

RESURRECTION MIRACLES OF JESUS #3

As John approached the podium to begin his lecture on that day in 1884, every eye was fixed upon him and every ear attentive to his words. It was not John's appearance that commanded such attention for his 5'4", slight frame was anything but imposing. No, it was the topic that he had chosen that had attracted the people. "How to Live a Century". The secret of longevity in life. It was John's claim to hold the keys to life that had motivated people to gather before him. "Ladies and gentlemen", John began, "I suppose there is not a person here who would not like to live 100 years." And with those words, he went on for the next hour, guaranteeing his listeners that if they heeded and practiced his advice, they too would be guaranteed at least a century here on this earth.

John had a marked influence on many notable people in his day. First families even listened to John's advice. President Calvin Coolidge installed a mechanical horse that John had invented for exercise in the White House. Eleanor Roosevelt sought out John for advice and counsel. And John's creative mind gave us many good inventions. In the field of medicine, John was the first to use radium treatments with cancer patients. He recognized the need for a greater degree of sterilization that helped cut down on infections in the operating room. But in the end, John was not able to back the guarantee that he had made. In fact, he himself did not live to be a hundred years old, dying of pneumonia on December 14, 1943 at the age of 91. And what John is best remembered for today is the food that he developed specifically designed to bring added years to people's lives. No, I'm not speaking of peanut butter or yogurt even though John invented them both. I'm referring to that food that John designed to be eaten first thing in the morning, those flakes of grain that John Harvey Kellogg designed to help people live for 100 years. When you ate your Kellogg's Corn Flakes this morning, you didn't realize that they originally came with a 100 year lifetime guarantee, did you?

Down through the generations of human existence, people have done their best to discover the secrets of immortality. The ancient Babylonian and Greek and Roman cultures had their mythological stories about how certain people achieved immortality entering the world of the gods. In more modern times, Ponce de Leon embarked upon a perilous journey to the new world in order to find "the fountain of youth". Today, magazines will promote stories about staying forever young and T.V. stations will have teasers about new cures or wrinkle-free creams, details at 11:00, because human nature hasn't changed. Editors and producers know that people will be curious to know if the secret key to longevity of life has been found.

We can understand then why the resurrection miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ created such a stir in his day. There were 3 people whom Jesus raised from the dead that are recorded in the gospel accounts. We have been looking at these 3 resurrection miracles during the past weeks.

\*The first occurred when Christ raised Jairus' 12 year old daughter from the dead. This raised quite a stir because Jairus was the president of the elders of the synagogue in his town. But he was willing to risk his reputation and position in order to have his only daughter raised back to life again.

\*The second one that we looked at last week happened when Jesus journeyed into the small town of Nain and met the funeral procession of the only son of a widow. When he raised this young man back to life again, the Lord brought back memories of the great prophet Elisha, who was a type of the Messiah creating much excitement in this farming community.

\*Now we come this morning to the scene that is commonly accepted by Biblical scholars to be the turning point in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. For while the other resurrection miracles were either performed in private or in out-of-the-way places, the raising of Lazarus happened in a very public manner in a populated place - in Bethany a suburb of the capital city of Jerusalem. Bethany would be similar in its relationship to Jerusalem as Rockford is to Grand Rapids. The fact that detailed plans began to be drawn up to execute Jesus Christ after this miracle is evidence to the critical nature of this miracle. And it was on this occasion that the Lord Jesus Christ made his most powerful assertion claiming to be the resurrection and the life.

Come with me to that bedroom community as we look at 3 features of this most remarkable miracle that proved Jesus to be the embodiment of resurrection itself.

1. At first glance, we are somewhat confused as we see the seeming lacksidical attitude that Jesus has towards Lazarus' desperate situation. It is obvious from the context that the household of Lazarus, Martha and Mary is in a crisis mode. Lazarus is sick, very sick. He is so ill that his very life is in danger. So Martha and Mary send urgent word to Jesus. "Lord, the one you love is sick." The implications are clear, aren't they? Lord, we need your help and we need it now. There is no time to waste. Come quickly.

The fact that they could give this kind of message shows the intimate relationship that Jesus had with this family. They didn't have to mention Lazarus by name. They called him only "the one you love". Jesus would know whom they meant. They didn't have to give directions. Jesus had stayed at their home innumerable times - he would know the way. In fact, this was the place where Jesus normally stayed when he was in the Jerusalem area. For Bethany was just 2 miles from the Jerusalem city limits. It was close enough for convenience, yet far enough away for some privacy from the pressing crowds. We would have expected Jesus to drop everything and rush to the aid of his closest friends. I'm sure the disciples expected to make a fast trip. But the Lord Jesus Christ acted in quite an unexpected manner. So much so that it confused the disciples. The Lord Jesus initially delayed for 2 days causing his followers to think that he was avoiding the Jerusalem area out of fear for his own life. Then he abruptly decided to pick up and go to Bethany after it appeared that it was too late. No wonder the disciples had so many questions about his seeming erratic behavior. But each step that was taken was carefully calculated so that the maximum effect of his intended miracle could be realized.

