

## THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

*John 11:1-46*

For all classes this story offers one of our best opportunities to give the doctrine of the future life. In our chapter the Lord shows clearly that He raised Lazarus in order to teach that we never die and that it is He alone who determines when our consciousness should be transferred from this world to the spiritual world.

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### Doctrinal Points

*Death is a kind of “sleep” leading to resurrection.*

*The only “death” we need fear is the death of goodness in our hearts.*

*Unless we try to obey the Lord, believing in His Word, we are in danger of letting selfish and worldly desires kill any hope that we may become spiritual people.*

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### Notes for Parents

Our story for today tells us many things which will help us all through our lives, if only we are willing to believe them. One thing it shows us is that belief is a matter of our free choice. Sometimes we hear people say, “I wish I could believe that death is not the end.” They could believe if they were really willing. Mary and Martha and Lazarus were willing; the chief priests and the Pharisees were not. Belief involves changing our lives and we tend to put off making such an important decision.

The Lord tells us plainly that all are raised up after death, not on some distant judgment day but immediately. He told His disciples first, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth” and then “Lazarus is dead.” Both statements were true. For death is nothing more than going to sleep in this world and waking up in a much more beautiful and happy one.

You notice that when the Lord was first told that His dear friend Lazarus was sick, He said: “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God.” He knew that the work of Lazarus in this world was not finished, and that He would reawaken him here. This life is our school. We all have work to do here—work for others and also the work of forming our own souls into the image and likeness of God. It is right that we should hope for a long life here, so that we may do all the good and make all the progress we can. But still this is just our beginning, and we should trust the Lord to decide when it will be best for us to be transferred to our eternal homes, and we should look forward to that time. Death is always a blessing for the person who dies, however we may feel the loss here. The only death we should fear is the death of goodness in our hearts. This is the death which is meant in verse 26 of our chapter. If we do not make up our minds here to believe in the Lord and try to obey Him, we are in danger of letting our own selfish and worldly desires kill out in us all possibility of becoming the kind of people who live in heaven.

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### Primary

Introduce the characters in the story and then read the lesson from the Word. Talk about what death really is and about the beautiful world which is prepared for us; do not fail to emphasize that we must learn here to be heavenly people if we are to live in heaven when we die. The teacher should try to find out what the children know of death, and let that lead into a discussion of what death really is, the spiritual world, and the purpose of our life here.

Often when the Lord went to Jerusalem for any of the great feasts, He did not sleep in Jerusalem, but at night went out to Bethany, a little town about two miles from Jerusalem, and stayed with some dear friends He had there. These friends were a man named Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary. They are mentioned several times in the Gospels. Our story today is about something that happened to them and a miracle which the Lord performed.

What had happened to Lazarus?

Why did the Lord wait to go to Bethany until after Lazarus had died?

Who went out to meet Him?

What did Martha say when she met the Lord?

What did she think about the resurrection of the dead?

What did the Lord tell her?

When they came to the grave, what did the Lord tell them to do?

What did the Lord say when they took away the stone?

What happened?

When anyone we love dies, we feel very sad because we know how much we shall miss him and what a change in our lives his going will make. This is a natural feeling and not wrong, but we must be sure that we do not let ourselves feel that the Lord ought not to have let our friend die. The Lord always does what is best for every one of us.

The Lord raised Lazarus from the dead to teach us two things which we must always remember. One is that, as verse 25 of our chapter tells us, He is the “resurrection and the life.” All life comes from the Lord. The other is that no one ever really dies. When a person is said to die, it just means that he is waking up in the spiritual world instead of here on earth. And the spiritual world is much more beautiful and happy than this one. We live here on earth for just a few years to learn to be the kind of people the Lord wants us to be, and then the Lord can let us wake up in the other world and find the homes where we shall live always—very beautiful homes if we have been good.

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### Junior

The principal lessons to be impressed on the Juniors are that our life here is given us as a time of free choice of God or self, that death is not to be feared, that the Lord decides when it is best for us to leave this world, and that no one can be convinced by miracles who does not want to obey the Lord.

Our lesson today is about another miracle—perhaps the most striking one of all. The story is told only in the Gospel of John. It happened very near the end of the Lord’s life on earth, for at

the end of the chapter we are told that the Passover feast was at hand, and in the beginning of chapter 12 we have the story of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Where did Lazarus live?

Who were his sisters?

To whom did they send when Lazarus became sick?

