

Lazarus Lessons

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at [Topeka]: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[I] give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

[The world has] heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints,

For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth: * * * *

That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness[.] (Colossians 1:2-6, 10, 11).

New Testament stories telling us about events during the earthly pilgrimage of Jesus are historical fact, but they also provide us with valuable lessons and advices. One such tale is found in John Chapter 12, verses 1-11:

12 Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead.

² There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.

³ Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.

⁴ Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him,

⁵ Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?

⁶ This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.

⁷ Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.

⁸ For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.

⁹ Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead.

¹⁰ But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death;

¹¹ Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.

A big part of this narrative involves Lazarus and his resurrection. So, let's refresh our memory about that remarkable event. The account is found in John Chapter 11, the chapter that immediately preceded what we just read. There, we are told that Mary and Martha – the sisters of Lazarus – tell Jesus Lazarus is sick. We also learn that Jesus loved all three of them; that is, Lazarus and his two sisters. Notwithstanding that sickness, and over the vocal objections and concerns of his disciples, Jesus takes off for Judaea again. Soon, Jesus supernaturally and instinctively realizes that Lazarus has died and so informs his fellow disciples. He then returns to Bethany, where we take up the story:

17 Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already.

18 Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off:

19 And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

20 Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.

21 Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

22 But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.

23 Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

24 Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

27 She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

28 And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee.

29 As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him.

30 Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him.

31 The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there.

32 Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

33 When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled.

34 And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see.

35 Jesus wept.

36 Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!

37 And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?

38 Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

39 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.

40 Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?

41 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.

42 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.

⁴³ And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

⁴⁴ 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.

⁴⁵ Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.

Lessons –

1. Proof of Greatest Miracles:

In our primary passage, we see what abounding proofs exist of the truth of our Lord's greatest miracles. We read of a supper at Bethany, where Lazarus sat at the table among the guests; Lazarus, who had been publicly raised from the dead after lying four days in the grave. Given that picture, nobody could pretend that his resurrection was a mere optical illusion or that the eyewitnesses to that body-uprising must have been deceived by a ghost or vision. Here was that very same Lazarus, and the passage of several days or weeks, sitting among his fellow men and women with a real material body and eating and drinking real material food. Stronger evidence of a fact would be hard to imagine. Anybody not convinced by such evidence should just as well say that he is determined to believe nothing at all.

It is comfortable to know that the very same proofs which exist about the resurrection of Lazarus also surround that still mightier fact, that is, the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Just like Lazarus, Jesus was seen by his contemporaries coming and going after his resurrection. And just like Lazarus, the Lord Jesus did eat and drink after his resurrection. I offer the following scriptures in support of what I just said:

And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee and there shall they see me. (Matthew 28:9, 10).

Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. * * * After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. * * * Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat[.] (Mark 16:9, 12, 14).

Perhaps the most detailed description of Christ-spottings after His resurrection is found in the last chapter of Luke (chapter 24), including this: **And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. (Luke 24:30, 31).** And later on in that same chapter, specifically verses 36-48, we read this:

36 And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, *Peace be unto you.*

37 But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.

38 And he said unto them, *Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?*

39 Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.

40 And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them *his hands and his feet.*

41 And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, *Have ye here any meat?*

42 And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb.

43 And he took *it*, and did eat before them.

44 And he said unto them, **These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me.**

45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

46 And said unto them, **Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:**

47 **And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.**

48 **And ye are witnesses of these things.**

The idea of Christ rising from the dead is scoffed at nowadays. We live in an age of abounding unbelief and skepticism. But the words tell us otherwise, and the resurrection of Christ will stand up under any weight placed upon it. If we believe that Jesus rose again, we need not doubt the truth of his Messiahship, the reality of his role as our mediator, and the certainty of our own resurrection. Remember Paul's words: **And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. * * * But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.** (1 Corinthians 15:17, 20).

2. Ongoing Discouragement:

Mary, the sister of Lazarus, anointed the feet of Jesus with precious ointment and wiped them with the hair of her head. This was a common practice at this time and place where the heat is intense and the feet exposed to it by wearing sandals were often dry

and scorched. And Mary wasn't stingy. She was so generous with the ointment that the house was filled with its odor, similar to walking into a house where bacon is being cooked. This shows Mary was "all in" when it came to serving and worshiping the true and living God. Having freely received grace, she freely gave.

But there was one present who found fault with Mary's conduct and blamed her for being wasteful and extravagant. Mary, he said, should use her resources in a different and better way. Mary should, as they say, "get a life!" And note, the criticizer was not some homeless bum, but one of the disciples.

We know this type of person. We see and hear from these people on a daily basis. We call those folks sideline players, or Monday morning quarterbacks. They watch from the cheap seats and criticize. These people are happy to spend their resources on concerts, sporting events and other endless hobbies, but suggest they expend their God-given assets for the preaching of the Gospel and the spreading of God's word, and they tell you plainly that they think it a waste.

This carping is a specimen of the way in which wicked men often try to depreciate and discourage good actions. The more wicked and graceless people are, the more ready they are to find fault, seeing no beauty in the actions. And lest you think I unwisely use the term "wicked" in this context, consider the words of Christ when speaking of the servant who was **afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth.** (Matthew 25:25). Here's what our Savior said on that occasion: **Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.** (Matthew 25:26, 27).

Applied to our story, the heart which could conceive such censuring thoughts must have had low views of the dignity of Christ's person, and still lower views of our obligations to him. Of course, we ultimately learned the true nature of Judas Iscariot, and he stands representative of those who perpetually would discourage us in our service to God.