One of the common threads that tie each of these resurrection miracles together is the timing the Lord Jesus employed.

\*In raising Jairus' daughter, the Lord Jesus allowed himself to be delayed by another need, to perform another miracle, long enough so that Jairus' daughter could die, so that he could raise her from the dead and strengthen the faith

of her father, Jairus.

\*In raising the widow's son in Nain, Christ timed his entrance into the city so that he would meet the funeral procession coming out.

\*And here in this case, the timing was very significant as well. For the question was not whether Christ would get to Bethany before Lazarus died. If Jesus stayed on 2 more days after he heard word of Lazarus' illness, journeyed with his disciples to Bethany, and arrived 4 days after Lazarus had died, simple logic tells us that Christ could not have arrived in Bethany before Lazarus had died even if he would have dropped everything and gone there immediately. The best that he could have done is walked into Bethany 2 days after Lazarus had died. So it is obvious that his delay of 2 days had a significant purpose. Christ wanted Lazarus to be dead for 4 days rather than just 2. He wanted for the decomposition process to fully set in so that there would be an odor to the body. He wanted for there to be no doubt concerning the miracle that he was about to perform. Therefore, timing was of the essence.

Timing is very important to God. As the Sovereign Lord, God reserves the right to not only act according to His own will, but to also act when He wants to, in His own timing. Now this is sometimes very frustrating to us because we are impatient people. When we think we know what needs to be done, we want it done now. But God knows best. He knows the perfect timing. And He reserves the right to act according to his time-table.

\*When God delivered the Israelites out of slavery, He executed 10 miraculous plagues of judgment upon the Egyptians, and He acted according to his own time-table. The Israelites were ready for deliverance long before God acted. If it had been up to them, they would have run out of Egypt years before in their impatience. But in God's timing, the Pharaoh of Egypt was humiliated, all of the false gods of Egypt were discredited, and the power of the great Egyptian army was broken so that the Israelites would not have to fear Egyptian retaliation in the near future. The result was freedom for the Jewish people and a land of inheritance which they possess even today.

\*When God delivered the Israelites in a miraculous manner during the exile when Esther was the queen of the Persian Empire, his timing was perfect. Mordecai would have chosen more immediate action in his impatience, for he went through some periods of anxiety and worry. But God raised Esther to the throne in his time, and he brought to the King's memory Mordecai's kindness of unveiling the plot against his life just the night before Haman would request Mordecai's death, and he even allowed the wicked plot of Haman so that the Jewish people could eventually be delivered from the threats of their enemies. The result was greater freedom to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and be re-established in the Promised Land.

\*The season that we are beginning to commemorate today illustrates the perfection of God's timing. For just in the nick of time according to the words of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 4:4, God sent his son into the world. I'm sure that in our impatience, we would have preferred that He act much sooner - probably the day after Eve and Adam had disobeyed God in eating of the forbidden fruit. And then the Messiah grew up in relative obscurity for 30 years. What is God waiting for? But in God's perfect timing Jesus Christ began his public ministry and moved inexorably towards the cross. Even his followers would never have chosen the cross. They wanted the kingdom. Lord, usher in the

kingdom, now, they cried in their impatience. But a kingdom without a cross would have been the doom for mankind. For without redemption, there would be no subjects in the kingdom - just the king, Jesus Christ. So Christ kindly tolerated the ignorant impatience of his disciples, and moved ahead in God's perfect timing to the cross. And then when Christ's body was laid in the tomb, all hope appeared to be gone. The Messiah was dead. The Son of God had been crucified. But God's timing was progressing right according to schedule. For the Lord Jesus Christ would lie in that tomb 3 days and 3 nights according to the Scriptures. He would do so in order for there to be no doubt concerning his death. He would do so in accordance with his own prophetic words so that there would be no doubt of who was in control. And he would rise again from the dead on that first Easter Sunday so that there would be no question about who had conquered sin and death.

God's timing was perfect. God's timing is always perfect. It was perfect when Christ raised Lazarus; it was perfect when God raised Christ from the dead.

2. But notice in the second place, the great power that the Lord Jesus demonstrates as he raises Lazarus from the dead.

Now the power of the Lord Jesus Christ over death is seen in 2 very dramatic ways. It is most obviously seen in the authority and confidence with which Christ orders the stone to be rolled away from the door of the tomb and then commands Lazarus to come out of the grave. There is no hesitation in his voice. There is no doubt in his words. The odor of decomposition doesn't bother him a bit. He does not question that Lazarus has now gone beyond the point of no return. Christ commands Lazarus to come out with absolute assurance that he will. Yes, there was a power in Christ's act of raising Lazarus from the dead that clearly transcended human origin. A powerful demonstration of divinity.

