

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church,
10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 26B

THE LIFE OF CHRIST

UNDERSTANDING

On Forgiving and Serving

Jesus mentioned about how serious it can be when a person sin against another. We live in an imperfect world. It is inevitable that there will be stumbling blocks along life's path. However, the person, who is a stumbling-block to another, is responsible for his offence. Just because the world is imperfect does not reduce the gravity of an offence. There is no greater offence than that a person stumbles his fellow-man in respect of his faith; or to break that faith in God, in the deity of Christ, in the authority of His Word, in the value of His redemption or in the reality of his salvation. Jesus said that a millstone should be tied round the neck of such a person who stumbles another, and he should be cast into the sea and drown. This would ensure that such a person will not be able to influence and destroy other lives. How serious and terrible it can be for a person to sin against another in this way. We need to take heed and examine ourselves that we do not

commit such offences. The consequence to the one whom we stumble is eternity: eternity in Hell or Heaven!

In such a situation, a true disciple of Jesus has the duty to do two things: (1) to rebuke his offending brother; and (2) to forgive his repentant brother. The first duty to rebuke his brother is not an easy thing to do. Some people enjoy doing it, and we can safely say that such people do not do it with the right spirit of love and humility. Some people will not do it and let it pass because of the resultant unpleasantness and bad reputation they might incur upon themselves. One becomes a coward when he is afraid to correct the erring brother, and win him over to the correct way. In fact, our silence will encourage the brother to think that his sin does not matter. Christ is our example. He pulls no punches to check those who have sinned. Secondly, the true disciple must forgive his repentant brother, even if he sins and repents seven times in a day! The use of the number seven here is to highlight the point that we must always be ready to forgive. It is not teaching us to keep count to the number seven and then any sin after that will not be forgiven!

The ability to keep on forgiving is something that only Christians can do. It is only by the grace of God that we can forgive over and over again. The unbelieving person can only forgive up to the point of how much hurt he can bear. But the Christian is demanded by

God to forgive because of the forgiveness he has received from God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The extent of his forgiveness is to forgive him even when he comes to him and say I am sorry 7 times a day. This is very, very hard to do, for the sinful heart desires to bear a grudge than to forgive a hurt.

The disciples listened to Jesus' teaching of such high demands on their part. They immediately asked Jesus to increase their faith. Jesus replied that if they have faith even as small as a mustard seed, trees could be uprooted and be cast into the sea. The issue is not one of the size of your faith but the reality of your faith. Is your faith genuine? If it is, then even when it is the size of a mustard seed [which is the smallest seed in Palestine] your genuine faith will be able to move mountains. Hence, to forgive someone 7 times a day is definitely a reality.

Lest they become proud and arrogant after having exercised their faith, Jesus proceeded to teach them the right kind of attitude they should have towards God as His servants.

Jesus drew a comparison and put it to His disciples. Jesus posed to them that if their servant returned from the fields, they would impose on the servant to prepare dinner, to dress up and wait on his master. They would not tell the servant to sit down with him and have dinner. The servant could only eat after his master has eaten and drunk. Through this illustration, Jesus taught

His disciples not to think that they had served the Lord so superbly that they have the right to put their own needs and satisfactions before God's requirements. In other words, we can never put God in debt for serving Him! If we have served God very well, so we think, we should adopt the attitude that it is our duty, and we have done as best as we can. If Jesus does not seem to be grateful, we should not grumble. Why should He be? Are we not His servants and it is our duty to serve?

It is always a privilege to serve the Lord, and He will empower us to do His Will with much success so that His name might be glorified. In fact, the Lord promised that at the great banquet, He Himself will serve us (Luke 12:37). Should we not seize every opportunity to serve Him?

"The design and scope of this parable is to show, that Almighty God neither is nor can be a debtor to any of his creatures for the best service which they were able to perform unto him; and that they are so far from meriting a reward of justice, that they do not deserve a return of thanks.

"Three arguments our Saviour makes use of to evidence and prove this:

"1. In respect to God, who is our absolute Lord and Master; and the argument lies thus, "If earthly masters do not owe so much as thanks to their servants for doing that which is commanded them, how much less can God owe the reward of eternal life to his

servants, when they are never able to do all that is commanded them, in a perfect and sinless manner?"

