Exploring the Bible—Gospel of John (11)

The Need of The Dead

**Scripture Reading:**

1 Now there was a certain man who was sick, Lazarus from Bethany, of the village of Mary and her sister Martha... 3 The sisters therefore sent to Him saying, Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick. 4 But when Jesus heard it, He said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, in order that the Son of God may be glorified through it. 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 When therefore He heard that he was sick, He remained at that time in the place where He was for two days. 7 Then after this He said to the disciples, Let us go into Judea again... 11 He said these things, and after this He said to them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going that I may wake him out of sleep. 12 The disciples then said to Him, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. 13 But Jesus had spoken about his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. 14 So Jesus then told them plainly, Lazarus has died. 15 And I rejoice for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him... 17 Then when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days... 19 And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. 20 Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him; but Mary sat in the house. 21 Then Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You. 23 Jesus said to her, Your brother will rise again. 24 Martha said to Him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection in the last day. 25 Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes into Me, even if he should die, shall live; 26 And everyone who lives and believes into Me shall by no means die forever. Do you believe this? 27 She said to Him, Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, He who comes into the world. 28 And when she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Teacher is here and is calling you. 29 And she, when she heard this, rose quickly and came to Him... 32 Then Mary, when she came to where Jesus was, saw Him and fell at His feet, saying to Him, Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. 33 Then Jesus, when He saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her weeping, was moved with indignation in His spirit and was troubled, 34 And He said, Where have you put him? They said to Him, Lord, come and see. 35 Jesus wept. 36 The Jews then said, Behold how He loved him! 37 But some of them said, Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man also have caused that this man would not die? 38 Jesus therefore, moved with indignation again in Himself, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus said, Take away the stone. Martha, the sister of him who was deceased, said to Him, Lord, by now he smells, for it is the fourth day that he is there. 40 Jesus said to her, Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God? 41 Then they took the stone away. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 And I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the crowd standing around, I said it, that they may believe that You have sent Me. 43 And when He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out! 44 And he who had died came out, bound hand and foot with cloths, and his face was bound about with a handkerchief. Jesus said to them, Loose him and let him go. 45 Many of the Jews therefore who had come to Mary and beheld the things that He did believed into Him. (John 11:1-45)

**Ministry Reading:**

THE NEED OF THE DEAD

Let us consider the need of the dead. Do the dead need healing? Healing is useless. Do the dead need correction? Correction is also useless. The need of the dead is the resurrection life, because their problem is death. Healing cannot deal with death, and correction cannot deal with death. Only resurrection life can deal with death. Therefore, the dead need a life that can enter into and enliven them. This is the basic need of the dead.

When Lazarus was sick, his sisters sent a message to the Lord Jesus, hoping that the Lord would come to heal him. They asked the Lord to heal Lazarus. However, when the Lord Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, He remained in the place where He was for two more days. Because of the delay, Lazarus had been dead for four days when the Lord arrived. The Lord Jesus delayed in order to show that His salvation raises people out of death instead of just solving their outward problems. For this reason He did not go to save Lazarus until he was dead. If He had gone to heal Lazarus, His salvation would not have been presented in a proper way. It would have meant that His salvation merely “corrects” people. Healing is in the principle of correction, but resurrection is in the principle of regeneration. To heal is to correct a problem; it is a matter of behavior. To resurrect is to give life; it is a matter of life. The Gospel of John presents eight cases to portray the principles of the Lord’s salvation. The greatest principle of the Lord’s salvation is to raise people out of death. Therefore, the Lord waited until Lazarus had died instead of healing him while he was sick. This shows that resurrection is the principle of salvation. Resurrection is the true need of those who are dead in sins.

The Lord’s salvation is to raise people from the dead, not to correct their problems. Hence, when Lazarus was sick, the Lord did not go to heal him. The Lord did not do anything. This means that if we merely acknowledge that we have problems but not that we are dead, the Lord will be unable to carry out His salvation in us. If we feel that merely our conduct needs to be corrected but not that we need the resurrection of life, the Lord will be unable to carry out His salvation in us. We must see that the Lord’s salvation is not to heal or correct us but to raise us from death and to give life to us. Our problem is not that there is something wrong with our conduct but that there is something wrong with our life. We are not only sick; we are dead. The need of the dead is to receive life in order to be resurrected. The only cure for death is resurrection life. Only resurrection life can eliminate death.

HOW THE LORD’S RESURRECTION LIFE ENTERS INTO MAN TO RESURRECT MAN

When someone hears the Lord’s word, the Lord’s resurrection life enters into him. The Lord raised Lazarus from the dead by speaking to him. This indicates that the Lord’s resurrection life enters into man and resurrects man by His word. His word is His voice. His resurrection life is contained in His word. His word is also the gospel, which is the words in the Bible and the words that He spoke. When His word meets the death in man, the power of resurrection life swallows up the death in man and enlivens man. Whenever the Lord visits you, His word will come to you. The Lord’s resurrection life is in His word. When His word comes to you, His resurrection life will enliven you.

There are three steps here. The first step involves the Lord’s speaking, which is the Lord’s doing. The second step involves our coming out, which is our responsibility to believe the Lord’s word. The third step involves help from others, which is to be released from our bondage. These three steps are involved in shepherding others. We should always let the Lord speak first. Those whom we shepherd then need to believe. Following this, we can render them some help to release them from their bondage. First, those whom we shepherd need to hear the Lord’s word, which is spirit and life. After they hear the Lord’s word, they need to take the responsibility to believe. However, after they believe, they are still bound; hence, we need to loose them.

The ultimate issue of man’s salvation is resurrection. The Lord does not correct man; He enlivens man inwardly. This is how the Lord saves an unbeliever, and this is the same principle of the Lord’s resurrection work in believers. As believers, we should be resurrected daily. We are not being corrected daily but being resurrected daily. Every day we need to allow the resurrection life to operate in our being in order to deliver us from the tomb and from bondage. We need to be delivered by the operation of the resurrection life in us from what buries us and from what takes away our freedom.

Question for Discussion: What is the spiritual death and resurrection in our experience?

Reference: Changing Death into Life, Ch. 9