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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer", Clapham,
on Sunday morning, 25th October, 1970

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Hymns: 477, 476, 193.

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15. 1-28 and from verse 50-end.

Text: John 11. 25,26.

"Jesus said unto her, '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?'"

When the Lord Jesus was upon earth, as we know He wrought many miracles in different ways: He fed the hungry, gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and healed many of their sicknesses and diseases; many lepers, and many poor sinners heard His blessed Gospel and believed on Him by His grace to the saving of their souls.

This is a miracle that seems to stand out and is recorded in a particular way to demonstrate both the divinity and humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord had a particular purpose evidently in recording in considerable detail the circumstances relating to the raising of Lazarus from the dead, particularly after that he had been dead four days. I know the attending circumstances are familiar, and I do not intend dilating in detail upon them, but they show first of all, and that can be confirming to us, that nothing is too hard for the Lord, no death, no sickness, no trial, or whatever it may be in our lives or our bodies, nothing is too hard for Him, but even so we need to realise that our times are in His hand, and life and death, time and eternity, sickness and health, with all our circumstances, are as it were under His feet. To a believer, whatever the Lord's disposings may be, this can be in times of distress, trial and bereavement, a sweet consolation, but only to believers: and sometimes this is particularly felt.

Ever since the fall, the Lord has never designed that man shall be immortal as to his state here below. We have it so clearly in the Scripture that it is appointed unto man once to die. This has continued since the fall, and we need solemnly to realise that death results from sin and a violation of the law of God, and was a judgment upon Adam;

consequently all his posterity died in him as we have been reading, and so to this day, and while time shall last we shall continually meet with death, and we know it must come to us, for there is no exception, none whatever. Those who love the Lord, as our dear sister did, die in the Lord. Death makes no difference to the union subsisting between a believer and his Lord, except that it is a blessed confirmation of it; as relating to all who truly believe in Him, we read that with such it is "absent from the body, present with the Lord". Beloved friends, when we think of the uncertainty of life, that our life hangs so to speak upon a brittle thread, that we may be here one moment and gone the next, from time into eternity, what need we have to pray:-

"Prepare me, gracious God,
To stand before Thy face".

How much this weighs with some of us, the Lord only knows.

Here are unusual circumstances, but they are circumstances which in a particular way we may realise that the dear Redeemer when He was upon earth had human feelings of grief, sorrow and compassion. Death has come to a family each of whom He loved, Martha, Mary and Lazarus; but Lazarus falls sick and dies. In their distress they send a message to Him saying, "Lord, behold he whom Thou lovest is sick"; that was beautifully true for He did love them each one; but still He allowed Lazarus to die for a particular purpose. As you know, when the Lord heard of this He abode still two days in the same place where He was, although it was so urgent, and though, as the Lord Himself knew, by then Lazarus was dead; yet He did not say, "Come we must go quickly, we must lose no time, these sisters are in grievous distress, we must get there quickly". No, no, His ways are not ours; He abode two days in the same place where He was. What a painful two days they must have been for those sisters! We may imagine them waiting with earnest intent for His appearing, He was so necessary to them, they were filled with grief, He alone could console them; but He abides still two days in the same place. It would appear that He designed this delay in order to demonstrate His almighty power, when the case appeared to be beyond all hope, but what a sad and painful delay it

was with regard to these two sisters. This has often been the case with some of the Lord's living children, He appears to delay, but sets His own time to come to them; this delay can be a sharp trial of faith but is no indication of any lack of interest or love toward them. The purpose of delay is for reasons known better to Him than to us.

Here as we can see, to demonstrate His divinity, Lazarus must lie in the grave four days until there were marks of corruption; naturally we would say, "Now it is all too late"; as in the case of both Martha and Mary, when the Lord did come, the first thing Martha said to Him was, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died, - if you had come as quickly as possible you might have saved his life", or "if only you had been here, Lord, this would never have happened". Even so there was a measure of faith with Martha which is very sweet to notice in the midst of her hard strugglings, as with Mary. Martha says, "But I know, that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee". Jesus saith unto her, "Thy brother shall rise again". Martha saith unto Him, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day". She could believe there would be a resurrection some day. Her faith seemed to go so far, but it was struggling against an apparent impossibility as it concerned Lazarus at this particular time, but the Lord designed to prove to Mary and Martha that He was THE Resurrection. To Him it was not a point of importance how long Lazarus had been dead, and that he was even buried and decaying, - that dead body was not beyond the power of THE Resurrection. This was a matter of life coming to death, and so it is in every case, dear friends, in a spiritual way with the Lord's dear people whom He disposes to quicken from a state of death in trespasses and sins; it is the same almighty power; in a spiritual sense it is life going to death just as much as it was in the case of Lazarus as relating to his body. We read in the Epistle to the Ephesians, "You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins," and the Lord Himself said, "It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life".

