

“ I AM THE RESURRECTION, AND THE LIFE”

No date

I have a great love in my heart for the Lord Jesus, and an overflowing sense of gratitude for all that he has done for me and for all men.

In saying this I think I simply reflect the feelings of faithful members of the Church everywhere.

We are the Lord's people, the sheep of his pasture, those who have taken his yoke upon us. We have accepted his invitation, "Come unto me, . . . and learn of me." (Matt. 11:28.)

I love to learn of him and to study the authoritative accounts of his life. These are found in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and in Third Nephi.

May I now invite you to view with me one of the sweetest and most tender episodes in the life of our Lord, an episode in which he teaches some of the most transcendent truths ever uttered, and in which he displays in great power and glory the reality of his divine Sonship.

In many respects the Lord Jesus was as other men. He was born of Mary in a stable. Through that birth the spirit of the Great Jehovah was housed in a tabernacle of clay. He was thus subject to all the ills and trials of life. His childish feet trod the lanes of Galilee. When but 12 years of age he was lost among the milling masses that thronged Jerusalem at Passover time.

He ate and drank and slept and worked. His calloused hands hewed with the woodman's ax. His skilled arm wielded the carpenter's hammer. He knew toil, and felt the pangs of hunger and thirst. He was tested and tried in all things. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." (Heb. 5:8.)

But what interests us even more, he had friends and associates and loved ones. He enjoyed being with people. John was the disciple whom he loved. The two sisters, Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus were his intimate friends. They also shared in that familial type love which is sweet and tender and wholesome. And it is of them which we now desire more particularly to speak.

Mary is the one who anointed Jesus' feet with the costly ointment of spikenard; was rebuked by Judas for the waste; and received from the Master the promise that wheresoever his gospel should be preached in all the world, her act of anointing his feet would be held in honorable remembrance.

She and Martha and Lazarus were three of the most faithful and spiritually endowed saints in time's meridian. They lived in Bethany some two miles from Jerusalem, and Jesus often dwelt within the hallowed walls of their home.

On the occasion of which we now speak Lazarus lay ill, nigh unto death, in Bethany where his sisters ministered unto him. Jesus and his disciples were some 25 miles away in Perea. To them came this word: "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick."

Hearing this our Lord responded with words which his disciples did not fully understand but which meant: 'Lazarus shall die, but only for a short time. Then at my command he shall return to mortality to stand as a witness to all generations that I am the Son of God and have power over life and death.'

Knowing beforehand what he would do, Jesus made no effort to go to his sick friend. There was to be no manifestation of his healing power. For two full days he remained in Perea, teaching, healing, ministering among the people.

Then he said to his disciples: "Let us go into Judea again."

Their response was one of fear for their Lord's safety. "The Jews of late sought to stone thee," they said, "and goest thou thither again?"

That he would go in spite of the threats of death was a foregone conclusion. His message of reassurance to them was: "Though it be the eleventh hour of my life, yet there are twelve hours in the day, and during that designated period, I shall do the work appointed me without stumbling or faltering. This is the time given me to do my work. I cannot wait for the night when perchance the opposition will die down. He that shirks his responsibilities and puts off his labors until the night shall stumble in the darkness and fail in his work."

Then he said: "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep."

How gentle and kind is the message—"He sleepeth!" When the righteous die, they close their eyes in mortal sleep and awake at peace in the paradise of God. "Those that die in me shall not taste of death," the Lord says, "for it shall be sweet unto them." (D. & C. 42:46.) "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." (Psalm 116:15.)

Not knowing Jesus spoke of the sleep of death the disciples said, "If he sleep, he shall do well," to which Jesus replied plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him." (John ii:14-15.)

Then spake Thomas, one of the Twelve; one who was absent from the upper room when the Risen Lord ate fish and an honeycomb before them, and permitted the others to feel the nail prints in his hands and feet and to thrust their hands into the spear wound in his

side; one who disbelieved the words of the ten apostles who were then present; one to whom the Immortal Christ thereafter appeared and said: “Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing”; one who then said in humble adoration: “My Lord and my God.” (John 20:27-28.)

But on this occasion, as spokesman for the others, in the true spirit of his apostolic anointing, Thomas said: “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

And so they went. But when they arrived at Bethany they found that Lazarus, dead four days, already lay in the tomb, his mortal remains well in process of decomposition as they returned to that dust from whence they came.