But there was also a conversation that Jesus had with Martha before the resurrection miracle itself in which the Lord Jesus confidently proclaimed himself to be the source of resurrection power. When Martha bemoaned the fact that he was not personally available when her brother was so ill, Jesus replied by saying, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though he dies." Now these are remarkable words that evidence great power. Christ claimed to be the embodiment of life itself. He claimed the divine attribute of self-existent life. For God alone has life within his own being. All other living creatures are given life as a gift from God. So everything that has been created had some beginning when life was bestowed upon it. God alone has self-existent life. God alone never had a beginning, but always was. For God is the embodiment of life itself. And that was what Jesus was claiming in his statement to Martha.

This was not the first time that Christ had claimed to have self-existent life. He had told the Jewish religious leaders as recorded in John 5:25, 26, "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself." Now even though this prophetic statement of Christ has a great fulfillment to yet come in history, it was also evidenced in the raising of Lazarus. The Lord Jesus Christ had claimed self-existent life - life in himself. He was not dependent on any other source for his life. He was life. So when the dead would hear his voice,

they would live. And that is exactly what happened when Jesus commanded Lazarus to come out from that tomb.

And this is a picture of what is going to happen in the future when we hear his voice from the dead. For according to Christ's own words to Martha "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." The Bible teaches that there are 2 types of life and 2 types of death. There is physical birth and spiritual birth according to Christ's words to Nicodemus in John 3. And there is physical death and spiritual death according to Revelation 20. A person who is born twice, only need to fear death once. But a person who is only born once, is destined to die twice. That is the message that Jesus gave to Martha here. If a person is born again spiritual in addition to being born physically, that person will only die once - physically. He will never have to fear eternal spiritual death. But the person who is only born physically and never born again spiritually into the family of God, that person will not only die physically, but will also suffer spiritual death which is separation from God for all eternity.

Paul speaks of the glorious hope of those who are members of God's family in 1 Thess. 4:16,17: "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."

3. You would think that anyone who witnessed such a demonstration of divine power would immediately be convinced of Christ's claim to be the Messiah sent from God, wouldn't you? But amazingly, such was not the case. The Apostle John records 2 major responses that people had to this miracle.

READ JOHN 11:45,46A - "Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done."

Some believed and accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Others hardened their hearts against his claim in the face of all the evidence and joined with His enemies. And the amazing conclusion is found in verse 53 - "So from that day on they plotted to take his life." And just as amazing was the response of the unbelievers towards Lazarus. John 12:10,11 records, "So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him."

Blind our eyes to the facts. And get rid of all the evidence. That was their conclusion as they hardened their hearts against God. And so they arrested the Son of God. They ridiculed him and scourged him and went through the disgrace of a mock trial. Then they nailed him to a cross, putting him to death. And they wiped their hands and smugly said to one another, "Now we have put an end to this matter. We have finally gotten rid of all the evidence." But in the irrationality of their behavior, they hadn't counted on the fact that the grave couldn't hold the one who was the resurrection and the life. Just as he had raised Jairus' daughter and the widow's son and Lazarus, so this one who had self-existent life would also raise himself. They had played right into God's perfect plan in his perfect time. And their feeble attempt to get rid of the evidence ended in a spiritual explosion that continues to this day. For followers of the Lord Jesus Christ continue to meet in every corner of the world, giving to the Lord of life his rightful place in their

lives.

If we were to journey this morning into the Canadian Rocky Mountains, we could go to a small stream which is called "Divide Creek". It is high in the mountains, fed by the melting snows, so it is not impressive for its force or power or volume of water. But it is a unique creek and is so named because of one boulder. As the waters come down from the mountain top, each drop comes to this one boulder which forces it to go either to the right or to the left. The waters which flow to the left of this boulder blend into Kicking Horse River, and finally make their way into the Pacific Ocean. The waters which take the right fork travel into the Bow River, which courses into the Saskatchewan River on into Lake Winnipeg, and then the Nelson River, into the Hudson Bay and finally into the Atlantic Ocean. It is that single point of decision which determines the eventual home for every single drop of water which flows down Divide Creek.

There are certain decisions which we make in life that determine our future. Marriage decisions, Job decisions can all determine where we are going to live. But there is no decision that is as critical in our lives as what we will do with the Lord Jesus Christ. And ultimately, there are only 2 responses that we can make - and they are pictured by those who witnessed Christ raising Lazarus from the dead. We can recognize Jesus Christ as the son of God and accept him into our lives becoming a follower of his and a member of God's family, or we can reject his claim over us and deny the evidence that we see every day around us and especially at this time of year.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." We all have to do something with that statement. What are you doing with Christ's claim?