Bethany was a little town about two miles from Jerusalem, and it was at the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus that the Lord was in the habit of lodging when He went to Jerusalem. In our lessons from Luke we had a story about Mary and Martha. If you have forgotten it, read it in Luke 10:38-42. Read also John 12:1-8, which explains verse 2 of our chapter.

Did the Lord go at once to Bethany when He heard that Lazarus was sick?

What did He first say to His disciples about Lazarus?

When we die, we do merely go to sleep in this world and wake up in the spiritual world, which we know is our real home and a much more beautiful and happy world than this one. We live in this world for a few years to learn how to live and to make our free choice of the kind of people we want to be. It is right that we should want to stay here as long as we can in the effort to become better and better ourselves and more and more useful to other people. But we should never be afraid of death. In fact we should all, if we are trying to do right, look forward to the day when the Lord can say to us, as He said to the man in the parable (Matthew 25:21): "Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord." For it is always the Lord who decides just when it is best for us to leave this world.

In the case of Lazarus the Lord knew that this time had not really come. We learn this from verse 4 of our chapter. Lazarus did die, but the Lord planned to wake him again in this world instead of in the other.

What reason does the Lord give in verse 4?

When the Lord reached Bethany, how long had Lazarus been in the tomb?

What did Martha say when she met the Lord?

What did the Lord tell her?

When did Martha think Lazarus would rise?

What did the Lord say?

What did Mary say when she came to the Lord?

Both Martha and Mary believed firmly that Jesus was the Messiah and they knew He had performed many miracles. He had twice before brought back to life someone who had been pronounced dead. We have studied one of these stories (Luke 7:11-15). The other is told in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Read it in Luke 8:41-42, 49-56. Martha and Mary may have known of these miracles, but both had been performed very soon after the death of the person. It never occurred to the two sisters that the Lord could restore their brother to them after he had been buried for four days. Martha's words in verse 39 of our chapter show what their thought was.

How did Lazarus appear when he came out of the tomb?

What did the Lord tell the people to do?

What effect did the miracle have on many who saw it?

You should read the next few verses (47-53) to see the different effect of this miracle on the chief priests and Pharisees. You can see that they knew that the story was true, but their only thought was of how to preserve their own power with the people and the favor of the Roman governor. Miracles never convince anyone who does not want to obey the Lord.

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### Intermediate

The young people should be shown how clearly the Lord teaches that the death of the body does not interrupt the life of a person, and that He is always in control. Include the correspondences presented in the Easter lesson and show how they apply here. Call attention to the attitude of the chief priests and Pharisees and show how this lesson leads into the crucifixion of the Lord.

The miracle of our lesson for today was performed near the end of the Lord's life on earth. In verse 55 of our chapter we read, "And the Jews' passover was nigh at hand," and the next chapter tells of the Lord's coming to Jerusalem for this Passover and entering the city as a king, welcomed by the multitude—our Palm Sunday

lesson. In that chapter (chapter 12) we are also told that many of the multitude had come more to see Lazarus than to see the Lord. We can well imagine how widely the miracle was discussed.

The scene of the miracle was Bethany, a little town about two miles from Jerusalem. You may remember this from the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). The Lord was in the habit of lodging at their house when He came to Jerusalem for the feasts, and it was there that He lodged during the last week of His life also. Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus all believed the Lord to be the Messiah. They knew of His miracles of healing, and it was natural that they should send word to Him when Lazarus was taken sick. As we see from our chapter, both the sisters felt sure that the Lord would have healed Lazarus if only He had come in time, but neither of them imagined that He had power to restore their brother to life after he had lain four days in the tomb. They had the same material thoughts that everyone else had, and supposed that life was in the physical body, and that after their brother's body had begun to decay, he could not live again until all men's physical bodies should be raised to life again at the "last day." You will find that, in spite of the Lord's teaching, many people still believe this today.

The Lord tells us that He purposely waited before going to Bethany (verses 14-15). Twice before He had raised someone from the dead (Luke 7:11-15; 8:41-42, 49-56), but in one of these cases the miracle was performed almost immediately after death and in the other so soon after that the body was not yet buried. The raising of Lazarus was to carry a step further the disciples' understanding of the Lord's power over life. It should have prepared them to expect His own resurrection, but we know that it did not, and this is one of the things which teaches us how hard it is for anyone who has let himself become absorbed in the things of the material world to be brought to understand and believe in spiritual things, which are after all the real things.

