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Our Pulpit.

The Raising of Lazarus.

SERMON PREACHED BY

REV. A. J. MOWATT.

In St. Paul's Church, Fredericton, May 20th.

"He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them loose him and let him go.—JOHN XI. 43, 44.

I introduce you to a thrilling scene this morning, the raising of Lazarus. The scene is an oldtime one, almost two thousand years old, but so long as sickness and sorrow ravage homes and hearts, and so long as death and the grave swallow up our loved ones, it can never cease to interest.

One of the sweetest of christian homes has been broken in upon by death, and the choice one of the family, if there can be any choice where all are so good, has been taken. The home at Bethany yonder was perhaps as near the ideal of a christian home as has ever been realized—every member a christian, and the home where Jesus made His home. And yet, sickness, sorrow, death, come there. Jesus is miles away, but they send for Him in all haste. Strange to say, however, He is in no hurry to come, and when at last He does come, it is all over with the sick one; he is dead and buried four days, and grief and doubt have had their will with the sisters.

But the Lord has come, and asks the way to the grave where Lazarus sleeps. It is apart from the village a little distance. The sisters are there with their tears and sad questionings, and their weeping friends from the city. The grave is not such as ours; it is a vault hewn out of the limestone cliff, a tomb. When Jesus comes to the grave He is deeply, strangely affected. He groans and weeps. But after a little He calms Himself, and directs the bystanders to remove the heavy stone shutting the vault. The sisters object, but He overrules all objections, and the stone is with difficulty removed. God never does what men can do as well. Then stepping forward to the black mouth of the vault, and addressing the dead by name, He says: 'Lazarus, come forth!'

Instantly noisy grief is stilled, and there falls upon the mourning group an awful hush, a hush like the hush of death. In staring wonder and listening awe every eye looks and every ear listens. Who is he, and what, who dares speak into a grave? Is he a fool, or is he God? He must be one or other. Were I to go yonder where white grave-stones stand around so silent and cold, and loved forms lie buried, as loved as Lazarus, and as young and good; were I to tell the grave digger to dig out of a grave the earth he had filled in four days before; and then, were I, when he had reluctantly and with difficulty done it, and the coffin-lid was unscrewed and removed, to open my mouth, and in His name who is the resurrection and life, say with a voice full of all the lung power I could put into it, 'O dead one, so loved and so wept for, come forth!' You would say, I think, and you would be justified in saying it, that I was a fool, yea worse, a blasphemer. But Jesus is not a fool; He is the resurrection and life, He is God. Hark! down in the darkness of the tomb in answer to His word of power a rustling is heard, as of one new-awakened out of sleep, and slowly and with difficulty making his way up and out to the light. Presently Lazarus emerges wound around with grave-clothes, and so tangled up with them that he is all but helpless, and consternation seizes upon the bystanders. Some shriek out with affright; others are dumb with astonishment. Some start to run away as from an apparition of the under-world; others are paralyzed, their blood frozen in their veins. For a moment all is confusion, consternation, amazement, horror. But Jesus reassures them when He pleasantly directs them to loose him and let him go.

Here however the scene closes just where we would like it to be most minute. Only one remark is made, indicating that unbelief went away from that resurrection-scene as hardened and unbelieving as ever, but others were won.

The poet shapes the thought for us thus:—

When Lazarus left his charnel-cave
And home to Mary's house returned,
Was this demanded—if he yearned
To hear her weeping by his grave?

'Where wert thou, brother, those four days?'

There lives no record of reply,
Which telling what it is to die
Had surely added praise to praise.

From every house the neighbors met,
The streets were filled with joyful sound,

A solemn gladness even crowned
The purple brows of Olivet.

Behold a man raised up by Christ!
The rest remaineth unrevealed;
He told it not; or something sealed
The lips of that Evangelist.

Now, the raising up of Lazarus may teach us of another raising up that we have still more interest in and still more to do with, namely, the raising up of the spiritually dead. Let the dead in their graves yonder sleep on till the resurrection; they are beyond our reach; we cannot disturb their repose, nor wake them up. But the other dead, the dead in sin, we are not to let sleep; we have what will raise them up, and it is our sacred duty and blessed privilege to raise them up.

First, then, I remark, that Lazarus in his grave is an apt type of the state in which men are naturally. Men are as dead spiritually in their natural state, as Lazarus was dead physically when he lay in his grave four days. Dead in sin or through sin is a scriptural description of men in their natural and unregenerated state. The Apostle Paul writing to the Ephesian christians tells them how he found them spiritually when he came to them with the gospel; they were in a state of spiritual death. That splendid Asiatic city, as he found it, was a real necropolis, a city of the dead;—dead merchants doing her business, dead mechanics building her houses, dead farmers ploughing her fields, dead priests ministering at her altars, dead worshippers thronging her temples, the dead everywhere, all dead.

