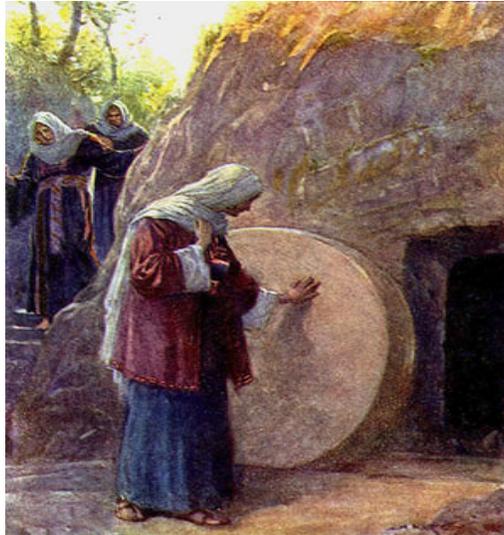


Winter 2015 Newsletter
Detroit Bible Students Ecclesia
P.O. Box 51, Southfield, MI 48037-0051
www.dawnbible.com



History's Greatest Event

"I am the resurrection and the life" John 11:25

What do you consider the greatest event in history? Many significant milestones might come to mind, Perhaps you would say the invention of the wheel, or man's walk on the moon, or possibly, thinking back to the Christmas celebrations of the recent past, you might say the birth of Jesus.

However, even more significant than all these, was Jesus' death and resurrection. It is so significant that the Bible tells us (1 Corinthians 15:17,18,20) that *"If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished... But now is Christ risen from the dead."*

Jesus told his disciples that his suffering, his death, and his resurrection were necessary. (Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22) Only later was the full importance of the resurrection understood. That it is the central theme of salvation for all mankind was taught by the Apostles: *"Who [Jesus] was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."* (Romans 4:25) We

have been given *"a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."* (1 Peter 1:3)

There are many ideas which have been promulgated about the condition of death and the fate of those who die. The Grecian philosophy of Plato, as presented in his Phaedo, that souls continue to live on after death, combined with the scenario of fire and torment that came out of the Middle Ages, as portrayed in Dante's Divine Comedy, have clouded the clear Scriptural declaration, *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* (Ezekiel 18:4) But, how can we be sure what death is like? To answer this question let us go to the best, most authoritative teacher of all time, Jesus.

In the 11th chapter of the Gospel of John (vss.1-44) we find the account of the death of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, a family which loved and assisted Jesus, and the miracle of Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead.. In this account we also learn many important things about death from the words of Jesus himself.

The account [*New American Standard Version*] begins: "Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair (John 12:1-8), whose brother Lazarus was sick. So the sisters sent word to Him, saying, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.' Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."

This family was very special to Jesus and one would expect that Jesus would hurry to Lazarus' sick bed and heal him. After all, Jesus has healed many others and even raised some from death. He even healed a Centurion's servant although the Centurion was a Roman and a soldier like those who would cast lots for his garment as he hung on the cross. However, Jesus did not rush to his beloved friend's side. Instead he told his disciples, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." (vs.4)

"So when He heard that [Lazarus] was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was. Then after this He said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to Him. 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?'"

Jesus' disciples feared that Jesus' life was in danger and perhaps thought Jesus knew Lazarus would recover on his own. Although Jesus told them again and again in many ways that he must be put to death, they couldn't conceive of such an end for their beloved Master. Jesus then said:

"Our friend Lazarus **has fallen asleep**; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep."

This statement was puzzling to Jesus' disciples. They said to him, "Lord if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." So Jesus had to explain that he "had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. So Jesus then said to them plainly, '**Lazarus is dead.**'"

What greater authority can anyone have than Jesus himself? Jesus tells us plainly that death is like sleep. There are two qualities of sleep which make the use of this description apt. Firstly, when one goes to sleep at night all consciousness of time and awareness of surroundings cease. Secondly, there is the expectation

that the sleeper will awake. Jesus' choice of the word sleep pointed to the great resurrection purposed by God through him.

Throughout the Bible the term "sleep" is used to describe the dead. In Acts 13:36 it says of King David that he "*fell asleep and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay.*" The first martyr Stephen's death is described as, "he fell asleep." (Act 7:60) In the great resurrection chapter, (1 Corinthians 15:18), the Apostle Paul speaks of the dead as those, "*who have fallen asleep in Christ.*" So clearly, the Bible description of the condition of death is that of sleep—sleep because God plans to awaken the dead.

Continuing the story of Lazarus (vs. 17) "**So when Jesus came, He found that [Lazarus] had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother. Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house.**

"Martha then said to Jesus, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again **in the resurrection on the last day.**'"

Martha, while still hoping that Jesus would bring her brother back from death, affirmed her faith in what she understood to be Jesus' teaching concerning the resurrection of the dead—that it would be on the last day. We have no record of the private teaching of Jesus within this family group, but Jesus had said publicly on another occasion, "*Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth.*" (John 5:28)

In anticipating his own death, the Apostle Paul said, "*Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord ... shall give me **at that day.***" (2 Timothy 4:8) To the Thessalonians he said, "*The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.*" (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 20:6,7) From this text we learn that the resurrection of the saints of God will take place at the return of Christ. The use of the

expression "first" clearly implies that there is a subsequent resurrection — viz. the rest of mankind. (1 John 2:2) The Bible's unified testimony is that the dead sleep in death until the "last day" when they shall be raised.

Jesus, however, intended to give a demonstration of the resurrection which his death would secure for mankind. So he said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Martha replied, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world." In these few words Martha spoke her full confidence in Jesus and in whatever he would do. Then she went to tell Mary that Jesus had come. Mary ran out to meet him, followed by the Jews who had come to console the sisters.

"When Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus therefore saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, and said, 'Where have you laid him?' ... Jesus wept."

Jesus knew he would soon awaken Lazarus from death, but the sorrow felt by the mourners touched his heart and he wept for them and for all mankind who are under the curse of death pronounced upon Adam and his race because of sin. Paul says in Hebrews 4:15, "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." As God so loved the world that he gave us his Son to die "the just for the unjust," (1 Peter 3:18) but Jesus also willingly "gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (1 Timothy 2:6)

"So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Remove the stone.' Martha ... said to Him, 'Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?' So they removed the stone.

"Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, 'Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You

always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.' When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth.' The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings."

This greatest of all Jesus' miracles was a demonstration of Jesus' resurrection power—but only a demonstration. Lazarus died again and sleeps in the grave awaiting the promised resurrection "at the last day," and the restitution of all that was lost by Adam. (Acts 3:19-21)

Jesus' own resurrection was the guarantee that the resurrection of all mankind—all who sleep in their graves—will one day come to bless all the families of the earth. (Galatians 3:8, 16, 27, 29) It was the proof that Jesus' sacrifice as our ransom was accepted by God, thus securing "a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust." (Acts 24:15) "... [God having] appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man [Jesus] whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." (Acts 17:31)

Jesus is the **resurrection** because he purchased our lives by his death. Jesus is the **life** because "there is no other name under heaven...whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12) Jesus' church first, (Acts 15:14-17) then all mankind, when the knowledge of the Lord fills the earth as the waters cover the sea, (Isaiah 11:9) for "He is the propitiation [satisfaction] for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

Please send me the free booklet:

LIFE AFTER DEATH

Send your request to:
Detroit Bible Students Ecclesia
PO Box 51, Southfield, MI 48037-0051

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