Jesus told Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life." The Lord alone is life, as we learned in the first chapter of John (1:4);

and all our life, and all the apparent life of the physical world comes from Him moment by moment. Before He went to Bethany He said to His disciples: “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep”; then He said: “Lazarus is dead.” What we call death is really only a short sleep from which we wake to consciousness in the spiritual world instead of in this. None of us should fear it. The Lord knows when each one of us has made all the preparation for eternal life that he is willing and able to make. Every once in a while we read in the papers of someone who has apparently died and then, by massage of the heart or some such treatment, has been restored to life. And we know that often people who have apparently drowned are resuscitated. In all such cases we may think that the Lord is saying, as He said of Lazarus in verse 4: “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God.” The person resuscitated and also those around him have something to learn from the experience.

The Easter lesson contains all the correspondences we need know for our study of the meaning of this miracle: the tomb, the stone, and the graveclothes. Whenever we are faced with the death of someone we love, we should remember that in the Word death and burial signify resurrection, and we should try to “think as angels think, and feel as angels feel”; that is, think of the person waking to fuller and more beautiful life and rejoice with him, even while we naturally grieve that we ourselves shall not see him for a while.

Read carefully verses 4, 15, 41, and 42 to see how plainly the Word shows us that the Lord stands guard over all the experiences that come to us and wishes us to learn from them.

But we do not learn if our minds are full of self and of our success in the world. Read verses 47 to 53 to see how the Pharisees took the news of the raising of Lazarus, and read verses 10 and 11 of chapter 12 to see how far their self-interest led them. The Lord has given every human being two great gifts: freedom and rationality.\* Each one of us, if he is to be what he is created to be, must

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\*Rationality is the ability to distinguish between right and wrong; freedom

first decide freely to believe the Lord and obey Him instead of letting selfishness rule his life, and then he must study the Word and think about all he reads there, and in this new age he must also study what the Lord in His Second Coming has taught us concerning its true meaning.

*Basic Correspondences*

- stoning = (in a good sense) truths used resolutely to condemn evil
  - = (in an evil sense) denial and perversion of truth
  - Lazarus = charity and openness toward the Lord
  - raising Lazarus = restoring these qualities in the church
  - death = the “sleep” of resurrection
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**Senior**

It is very important that young people form as early as possible the right habit of looking at death. A clear understanding and firm faith will enable them to decide more easily many problems and also to help those who have not had the same spiritual opportunities which they have had.

Recall the story of the Lord’s healing of the man blind from birth, the effect this miracle had on the man himself and the quite different effect it had on the religious leaders around him. Our story today gives us a still more striking example of the same lesson. It happened very near the end of the Lord’s life on earth. In the letter it is closely associated with the Palm Sunday lesson (chapter 12:9), and in its significance with the Easter lesson. It also gives us (verses 47-53) the final reason why the chief priests and Pharisees determined that they must destroy the Lord.

As you grow older, if you continue to read the Gospels over and over again, you will be struck with the way in which the Lord’s

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(or liberty) is the ability to make our own choices between right and wrong as we are confronted by good and evil day by day. –Ed.



power as well as His consciousness of His divine nature increased with His overcoming of the successive temptations which came to Him through His assumed human. You remember perhaps that when He was twelve years old, He said to Mary and Joseph when they found Him tarrying with the doctors in the temple: “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). Now, just before the final scenes of His earthly life, He can say to Martha: “I am the resurrection and the life,” and presently (John 14:9) to Philip: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”

Yet we can also see in our chapter that something of the assumed humanity still remained with Him, for He wept and also groaned, and weeping and groaning, although they are often produced by love, are not characteristics of infinity. We learn from this chapter that the Lord permitted Himself to do and say many things because of their effect on those around Him. With this in mind read verses 4, 6, 11-15, 41-42.

The Lord had twice before raised someone from the dead (Luke 7:11-15; 8:49-56), but in neither case had the person been buried. In the minds of the people this would make a great difference in the effect of the miracle, for the people of that day, as we know, were wholly external in their ideas, and believed that life was in the body and could not exist apart from it. Even Martha and Mary—who were friends of the Lord, knew of His miracles, and believed Him to be the Messiah—could not imagine that any power could restore life to a body which had begun to decay. The raising of Lazarus ought to have made the disciples realize that the Lord Himself could not be subject to extinction by death, but we know that it did not. Only His own resurrection finally opened their eyes.

The lesson for us in this story is simple and clear. The Lord spoke the truth equally when He said, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth,” and when He said, “Lazarus is dead.” When we die, we merely go to sleep in this world, just as we go to sleep every night, and we wake up refreshed and rested and ready for another day—only instead of waking in this world to go on trying to cope with our earthly problems and fighting temptations, we wake in a far more

beautiful and happy world, with our problems and temptations behind us. Death is always a blessing for the one who dies.