We must never allow ourselves to be moved by such detractors from **patient continuance in well doing**. (Romans 2:7). These distracters surround us; we experience them on the streets, social media, regular media, civic and political leaders, religious guides, entertainers, and so on. Paraphrasing what Christ said to Judas about Mary, we say to them: Let us alone, we have work to do!

3. Poverty will always exist:

One of the things we hear often is that we should donate to the poor. Many so-called “Christians” think they will earn their way to heaven by caring for the downtrodden and impoverished. Indeed, Judas (in our text) declared openly that Mary’s ointment would have been better employed if it had been sold and the proceeds given to the poor. And I know that some in this church struggle when they see “homeless” people in the streets begging for money. What to do?

Well, I say, it is clear from our text that poverty will always exist. Christ specifically tells us: **For the poor always ye have with you[.]** (John 12:8). So long as humans are what they are, some will always be rich and some poor, because some are diligent and some idle, some strong and some weak, some wise and some foolish. It is a pipe dream that poverty can be prevented. Presidents Franklin Delano Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Baines Johnson learned that (if they didn’t already know it).

My proposition is this: We’re not supposed to spend our time and resources “helping” the poor. That’s what phony so-called “Christians” do, in spades. Some make a career out of it. Our passage says don’t do it. Judas Iscariot said do it. That’s reason enough not to do it!

I offer these in support of my proposition:

- Idol worship. They make an industry of it. Self-worship. Look at me. I’m great because I help the poor. You’re great because you cook the turkey at Thanksgiving for the community Thanksgiving meal. We’re all great because we give to the Salvation Army at Christmas time. And so on.

- The poor are there for a reason. They are in-your-face evidence that God blesses some and not others.
- The poor are there for a reason. They are a regular, ever-present reminder of man's wretched condition.
- "Helping" the poor encourages people to violate God's orders to work and provide for your families. Modern day therapists call that "enabling."

All of this is not to say that we don't help fellow saints. Of course we do. We are well familiar with the writings in Matthew Chapter 25 where the blessed **inherit the kingdom of God prepared for you from the foundation of the world** (Matthew 25:34) for helping Christ's people when they were hungry, thirsty, homeless, without clothes, sick and imprisoned. **And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.** (Matthew 25:40). This clearly is in the context of hard spots in the lives of the people of God resulting from their faithful service to the King. We are always happy to help our fellow laborers in any way we can. Any other construction of these verses belies our obligation to work. Note this passage says **I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in,** and so on. (Matthew 25:35). It does not say "I was lazy and irresponsible and therefore impoverished as a lifestyle so I could live off the labors and resources of others."

Some may think this attitude is too harsh, but I trust it is in conformity with the scripture I have cited, and seems to be confirmed by Deuteronomy 15:11: **For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.** (Emphasis added).

But you may yet say that Galatians 2:10 belies these conclusions. That verse says: **Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.** Query: Is what I have just said regarding the poor compatible with our obligation to

remember the poor? Answer: I believe so, and the commentators agree. It is generally agreed that the “poor” Paul mentions here are the Christians of that day who were following Christ.

So, for example, Barnes says this –

All who know the special feelings of the Jews at that time in regard to Christians, must see at once that many of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth would be subjected to great inconveniences on account of their attachment to him. Many a wife might be disowned by her husband; many a child disinherited by a parent; many a man might be thrown out of employment by the fact that others would not countenance him; and hence, many of the Christians would be poor.

And Gill mentions these “poor” included the “poor saints” of that time who had arrived at that condition “*through the persecutions of their countrymen, who plundered them of their goods for professing the name of Christ; or it may be through their having given up all their substance into one common stock and fund, as they did at first, and which was now exhausted, and that in a great measure by assisting out of it the preachers who first spread the Gospel among the Gentiles[.]*”

4. Desperate Hardness and Unbelief in the Heart of Man:

I frequently stand in amazement at the glaring incredulity of man during and after God’s earth judgments. During a massive hurricane or consuming fires, you hear many verbal outbursts about God. But those spontaneous utterances are not sincere, and there is no genuine effort to see what is really happening and why such severe punishments are occurring.

Near the end of our principle text we see what shocking jadedness and unbelief there is in the heart of man. Recall the **chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death.** (John 12:10). What an astonishing reaction to this scene. Lazarus is a living exhibit to the power of Jesus Christ who had earlier raised him from the dead. These religionists **say that there is no resurrection.** (Acts 23:8). Lazarus sitting there at the dinner table said there is.

So these religious leaders want to kill Lazarus. That, my friends, is real hate, not to mention hard-as-flint hearts.

As I say, Lazarus made it impossible for these reprobates to deny the fact of his having been raised again, nor prevent its effect on the people. He was living and moving, eating and drinking a short distance from Jerusalem after lying days in the grave. As such, Lazarus was a witness to the truth of Christ's Messiahship and one whom they could not possibly answer or put to silence. But their pride and obstinacy would not give way. They would rather commit murder. No wonder the Lord Jesus in a certain other place marveled at unbelief. **And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.** (Mark 6:6). And do we not similarly marvel at the unbelief of those we see on the streets of this wretched nation? Of this scene, Matthew Henry says: *Never was there a more unreasonable madness and rage, to justify the apostle's calling of the enemies of the gospel unreasonable men.* Here's that referenced verse: **And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.** (2 Thessalonians 3:2).

Many's the time have I been present at one of our preaching events with a huge throng of opponents and I thought, "if only God would do some miracle, such as bringing back to life a prominent person to this scene, surely these people would understand." But this passage tells us such a miracle would have no curing impact. Instead, those contrarians would only become more hardened and, indeed, would want to kill the risen person, and us!

I love you. Amen.