This remarkable account of Lazarus may be very confirming to the

Lord's waiting people who may be assailed by the devil that there is no point in waiting any longer, if He was ever intending to come He would have come before now; but that is not the Lord's voice in the heart, that is the voice of unbelief rising up. He never comes before His time, He never is too late. These are blessed words that the Lord said to Martha, "I am the Resurrection". This would indicate that He held in His hand supreme power over death, inherent in Himself, as the Source and Foundation of all life both natural, spiritual and eternal. This appears to link with what the Lord Jesus said to John when He appeared to him in the Isle of Patmos, "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death". A lot of religious people now discredit any divine punishment for sin, and say that there is no hell but the Holy Scriptures do not say so. How solemn it is and how awful to bypass divine revelation, and for men to set their own sentiments against what God has clearly revealed. Every time we see a funeral pass in the street we see the effects of sin, for if there had been no sin there had been no death; but in the case of a believer, as in the case of our dear departed sister, we see what we have read this morning, death swallowed up in victory. Although the body must die as a divine appointment, that is not eternal death, but is the opening of the gates of paradise to the ransomed soul leaving the mortal frame to sleep in the dust until the Lord shall come again as the Resurrection. So it will be when that great day shall come, for there is no doubt about it, and I am disposed to feel sometimes that this glorious blessed morning of the resurrection when the Lord shall descend from heaven, with the voice of the archangel and with power and with great glory, is not very far distant now. I sometimes feel myself that is not far distant. O what a blessed day it will be to all who have died in the Lord. What is His own property will then be claimed by Him as His own, and will rise again to be conformed to His own risen body, as in that blessed chapter that I have read, "For this corruptible must put on corruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" . . . "then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory".

"I am the Resurrection". Not only does this indicate His inherent

power, but that He has power to give life to the dead and eternal life as we read in that blessed chapter, 17th John, where the Lord said in His prayer, "As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him". O what a blessed gift is this, a gift that will never, never lose its blessed efficacy, power and glory, for that will be eternal life through Him who is the Resurrection. Moreover, as the Resurrection He has power over death and here particularly of course in relation to His redeemed children. I am the Resurrection. "Martha said unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day", but as to his present condition he was dead, buried and becoming corrupt, past hope apparently, but he was not beyond hope with the Resurrection. No poor sinner waiting at His blessed feet is past hope with the Resurrection however impossible their case may appear to be. "I am the Resurrection rises above it all. His power is supreme over every detail from our life's minutest circumstance to our everlasting destiny.

"I am the Resurrection". This means, as we read in Corinthians, that as sure as that He Himself was raised from the dead, and is a living Jesus so will every member of His mystical body rise in Him one day. "I am the Resurrection". This is a blessed truth which incorporates every member of His mystical body, and none will be left out; this can be a power in the soul of those who feel a spiritual death in themselves. "I am the Resurrection".

This is a source of comfort, peace, hope and joy, "I am the Resurrection and the Life". This is beautifully experimental; this is what He is, He is the Life of all religion. No religion is worth having unless Christ is the Resurrection and the Life of it. Everything that is saving, vital and real in the soul of a quickened person is of the Lord Jesus. It is a blessed evidence of the power of the resurrection in one's soul when that soul is quickened into life from a state of death in sin, for there in that case the Lord Jesus is the Resurrection. This is a blessed fact, is it not? If the Lord has opened our poor blind eyes and granted us some revelation of Himself, then He is the Resurrection in our soul's experience, and the Life; He is the Life of the Church as His body; all the life that is in the living church of

God, irrespective of particular denominations, the living church of God that is enrolled in that bond of covenant love from the beginning to the end of time - the life in that living church is from the power of His Resurrection. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive". He is the life of our hope, but if we know anything real, friends, I am sure we shall not build upon something of our own as though we could make some foundation for ourselves, but we shall say, and feelingly too,

"My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness".