The time had not come when the Lord thought best to take Lazarus to his eternal home. There was still work for him to do and progress for him to make in this world. Read verse 4, which teaches this plainly. Our times are in the Lord's hand (Psalm 31:15). This does not mean, as some people think, that a particular moment for our death is set in advance and that nothing we can do makes any difference. Every choice we make from day to day and also the choices which other people make play a part in determining the time when the Lord sees that it is better for us and for others that we wake in the spiritual world instead of in this. And the death of someone we love always presents us with a new series of choices. We can lament and rebel against what has happened, or we can let it draw us closer to heaven and the Lord. This life is our time of choice and preparation. It is right that we should want it to be long. But we should also trust the Lord to do what is best. We should always think of death as a natural and good step in our lives, for it is only the end of our stay in "kindergarten." In Psalm 90 we read: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom . . . O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."

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### Adult

The Adult notes suggest several common questions which this story helps us to answer. These make good discussion topics. The teacher should also call attention to the connection of the story with the events which immediately followed it, especially in its bearing upon the attitude of the multitude on Palm Sunday and upon the determination of the chief priests to dispose of the Lord. Help will be found here in the Senior notes.

Three instances of the Lord's power to raise the dead are recorded in the Gospels: the raising of the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-16); the raising of the daughter of Jairus (Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:22-43; Luke 8:41-56); and the raising of Lazarus,

which is recorded only in John. The first two were performed in Galilee, and picture the Lord's power to restore to life the dead thoughts and affections of the external plane of our lives. But Lazarus lived in Bethany, close to Jerusalem, and was a beloved friend of the Lord, the brother of Mary and Martha, at whose house the Lord was often entertained, and this miracle pictures a more internal and spiritual work. In our reading of the story we should note that the scene is laid close to Jerusalem, that the time is near the end of the Lord's earthly life, that those concerned are believers and close friends of the Lord, and that throughout the story the Lord discloses to us the purpose governing the events. We should also note that, although many believed because of this miracle, those who opposed the Lord became even more violent against Him as a result of it. This illustrates the truth of Abraham's statement to the rich man in hell (Luke 16:31): "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." The same parable is further linked to our story by the fact that the beggar is called Lazarus, and Swedenborg tells us that the Lord chose the name for the beggar in the parable because of the Lazarus of our story, whom He loved (AC 9231<sup>3</sup>; AE 137<sup>2</sup>; SS 40<sup>3</sup>).

Throughout the story it is evident that the miracle was performed not in order that Lazarus might enjoy a few more years in this world, but that the disciples might see the Lord's power over death. This is the most obvious and external lesson which we may draw from the miracle. It is a fact that all life is from the Lord, that our times are in His hand (Psalm 31:15), that not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father (Matthew 10:29). But the life of the body is of relative unimportance in relation to the life of the soul. In fact, the life of the soul scarcely becomes apparent until after the death of the body. So the angels, reading the Word, understand resurrection where we read "death," and death in a good sense always signifies resurrection. There is another kind of death, which is sometimes called in the Word the "second death." This is spiritual death, death to goodness and truth, result-

ing when evil in the will becomes conjoined to falsity in the understanding. From this death also the Lord wishes to raise us, and has power to raise us if we will believe in Him and obey Him. “For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.” (Ezekiel 18:32)

When the Lord came into the world, His truth had been so perverted by the religious leaders that even those who wished to do right were threatened with this spiritual death, because they could not find the truth by which to live. This state is pictured in our story. Martha and Mary represent the desire to serve the Lord—Martha an external type and Mary a more internal, spiritual type of affection. Their brother Lazarus pictures such truth as they had, and the fact that he fell sick and died means that even that truth failed and was lost. They sent for the Lord, but He tarried until they thought Lazarus was gone beyond recall. There are many people today brought up in beliefs so mingled with falsity that their beliefs cannot survive the questions of their adult minds. When these people see their faith threatened, they often pray that it may not be taken from them, and feel that somehow the Lord might save it for them if He would, as Martha and Mary both cried, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” But the Lord tarries purposely. He knows our condition, but He waits the fullness of time, until we are convinced that our old beliefs have no life in them. Then, if we continue to look to Him and believe in Him, as Martha and Mary did, He can perform the greater miracle of raising up our faith to new life and freeing it from the prejudices and habits of thought—the grave clothes—which had bound it in the sepulcher. Swedenborg tells us (AC 2916<sup>4</sup>) that the raising of Lazarus “involves the raising up of a new church from the Gentiles.” The ancient Jewish Church era had to be consummated before the first Christian Church could be raised up. The first Christian dispensation had to consummated before the New Church could be raised up. Each new church has developed among those who realized the deadness of the old but still believed in the Lord and turned to Him with trust and obedience.

