

The Love of Jesus

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The home at Bethany comes before us in John 11 as a place where the love of Jesus was known. There they knew how to rely on it with natural, simple confidence at every season. Individually the members of the little household are marked out as its objects. "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus," as if to teach us that through all the experience of initial serenity, mourning sorrow, dawning hope, and the joy of restoration and reunion, the love of Jesus was there, ordering events, weeping in sympathy, and working the final miracle. The lesson is surely that whatever may be our sorrow, the love of Jesus stands before it, walks beside it, and though there be delay, comes at last — it will unfailingly be true for all His own — as the Resurrection and the Life.

The story begins with the sickness of Lazarus. "Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus." This was the brother of that Mary who anointed the Lord, yet his relationship with that illustrious woman did not make him immune from suffering. Further, his sisters sent to Jesus saying "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick". How infinitely blessed to be an object of the love of Jesus, but even this did not provide immunity from sickness. The work of divine love is not to guarantee freedom from suffering, but to make it serve the divine end. "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

At first there is no word about the benefit to the sufferers themselves: but when afterwards they reviewed it all, how clearly it would be seen that their own highest good was involved in what served the glory of God. Let us therefore not be hasty in arriving at a carnal assessment of the sufferings of this present time. Seen from the glorious heights of God's "afterward", their experience of the well-known love of Jesus, coming to its flower and fruit in their sample of life and resurrection with Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, was coincident with that which glorified God. It was not indifference which caused Jesus to abide two days still in the place where He was. Rather was it His allowing the circumstances to ripen towards the divine end.

"Not unto death", said the Master, yet Lazarus died, and Jesus said to the disciples plainly that "Lazarus is dead". Death was not the end, but Lazarus' death was necessary to the attainment of that end. The grand end in view in the sickness, suffering and dying of Lazarus was the manifestation of the fact that the power of resurrection and life was visiting this world in the Person of the Son of God. The heart anguish of the bereaved sisters was to give place to the full joy attendant on the resurrecting power of the Son of God. Where the awful power of sin reached its climax in death, where the ultimate power of the devil was seen, just there the glory of God shone out. The Son of God stood before the tomb and cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus come forth. And he that was dead came forth." Mighty triumph! The devil defeated! Death annulled! The grave robbed of its victory! The day of mourning turned into the joy of resurrection! What a result from the sickness of Lazarus. What strong consolation for the heartbroken sisters to learn that their suffering had become the occasion of setting forth the glory of their Lord.

Thus the sorrowing saints are enlarged through the pressure coming on them, for this was the paradox uttered by another sufferer when he said, "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in pressure" (Psalm 4: 1). Through such an experience Paul learned to say, "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

The grand revelation of the release of all the sleeping saints from the grip of death was augured by His intervention in love and power, for, "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

The end of the Lord on this occasion was to manifest the power which will shortly raise all the sleeping saints and change all the living saints. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven . . . and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."