rude hands arrest Him on His way. In vain shall Lazarus and his sisters wait for their expected Lord. For Him that night there is no voice of earthly comfort—no couch of needed rest; when the shadows of darkness have gathered around Bethany, and the pale Passover moon is lighting up its palm trees, the Lord is standing buffeted and insulted in the hall of Annas. The remembrances of Bethany are here absorbed and overshadowed for a time by the darker memories of Gethsemane and Calvary.

Via Dolorosa

In vain do we picture the feelings of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary on that day of ignominious crucifixion. Can we imagine that they could linger behind, unconcerned, in their dwelling? We cannot think so. Rather we may believe that among the tearful eyes of the women that followed Jesus along the "Dolorosa way", not the least anguished were the two Bethany mourners; and that as He hung upon the cross, the presence of Lazarus would be soothing and comforting in that hour of need. We may well believe that when the first day of the week had come and the glad announcement spread from disciple to disciple: "The Lord is risen"—Luke 24:34—on no home in Judea would the tidings fall more welcome than on that of Bethany. Martha and Mary had, a few weeks before, experienced the happiness of a restored brother. Now it was that of a restored Saviour. Whether He revisited the home in the days immediately after His resurrection, we cannot tell. We think it more than probable that He would. Perhaps we have a hint of such a thing in the words of John: "There are also many other things which Jesus did."—John 21:25.

The Resurrection and The Life

With what a new and glorious meaning to Martha must her Saviour's words have now been invested: "I am the resurrection and the life"—John 11:25. What saddening thoughts are associated with our final visit with a beloved friend. He was in health

when we last met; we little dreamt, in parting, we were to meet no more. Every circumstance of that visit is stored up in the most hallowed chambers of the heart. His last words, his last look, his last smile, they live there in undying memorial. Such was not the case with the disciples. They had had their last walk together with their beloved Lord. Ere another sun goes down over the western hills of Jerusalem He will have returned to His Father. And what is the spot which He selects as the place of the ascension? It is Bethany—Luke 24:50. We may imagine it, in all likelihood, the early dawn of the day. The grey mists of morning were still hovering over the Jehoshaphat valley, as for the last time He descended the well-known path. He must have crossed the brook Kedron—that brook which had so oft before murmured in His ear during nights' seasons of deep sorrow; He must have passed by Gethsemane, the thick olives pendant with dew, the shadows of early day still brooding over them. Their gloomy vistas must have recalled terrible hours, when the sod underneath was moistened with “as it were great drops of blood”—Luke 22:44. Had He dashed to the ground untasted the cup which His Father had poured for Him, His work would not have been done. But He shrank not from that baptism of blood and suffering.

In these final hours of early communion, we may be sure the Lord was occupied in preparing the hearts of the sorrowful band around Him for His approaching departure.

He would unfold to them the glorious conquests which, in His name, they were to achieve on earth, as His standard-bearers and apostles. The disciples had in their hearts a full and tender impression of three years of unvarying kindness and affection; sorrows soothed, burdens eased, ingratitude overlooked, denial forgiven. Of many others they could think only in connection with altered tones and changed affection. But He was ever the same. Now, however, comes the parting. No more tender counsels in difficulty; no more gentle rebukes in waywardness; no more joyful surprises as on the sea of Tiberias, or on the road to Emmaus when, with joy they would exclaim, "It is the Lord."

The Promise of the Father

Whether Jesus visited the home at Bethany on this occasion we cannot tell. All the notice we have regarding it is: that "He led them out as far as to Bethany."—Luke 24:50.

He cheers them with the promise of another comforter—the holy spirit—which would continue with them and the entire Church throughout the Gospel Age, taking of the things of Jesus and revealing them in their true and deeper meaning. He enjoined the disciples to linger in Jerusalem until the fulfilment of the promise of the Father, that they might be qualified for their ministry—Acts 1:4. Have we known, in the midst of our weaknesses and wants, our griefs and sorrows, the power and grace of

the promised paraclete? To what is much of the deadness and dullness and languor of our frames to be traced—the poverty of our faith, the luke-warmness of our love, the little hold and influence of divine things upon us? Is it not to the feeble realization of the quickening, life-giving power of the holy spirit? “It is the spirit that quickeneth.”—John 6:63.

The Apostles' Commission

Another theme of Christ's converse was the nature of His Kingdom. “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel”, was the inquiry of the disciples. “And he said unto them: It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power.”—Acts 1:6,7.

The thoughts of His followers were clinging, to the last, to the dream of earthly sovereignty. The Lord tells them there is to be no present fulfilment of these visions of Millennial glory. The Church may not attempt rashly and inquisitively to lift the veil. She is not to know the time of the Saviour's appearing until that day when the cry shall be heard, “Behold the Bridegroom”—Matt. 25:6. Then the Father would make known the time of the Second Advent accompanied by signs attesting it. Meantime the disciples were to proclaim His name throughout the world. But was Jerusalem—the scene of the Lord's sufferings and death—to be an exception? Nay, rather they were to begin there. But beginn-

ing at Jerusalem it was to embrace Judea, then Samaria, and then the uttermost parts of the earth. From the elevated ridge of Olivet, on which He now stood, He might tell them to gaze, in thought at least, far north beyond the cedars of Lebanon and Hermon; southward to the desert and the isles of the ocean; westward to the fair lands washed by the Great Sea; eastward across the palm trees of Bethany and the chain of the Moabite mountains on to unexplored continents. The Gospel was to be preached as “a witness unto all nations.”—Matthew 24:14.

The Ascension

And now His themes of instruction and counsel are over and He is about to ascend. “He lifted up his hands, and blessed them”—Luke 24:50. His last words are those of mercy; His last act is outstretching His arms to bless. There is something, moreover, significant in the words: “While he blessed them” (verse 51). The benediction was unfinished when the cloud bore Him away. It would seem as if He wished to indicate that the act begun on earth would be carried on beyond the veil: “He ever liveth to make intercession” for us—Hebrews 7:25.

The Time has come when the disciples must leave the crest of Olivet and return to Jerusalem. Were they borne down with grief? Nay, “They returned to Jerusalem with great joy”—Luke 24:52. Oh, the wonders of the grace of God! And here the

earthly vision of Bethany is sealed. Let us rise from our Olivet ridge and be going; and though traversing different footpaths to the same home—be it ours, like the disciples, to reach at last the true heavenly Jerusalem—“with great joy.”

JESUS WEPT

JESUS wept in sorrow over
One who trusted in His name,
Who, beneath death's sullen power,
Fell a victim 'mongst the slain.
Lifted there His tear-stained face,
Lighted with a matchless grace.
There His sympathy we see,
In those tears at Bethany.

Through those tears He spoke sweet comfort
To the hearts bereaved and sad,
Shadowed forth His coming power;
Yet to make the whole earth glad
Spoke the potent words of life,
Words with deepest meaning rife:
Yes, His power too we see,
In His work at Bethany.

There He bade all hearts look forward
To His kingdom soon to come,
Where with resurrection power
He'd recall the dead ones home.
There before the sealed grave
Showed His wondrous power to save.
O! what glory thus we see
In that type at Bethany.

When the pangs of sorrow seize us,
When the waves of trouble roll,
We may bring our cares to Jesus,
Comfort of the weary soul.
Never need we come in vain,
He is evermore the same,
For His love and power we see,
In His work at Bethany.

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