I realise that these are familiar words but I know that it is a blessed truth, I am sure that it is a blessed truth in the experience of a believer in the Lord Jesus who has been emptied from vessel to vessel, brought down, wounded, stripped and killed to all hope in himself. There is no hope for him but in the Resurrection.

Our blessed Redeemer has completed redemption's work on behalf of all for whom He died and that atonement will never lose its efficacy. Here, in the text we have a living Jesus. And where is He now? He is at the Father's right hand as the Resurrection, He raised many from the dead when He was here below, but none of those whom He raised from the dead were the Resurrection. The Lord Jesus is the Resurrection in that death could not hold Him. On the third day He emerged from the silent tomb as the Resurrection to die no more. Death had no more dominion over Him, for "in that He died, He died unto sin once, but in that He liveth He liveth unto God" as the Resurrection. He is the life of our peace, comfort, joy, prospects, repentance, prayers and worship. He is the life of all this. When you are favoured to get near the Lord in prayer, that is the power of Christ's Resurrection in your soul. He is the Resurrection and the Life there in your soul's experience. He lives after the power of an endless life, the first-fruits of the glorious harvest that He will one day gather when He comes again the second time without sin unto salvation.

The Lord said to Martha, "I am the Resurrection, and the Life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. Lazarus

was dead, but he shall live again; and soon he did. Lazarus was a believer, everyone who sleeps in Jesus will rise again one day. "Believest thou this?". How can we believe these gracious mysteries? They surpass all the conception of our minds; but that makes no difference to the glorious truth. Do not try to pry into something that seems impossible to carnal reason, ask the Lord to make it life and power in your soul. "Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die". That is, death is not the ultimate end. It is not a real death, as applies to those who die in hardness and unbelief, it is but asleep in Jesus, blessed sleep. He shall never eternally die, soon the purchased possession will be recovered, raised up again soul and body to be for ever with the Lord.

As relating to our dear departed sister I believe we can safely and feelingly say that with her it is "absent from the body and present with the Lord". I have not much record of our late dear sister's earlier days but I am informed by a friend that Miss Bunn was baptised at Ipswich when she was about sixteen and apparently the words that moved her to take this step were "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes" (Luke 12.47). This was her personal case, and I should feel that it was a time of first love with her. Later on living at Oakington she became a member there under the pastorate/^{in those days} of Mr. E.G. Rowell to whom she would sometimes refer. Eventually, when living at Richmond I understand it was through a sermon that she heard from 1. John 5.10 concerning him that believeth on the Son of God having the witness in himself, that she began to come up here on Sabbath afternoons for the evening service. After a time, feeling much drawn to us here she joined us, transferring from Oakington, in January 1942. She has remained a consistent, loyal and devoted member. During that time that she has been with us here she has been a lively hearer. As her pastor I shall miss her keenly, for she often gave me an encouraging word, and would refer to something that I had said in the sermon being made good to her. She would often be here early at chapel, and would sometimes tell me something about a good hearing time. She would write little notes now and again

something like this, "I truly love the place where God's honour dwelleth, and can say there my best friends and kindred dwell, there God my Saviour reigns. I liked what you said last night, that this Man receiveth sinners and eateth with them, that this eating was a spiritual communion. I had not thought of it just like that. It is nice to be able to think of these things, is it not? It just helps one along. I hope you are much helped at the weekend (this was written in May) at the special services and that many of us will receive a blessing."

Miss Bunn has been in our hearts for years and this is another sad loss to us as a church. In this we mourn the loss of others as well, late friends and members; Miss Lydia Smith died on July 29th, Mrs. Funnell on 30th August and now Miss Bunn on October 20th. But the Lord balances the clouds, friends, and we have to thank the Lord that it is not all one side. In the midst of this sorrow the Lord has appeared to us and blessed one, blessed her greatly, and given her a willing mind and desire to honour her Lord and to walk in His ways. She was sweetly helped to tell us some good things last Friday evening and was warmly received, and if the Lord will the baptising will be next Wednesday after the evening service.