And we are not to understand, I think, by the apostle's use of the word dead, that he intended to convey the idea that Ephesus was a specially wicked city, a city abandoned to idolatry of the grossest kind, a city where society was steeped in every vice and immorality. It was a wicked city, and Paul found it so to his cost, but he does not necessarily mean by the expressive phrase, dead in sin, that as a city it had attained a notoriety beyond all others in wickedness. That was not the case. As a city it had its virtuous people so-called and its vicious ones, its respectable classes and its criminal masses, and perhaps it had more than its share of the criminal classes, for, as the temple of Diana was there, all sorts of criminals fled to Ephesus to escape the justice that was after them.

Every one not in Christ is spiritually dead. A man may be living enough in every other respect, but in relation to Christ and the higher duties of Christian living he is as dead as a dead man is dead to the affairs and business of ordinary everyday life. Angels are singing sweetly of peace on earth and Heaven's goodwill to men, but the spiritually dead man hears none of it. A blessed light above the brightness of the sun is shining all around, but the man dead in sin sees it not. A new world is close to him with all its glorious spiritual advantages and privileges, and it may be his as it is others, but he is in a state where he can neither profit by it nor enjoy it, for he is dead. There was a time when man was not dead. Once he lived in Eden, and talked with God, and heard the angels sing. But sin came, and death, and now he is dead—Oh so dead!

And spiritual death like the death yonder at Bethany turns from bad to worse, from death to corruption. Dead four days means more than dead. Dead one day is to be dead enough; dead two days is to be still more so, for there are degrees in death, but to be dead four days—dead, dead, dead, DEAD—how dead that is! And yet all around about us are men dead in sin, not for days, but years and years—twenty, thirty, fifty, three-score and ten; and in not a few such cases corruption is far advanced. We cannot stand still in sin and death; we cannot hold our ground, and become neither better nor worse. No; we die, and die, day by day, and year by year, and corruption sets in, and grows as corruption grows, and we sometimes reach a stage so bad that there is but little of good to hope for us.

Lazarus, so young, so full of promise, so gifted, is dead. And not the old only, the good for-nothing, but the hope and promise of our homes and churches

and country are dead. We expect so much of them, but they disappoint us. We say to ourselves: 'wait till they are older and they will be wiser and better,' but the older the worse. We look to them to do so much for us, to be true to us in the dark days of life, to be a staff to lean on in our old age, to carry forward to still grander results the life-work we have been trying to do; but alas! they are a grief of heart, a broken reed, a cruel disappointment. And the reason is not far to seek—they are dead. What can the dead do for us, for our country, for the church, for any cause whatever? Nothing that is good. The dead can only rot. Oh sad indeed, if the young men in our homes and schools are dead to all that is good, for as such they can do nothing for us! we love them, but they do not love us back. We trust them, and they fail us. We hope, but our hope makes ashamed. Ah! we have to bury the dead—bury them out of our sight, forget them.

Again, I remark, that the raising up of Lazarus from the grave lets us see what can be done for the spiritually dead—what we can do and cannot do. We can do this—we can conduct the Christ to where the dead are, and we can roll away the stone from the grave's mouth; but the power that wakes up the dead in sin to the life that is in God is Divine power.

Ignorance is one of the great stones in the way of men's spiritual rising, and in the way too of God's word of power reaching them, very much in their way, and we can roll that stone away. It may take quite an effort on our part, and may require no little patience, but it can be done, and much is done when that is done.

Then evil habits are in men's way, and we can do something towards their removal. How intemperance bars the way to all hope and help for men, and we may not be doing what we might to roll away that great stone from the door of our brother-man's sepulcher! Ah! our boasted moderation, our wicked influence and example, our cruel teaching, may be rather holding it there. We may be sitting with all the weight of our position upon it, and not putting our breast to it and helping to roll it away. You say, 'I can drink or let it alone,' but you do not let it alone, you drink, and so weak men do what you do, and are lost. You sit securely on the edge of the hell where men are going down by the ten-thousand, and you drink in moderation, and you smack your lips and enjoy the good of it without enduring the woe of it, but you had better take care, for some day you may trifle a little too far and fall in. I want to keep away myself as far from danger as I can, and my counsel to others is to do the same, and I think that that is the teaching of the word of God. The best sort of self-control, I humbly aver, is not to see just how far I can safely imbibe from the poisoned wine-cup, but to go the whole length, and be out and out abstinent. According to some, self-control is to drink so far and then stop with moderation, but is it not also self-control not to drink at all? I read here that I am to abstain from every appearance of evil, and drinking from the cup of drunkenness is admitted on all hands to be, in these times of ours, an awful evil, a curse under which the whole land is groaning; and therefore, as I reason it out for myself, I am to abstain from that form of evil, not merely control myself in it, but so control myself with regard to it as to abstain from it altogether. I am not to look upon the red wine in the drinking-cup. I am to loathe it. I am not to touch it, as that which is dangerous to health, and a deadly poison to the soul. Oh this great stone on the door of the sepulcher where lie dead and buried men's souls, their hope and happiness, their good and usefulness—this stone that stands in the way of the church's work in the world, and all true progress, let us do what we can to roll it away!