"2. In respect to ourselves, who are his bond-servants, his ransomed slaves, and consequently we are not our own men, but his who hath redeemed us: and accordingly do owe him all that service, yea, more than all that we are able to perform unto him: and therefore whatever reward is either promised or given, it is wholly to be ascribed to the Master's bounty, and not to the servants' merit.

"3. To merit any thing by our good works is impossible, in regard of the works themselves, because all that we can do, although we did do all that is commanded us, is but our duty. The argument runs thus: "To bounden duty belongs no reward of justice; but all the service we do perform, yea, more than we can perform to God, is bounden duty; therefore there is due unto us no reward of justice but of free mercy."

"From the whole note,

"1. That we are wholly the Lord's, both by a right of creation and redemption also.

"2. That as his we are, so him we ought to serve, by doing all those things which he hath commanded us.

"3. That when we have done all, we are to look for our reward, not of debt, but of grace.

"4. That were our service and obedience absolutely perfect, yet it could not merit any thing at the hand of justice: When you have done all, say... etc." [Taken from Burkitt]

Return to Judea: Raising of Lazarus of Bethany

There was distress in the little town of Bethany, which is about two miles east of Jerusalem. The distress happened in the home of Mary and Martha. Their brother, Lazarus, was sick. The Greek word indicates that he was sick for some time, and this means that his condition had become worse. Apparently the two sisters must have done all they could to save their brother, but they were helpless when the sickness turned worse. They then sent a messenger to inform Jesus that he whom He loved (Greek, *phileo*, meaning love as a friend) was sick. This family of three were unusually close to Jesus. We may think that the sisters expected Jesus to come immediately to their aid and heal their brother. It is natural. In their hour of need, they turned to Jesus in faith.

Jesus was somewhere in Perea, and the messenger must have taken about two days to find Jesus. He informed Jesus of the bad news. Jesus replied that Lazarus was not going to die, because the sickness was not unto death but for the glory of God, and that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. This truth demonstrates the omniscience of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The fact of the matter is that Lazarus did die. Jesus did not respond immediately, much to the disappointment of the two sisters who expected Jesus to come straightway. It is stated here that Jesus “loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (verse 5). The word “loved” here is the Greek word, *agapao* (a different word from verse 3). It is the highest form of love. Jesus loved them not only as friends but also loved them with divine love.

Jesus delayed for another two days, and then He said to His disciples that they should go to Judaea again. Jesus’ delay in going to the family was not because He was unconcerned and indifferent to the two sisters’ need. This delay was to show that the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead cannot be disputed. The four days of death was to demonstrate without a shadow of doubt that Lazarus was really dead. When Jesus decided to go to the two sisters in Judaea, His disciples tried to dissuade Him from going to Judaea because of the many enemies who wanted to kill Him. Jesus mentioned that He was in the daylight of God’s Will in going to Bethany. Therefore, He would not shirk from doing His Father’s business. It is not the cover of darkness that protects someone from harm and danger, it is God Himself.

Jesus gave His reason for going to Bethany. He told His disciples that Lazarus was asleep and He was going there to wake him up. Mistaking the meaning of Jesus’ words, the disciples

told Jesus that if Lazarus was sleeping, he was doing fine for he would wake up. So there was no need for Jesus to risk His life by going to Judaea. Jesus then plainly said to them, “Lazarus is dead.” In the light of what Jesus said, some people are led to believe in “soul sleeping” after a person is dead because of Jesus’ use of the word “sleep” in connection with death. But this view is contrary to the abundant teaching of the New Testament. “Sleep” simply means rest from the cares and labours of life. This was a euphemistic way of saying that a person is dead.

Jesus said that for the sake of His disciples, He was glad that He was not there. The reason why Jesus said these words was that He wanted to perform a greater sign than just healing Lazarus’ sickness. He wanted to raise Lazarus from the dead. He could have raised Lazarus there and then from a distance. He chose not to do so. If Jesus was not present then the miracle would not be attributed to Christ but mere chance or “luck”. The miracle was to attest to His sovereign claim that He is the resurrection and the Life. He is not only in charge of life and the death but HE IS LIFE AND THE RESURRECTION! He wanted to go there and raise Lazarus. Although the disciples had seen Him raise the dead twice, namely, Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:35-42) and the son of the woman of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), there are some differences in the case of Lazarus. It would be Jesus’ greatest sign and it would strengthen immeasurably the faith of His disciples.