In connection with the story of Lazarus we are taught why the Lord often does not answer our petitions immediately. It is because He has higher things in store for us than the particular thing we want. He said to the disciples, “And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe.” The disciples, as well as Martha and Mary, felt that the Lord could have kept Lazarus from dying, but the Lord wanted to show them that He had even greater power. We must all learn to “rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him” (Psalm 37:7), and we must learn that there is no bitterness of loss or depth of despair in which He cannot teach us and save us if we will let Him.

Then we have the Lord’s answer to those who believe that all are to remain in their graves until some final resurrection day. For He told Martha, “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.” We know that this does not refer to the death of the body, for everyone must lay aside the material body before he can become really conscious of the life of heaven, but that it refers to spiritual death, the shutting out from the soul of the Lord’s life, that life which alone can give eternal happiness. Those who live and believe in the Lord, whose hearts and minds are ordered according to His laws, are conscious of no interruption of that heavenly life when they lay aside the material body. For “this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3)

Again, our story suggests the answer to the question, “If Jesus was God, why did He pray to the Father, and why did He appear to suffer?” Our story tells us that Jesus “groaned in the spirit, and was troubled,” and that “Jesus wept,” and in verse 41 we are told that he “lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.” But He goes on immediately: “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.” We know that the Lord, while He was in the world, was clothed with a finite

humanity like ours. Bruce\* suggests that such manifestations as His groaning and weeping were the natural reactions of the finite humanity to the working of the Divine within, just as our efforts to live according to what we know of divine love and truth produce struggle and grief in our lower, selfish natures. The Lord, while He was in the world, did humanly grieve over the waywardness and faithlessness and blindness of those He sought to save—this was one of His most severe temptations—and in this story we are allowed to see it outwardly manifested, because we need to understand and recognize that the Lord underwent such a temptation and overcame it, refusing to tamper with the free will which His wisdom had implanted in man. We sometimes feel this temptation to bring people to our way of thinking by force. The Lord shows us His struggle and then immediately the victory and its source by His thanksgiving to the Father.

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#### From the Writings of Swedenborg

*Arcana Coelestia*, n. 2343: “That all regeneration or new life, thus salvation, is from the Lord alone, is indeed known in the church, but is believed by few, for the reason that men are not in the good of charity. It is as impossible for those who are not in the good of charity to have this belief, as it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle; for the good of charity is the very ground for the seeds of faith. Truth and good agree, but truth and evil never: they are of a contrary nature, and are averse one to another. For this reason, so far as a man is in good, so far he can be in truth; or so far as he is in charity, so far he can be in faith; especially in this chief point of faith, that all salvation is from the Lord . . . But that they who are in evil, that is, in a life of evil, cannot possibly believe that all salvation is from the Lord, has been made evident to me from those who had come into the other life from the Christian world; and also from those who in the life of the body had confessed with the mouth, and had even taught, according to the doctrinal tenet of faith, that without the Lord there is no salvation, and yet had led a life of evil. These, when the Lord was merely named, forthwith filled the sphere with endless difficulties (for in the other life that which spirits merely think is perceived,

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\*Rev. William Bruce, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, pp. 264-265. —Ed.

and diffuses from itself a sphere, in which it becomes manifest in what kind of faith they are).”

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### Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Who was Lazarus? *a friend of Jesus*
- P. Who were his sisters? *Martha and Mary*
- P. Where did they live? *Bethany*
- J. When did the miracle of our chapter take place? *near the end of Jesus' life*
- P. When Lazarus became sick, did the Lord go to Bethany at once? *no*
- P. When He arrived, how long had Lazarus been in the grave? *four days*
- P. What did Martha say when she met the Lord? *“If you had been here . . .”*
- J. How did the Lord answer? *“. . . will rise again.”*
- J. What was Martha's idea of the resurrection of the dead? *at the “last” day*
- J. What did the Lord tell her? *I am the resurrection*
- P. Can you tell about the raising of Lazarus? *took stone away, called loudly, Lazarus come forth*
- J. What did the chief priests and Pharisees think about it? *plotted to kill Him*
- I. Why did the Lord wait so long to go to Bethany? *to show His power over death*
- S. Why did He first say Lazarus slept and afterward that he was dead? *death is a sort of sleep, with reawakening in the spiritual world*