

### Lazarus (John 11:1-43)

On the eastern slope of Olivet about two miles out of Jerusalem lies the little village of El-Lazarieh, formerly called Bethany, which must ever be dear to the Christian heart. For there amidst the palm-trees stood the house of Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus, very dear and beloved friends of Jesus. When Jesus had been going about doing good in Jerusalem and nearby vicinities, he often stopped here to refresh himself and to rest. "Their abode was to him like an oasis in the wilderness, where he might find shade and relief, kindness without any alloy, and affection without any drawback." It seems that such a home would have been free from any affliction, and that the providence of God would have blessed it with joy and peace unceasingly. But the ways of God are higher than the ways of men, and one day when Jesus was in Perea on the Eastern side of the Jordan, there came a message from the sisters saying that the beloved Lazarus was sick. Jesus did not hasten to the village at once and heal Lazarus. He could have done that or he could have wrought his recovery from a distance, but the Lord had something far more remarkable in mind. So he lingered for two days in Perea and then suggested to the disciples that they return to Judea. But the disciples objected, knowing that the Jews were seeking to kill him. The Lord told them that "Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep." The disciples, in their weakness noticed only the former part of Jesus statement and concluded that it was a good symptom and that Lazarus would recover. Jesus then tells them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent that ye may believe; nevertheless let us go to him." Then Thomas, weak in faith but

strong in love, said to the others, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." When Jesus arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days, but many Jewish mourners were gathered at the house of Mary and Martha. Martha was the first to meet Jesus. "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." And then a faint glow of hope manifests itself in Martha's words, "And even now I know that, whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give it thee." But Jesus' answer is too general to encourage her in her grief. "Thy brother shall rise again." Martha is rather puzzled by this statement, and we see the perplexed expression on her face as she says, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." She did not realize how near the resurrection actually was, for she was in his presence at that moment. "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die. Believest thou this?" Martha does not understand these words, but she does not reject them. After her profession of faith in Christ as the son of God, she calls her sister Mary, who is smitten with grief. When Jesus saw the sorrow and misery of his fellow-men, he wept and walked to the grave-side with them "groaning in himself." A large stone lay at the mouth of the tomb, and Jesus commanded it to be removed. Thinking, perhaps, that Jesus desired to look on the face of his dead friend once more, Martha suggested that the body had already begun to decay, and that it might be best not to disturb it. But Jesus insisted that the stone be removed. Then he lifted his eyes to heaven and communed for a moment with his God in audible tones, thanking Him that his prayer had been granted. Then he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." Out into the light of day stumbled Lazarus, bound hand and foot with graveclothes, his face

covered with a napkin. The command of Jesus broke into the astounded minds of the witnesses, "Loose him, and let him go." So far as I know, no one dared to deny the performance of this miracle. If there had been any grounds for denying it, surely the wily Pharisees would have found it, but even they confess, "this man doeth many signs. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him." So they sought the more earnestly to kill Jesus. And what of Lazarus? What message did he bring from the land beyond? None whatever. There is a legend to the effect that the first question asked by Lazarus after his revival was whether he would be required to die again, and that on being answered in the affirmative, he never smiled again. This is only a legend. In the short story, "Lazarus," a great Russian writer gives a ghastly, imaginative history of the rest of Lazarus' earthly life and death, but there is no evidence for any such conjectures. It is reasonable to conclude that Lazarus was restored to his old manner of life and died again in due season, perhaps having his memory of "the un-discovered country from out whose bourne no traveler returns" completely sealed. As Tennyson has said,

Where wert thou, brother, these four days?  
There lives no record of reply  
Which telling what it is to die,  
Had surely added praise to praise.

From every house the neighbors met;  
The streets were filled with joyful sounds:  
A solemn gladness even crowned  
The purple brow of Olivet.

Behold a man raised up by Christ.  
The best remaineth unrevealed;  
He told it not, or something sealed  
The lips of that evangelist.

Here the humanity of Jesus is revealed in all its splendor, and his divinity as well. His friendship with Lazarus and the sisters was human fellowship, but his address to the Father was divine communion. As man, he could weep as they led him to the tomb. As God he could call the dead from the sepulchra. "I am the resurrection and the Life."