Learning that he was enroute, Martha went forth to meet Jesus, and greeted him with this faith-filled testimony: “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.”

Such was the faith of Martha—not alone that if Jesus had been present he would have closed the door of death and healed her health bereft brother, but that even now the rotting and decaying corpse could live again as a mortal among men.

Then from the lips of her Lord came these words: “Thy brother shall rise again.”

“I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day,” Martha replied. But this was not what she sought. All the faithful saints shall rise again in glorious immortality and inherit celestial rest in due course. Martha felt—and who can question but that the feeling was implanted in her heart by the power of the Holy Ghost?—Martha felt that Lazarus had not finished his work among men, and she knew that if Jesus willed it so, her brother could even now return to his mortal labors.

At this point and in this setting Jesus made one of the most profound and marvelous pronouncements of his whole mortal ministry. To Martha he said:

“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.”

That is: “Immortality and eternal life come by me. Because of the infinite and eternal atonement which I shall accomplish by the shedding of my own blood, all men shall be raised in immortality, while those who believe and obey shall be raised also unto eternal life. By me redemption cometh. I am he whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. I am the Son of God. Even the dead who believe in me shall have eternal life. And all who believe in me shall be born again and shall be spiritually alive forever.”

This great Messianic proclamation is the heart and core of the gospel. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not

perish, but have everlasting life. . . He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” (John 3:16, 36.)

This transcendent truth was and is the heart and core of all the prophetic teachings of all the ages. In all dispensations, from the first to the last, the voice of God is: “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” (Moses 1:29.) Paul said, Christ “hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (2 Tim. 1:10.) Through Joseph Smith, the Lord revealed that the very reason he appointed “unto man the days of his probation” was so “that by his natural death he might be raised in immortality unto eternal life, even as many as would believe.” (D&C 29:43.)

But nowhere has the doctrine been crystallized with such clarity as when the Lord Jesus made his great pronouncement to Martha that he himself, the mortal man who graced their home in Bethany with his presence and who loved her and Mary and Lazarus, was in divine reality the resurrection and the life. And having so testified our Lord tested the faith of his beloved Martha by asking: “Believest thou this?”

Her answer was perfect. It embraced the whole concept of redemption, of the promised ransom of fallen man from the effects of the temporal and spiritual death brought into the world by the fall of Adam. It said simply: “Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.”

Thus the doctrine had been taught. Both Jesus and Martha had borne testimony to his divine Sonship. It now but remained for Him who is God’s own Son to do that which no mortal man who ever lived could do of himself. It remained for Jesus to work the miracle which would prove God was with him and that his words were therefore binding upon his hearers and upon all who thereafter should read them.

That his beloved Mary might also be a participant in what he was about to do; that she too might feel the mighty power of God which he was about to exercise; that she too might continue, with her kindred, as a living witness of his divine Sonship, Jesus sent for Mary.

She came, fell at his feet, and echoed the words of Martha: “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” Perhaps she also said more; in any event her faith in Him whom she addressed as Lord was also perfect.

Jesus was then at his request shown the place where Lazarus was laid. It is a touching scene. Mary wept. Her Jewish friends wept. “Jesus wept. “ The people said, “Behold how he loved him!”

And Lazarus came forth. The rotting flesh restored to health and normality; the stench of death, was no more; the processes of decomposition ceased. And the eternal spirit left

friends and loved ones in the paradise of God to inhabit again his mortal tenement, to fill the full measure of his mortal life.

After the miracle, many believed, and well they might. But after the miracle others refused to believe and sought to put both Jesus and Lazarus to death lest our Lord's act of raising the dead be used as evidence that he was the promised Messiah. (John 11.)

Now these things which we here recount all happened some 2000 years ago. But the truths we learn from them are as important to our salvation as they were to those anciently who dwelt in Bethany or Jerusalem or any of the regions round about.

If we ever sit down with Martha in the kingdom of God, it will be because we know as she knew that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."

If we ever expect to have the association of Thomas and the apostles of old in those heavenly realms where they now abide, it will be because we are willing to "die with him" as they were.

If we ever expect to be raised both in immortality and unto eternal life, it will be because we believe and obey as did those of old whose lives are patterns of faith and devotion.

How blessed and favored we are to live in a day when God speaks again; when the gospel has been restored in all its ancient glory; and when we know, as did they of old, that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God by whom immortality and eternal life come.

These things I know and to them I testify.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.