Then Thomas responded, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." This is the first mention of Thomas in the Gospel of John. It presented him as a person of great loyalty and courage but little faith. Lazarus is dead, the Jews would kill Jesus if He went to Bethany, but he was ready to die with Him. His words inspired the rest too because they all went with Jesus to Bethany to die with Him!

Jesus arrived in Bethany. Lazarus was already dead four days and was buried. Many Jews came from Jerusalem to Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother. This shows that the family was prominently known and loved by many. As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met Him, whereas Mary sat still in the house. Martha displayed her usual character. She was always busy and we can imagine that she must have been attending to the friends who had come to comfort them. Mary on the other hand was quieter, and she remained still, being overtaken by grief.

Martha said to Jesus that if He had been with them, Lazarus would not have died. One might think that this is a gentle rebuke. But it is more likely an expression of faith that if Jesus were there, Lazarus would be healed. This is shown by Martha's words to Jesus that even now God would hear whatever Jesus asked of Him. Jesus replied to her, "Thy brother shall rise again." Martha then said that she believed that

her brother would rise again "in the resurrection at the last day." Martha shared with the Jews the hope of a final resurrection of the righteous (Daniel 12:2).¹ Although that would happen in the distant future, it nevertheless was a source of comfort to Martha.

Many of us comfort our bereaved friends with such words too, the hope of the deceased being raised from the dead when Jesus returns, and to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. This is the greatest hope we can give to any bereaved family when a Christian dies. The words of man can comfort but for a moment for their hope is only good for this life. But this hope of God goes beyond this life and enters into the realm of eternity. Who is afraid of sleep? We are not because we have done it many times before and we wake up the next morning. Death to the believer is like sleep where the parting is temporary. The reunion is coming in the future, at the Second Coming of Christ!

But concerning Lazarus who would live again, Jesus was talking about the present. Jesus then said to 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. Believest thou this?"

¹Daniel 12:2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Jesus was not speaking about physical death, but of spiritual death. Whoever believes in Him shall not be condemned but shall live eternally with Him. He may die physically but he is still very much alive in heaven. The resurrection of the body was a manifestation of the life which Jesus has the power to give – eternal life! Jesus put Martha to the test. Did she believe that Lazarus was still alive when his body lay lifeless in the tomb? Martha replied, “I believe” and acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ (the Messiah) the Son of God, who should come into the world. Martha’s confession “I believe” is strong. She emphasized her personal belief “I” and the present perfect verb-form of “believe” speaks of her unchangeable faith – she had believed it, she still believes, and she will continue to believe – regardless of what was happening to her at the moment. Outward circumstances did not change her abiding faith. We see that although Martha was a practical woman, always busy with herself in many things, she was also a woman of tremendous faith. She showed to us that a person can be a “Martha” and at the same time be one having strong spiritual qualities. Martha is an example of this combination.

At this point, Martha went away and called her sister and secretly told her, “The Master is come, and calleth for thee.” As soon as Mary heard this, she quickly got up and went to meet Jesus, who had not yet reached the town. Her friends in the house thought that she was going to the tomb. But when she

came to where Jesus was, she fell down at His feet, and weeping said to Him, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” Seeing her weeping and all the Jews who followed her too were weeping, Jesus “groaned in His spirit and was troubled.” The word “groan” means “violent displeasure or indignation.” Mary expressed her faith that had Jesus been there, her brother would not have died. But she did not express the faith uttered by Martha as to the future assurance. Mary’s grief was one of despair. Mary’s words show no element of future faith and hope. As God, Jesus showed His inner intense displeasure at their unbelief, but as Man, He shared their deep sorrow and grief. Jesus then asked, “Where have ye laid him?” They led Jesus to the tomb. Jesus wept.

Jesus’ tears drew two reactions. Some of the Jews said, “Behold, how He loved him” (v.36). Indeed, He loved the family and the others also. But some of the Jews said, “Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?” These Jews who said these words were sceptical that Jesus could have healed Lazarus. That was why they thought that Jesus came late. This explains Jesus’ indignant groaning after hearing them. Earlier, Mary and the others had shown a lack of a future faith (v.32). Here, they showed a lack of present faith on the part of the unbelieving Jews (v. 38).