Then our indifference may be another stone barring the door of sepulchers. What we can do in other things when we want to reach men and rouse them! We go to them where they are. We climb fences, and wade through new-ploughed fields, and get to them, when we want their votes. We talk hours to them, and make them almost whether they will or not, buy what we have to sell, vote for our side in politics, insure their life, subscribe for a book they have no use for, and so on. But when it is their raising up to a new life of faith and love, we care not! And so men are not raised up. Why is it those streets are full of dead men? Is it because there is no power of word, no might in the gospel of God's Son? No; but the stones are not rolled away, and the

word of Divine power cannot get at them. No preacher can help men who are not where he can reach them with his messages. It is ours to do what can be done to bring Christ, the resurrection and life, face to face with our dead! And we are not doing that, and the dead, and corruption still goes on.

Now, I do not know how the dead are raised up. I know indeed that removing the stone from the grave's mouth is a small part of it, but, you will notice, that small a part as it is, there is no raising up of the dead without it. The mighty Christ waits till our poor weak human part is done before He does His great part. You are asking perhaps, with no little concern, why it is the dead in your home, the dead on your side of the street and in your end of the city, the dead you have to do with and are interested in, are not being raised up. But have you done your part? Perhaps your indifference is in the way, your careless living, your worldliness, your yourself, and these stones must be rolled away before Christ can do anything for the dead you have to do with. One thing is clear, if the dead are not raised up the fault is ours, not His.

You see yonder at Bethany what an effort it is for the bystanders, perhaps half a dozen of them, to roll away the stone. They lift and pull, and have a great deal to say, and perhaps some little wrangling as to how best to do it, before they make out to do it, and Christ lets them pull and lift and wrangle away till they do it, and after a while they succeed. And then when their part is done, ill or well, soon or late, pleasantly or unpleasantly, He steps forward, and with a word, and without the least effort, He does His part, and the dead is raised up.

And so it is in the raising up of the spiritually dead. We have our part to do, and what a time there is about it. What pulling and hauling at the stones in the way. What a wrangle and tangle we get into with one another about the doing of our part. We pull against one another, and struggle and scramble, and shout and find fault, and make such a fuss. And sometimes there is a great ecclesiastical row over the rolling away of the stones, and the work is much hindered. But when our part has been done, even though so imperfectly, Christ comes, and easily raises up our dead. He simply speaks and it is done. Men wake up that we had ceased to hope for, men that we thought had gone too far even to be saved, and they live anew. By scores and hundreds sometimes they wake up, and come forth from the graves of their sins.

Again, I remark, that the raising up of Lazarus lets us see that all is not done for men they need to have done for them when they are raised up.

You see how it is with Lazarus. The power that mysteriously and mightily turns his death into life for him, and his corruption into healthful vitality, does not send off from him the cements of the tomb. Something is left for loving human hands to do to complete his resurrection. 'Loose him,' the Master says, 'and let him go.'

And as with Lazarus, so with the dead in sin. All is not done for them when they are raised up. They are still entangled more or less with their old world-life, the habits they had formed, and they need our help to get rid of them. The putting off of the old and the putting on of the new, is not at once done. It is often a slow tedious process. A man does not at once leap up out of the grave of sin where he has been companionating with the worms of corruption for years, and serve God with all the glory and power of his resurrection-life. No; he comes up, crawls up, little by little, and others have to help him, and bear with him, till he can do for himself.

You expect a man, when he professes to have passed from death to life, to be so good, so free from all the entanglements of the world. But when you see him weakly doing things not very consistent with his profession, and yielding to indulgences like others, you denounce him as a hypocrite, and you would expel him from the church and all that is good, if you had your will. But not so with the Master. He would say, 'Loose him and let him go. Love him and help him. Pity and pray for him. Give him a chance for life.'

What a trouble we all were to those who had to do with us when we woke up to this natural life of ours. How our patient mothers worked with us and worried over us, how our teachers almost despaired of being able to teach us anything, and how all who had anything to do with us were worn out of all

Concluded on fourth page.