Jesus, feeling disturbed in spirit, came to the cave where Lazarus was buried. It was a common method in those days to bury the dead in a cave and a stone was rolled to cover the entrance. When Jesus arrived at the cave, He told them to take away the stone that covered the entrance. Jesus could have done it by commanding the stone to roll away. But He chose not to but used man's ability to do so. Martha instantly protested saying that by now his body which had been dead four days would stink. The reason why Jesus delayed for four days was because there was a Jewish tradition that upon death, the soul hovers around the tomb for three days hoping to re-enter the body. But on the fourth day, it departs. We are not required to believe that Martha believed this. Certainly Jesus did not. But this was believed among the Jews generally. So Jesus made it doubly sure that the Jews accepted that Lazarus was really and truly dead and not that he was in a coma before He raised Lazarus.

Even today's critics, who deny Jesus' miraculous raising of Lazarus, hold to the view that Lazarus was in a coma and was not actually dead. They deny Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. So, for that time and for all time, Jesus presented the answer for all critics and sceptics. He delayed four days so that every one knew that Lazarus was dead, and He raised him from the dead. No question about that. That settles it.

In reply to Martha's protest, Jesus reminded her that if she believed, she would see "the glory of God." Jesus willed to raise Lazarus from the dead and to do it for the glory of God. After the stone had been moved, Jesus prayed (v.41). Jesus thanked God the Father for answering His prayer even before He prayed it. Jesus was aware of God's willingness to hear Him. He spoke loud enough for those around Him to hear so that they might believe that He was sent by God. It was for their benefit. He wanted them to see that when He called, Lazarus would respond to His call. Jesus then with a loud voice said, "Lazarus, come forth" (literally, "Lazarus, hither out"). Lazarus did so. The people saw. He was bound hand and foot with grave clothes. His legs were separately bound. This explains why Lazarus could walk out of the tomb. Jesus then instructed the grave clothes to be removed.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead was in a way unlike the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ's resurrection was the "first-fruits" from the dead. Christ's resurrection means that one is raised from the dead and never to die again. This was not true of Lazarus. He was alive again, that was a fact, but he had to die again. It was the same with Jairus' daughter, and the son of the woman of Nain. These who were raised from the dead did not experience a resurrection in the sense that Jesus did. They did not possess a glorified body. They would experience it

when Jesus comes again, the second time.

Conversion of the Friends of Mary of Bethany

One would imagine a tremendous response to the stupendous miracle which Jesus had just accomplished before their very eyes. Sadly, that was not the case. There were those Jews, who came to comfort Mary and who had seen what Jesus did, that believed "on Him." They not only believed what they saw, they believed on Him, that He is the Christ, the Son of God, who had done the miracle. However, there were others who reacted differently. They believed what they saw. They could not deny it. But they did not believe "on Him." They went off to report the incident to the Pharisees, Jesus' enemies. This is very strange. There are people, who would stand in the presence of the power of God, and yet turn away from it to walk in the power of Satan! Is this not a clear example of one who is totally depraved and dead in sin?

PRACTICAL VALUE

A whole chapter is devoted to Jesus' visit of Mary and Martha during their time of bereavement. We can draw much comfort, peace and encouragement when we are in similar circumstances. The loss of a Christian, whom we dearly love, can be spiritually and emotionally devastating. But like Martha, if we believe that Jesus has the power to heal and resurrect the dead, we should not be unduly or overly

despairing and sorrowing like the others who are unbelievers and without hope. We have a sure hope in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who has promised to return, to raise us from the dead, and to live with Him forever and ever in His glorious kingdom. Loved ones will be reunited in Christ. Let us therefore not believe in words and thoughts only, but show it in our behaviour and conduct.
AMEN

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: John 11: 1-10

TUESDAY: John 11: 1-10

WEDNESDAY: John 11: 11-27

THURSDAY: John 11: 1-27

FRIDAY: John 11: 28-46

Discussion Questions

1. What four subjects are spoken of in these ten verses?

2. What kind of spirit do these four subjects pre-suppose in a true disciple, if he is to live according to this teaching?

3. What was Jesus' response when He was told that Lazarus was ill and that his illness was life threatening?

4. What was the basis of Jesus' action to the news concerning Lazarus? What lesson may we find here for our own comfort?

5. How is it that the same miracle quickens faith in some, and hatred in others?

6. What words and actions of Jesus in this lesson strengthen your faith, comfort you, and draw you closer to Him?
