

# TONIGHT'S READING



## THE NEED OF THE DEAD (I)

### Scripture Reading:

John 11:1-7 <sup>1</sup>Now there was a certain man who was sick, Lazarus from Bethany, of the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup>It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. <sup>3</sup>The sisters therefore sent to Him saying, Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick. <sup>4</sup>But when Jesus heard it, He said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, in order that the Son of God may be glorified through it. <sup>5</sup>Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup>When therefore He heard that he was sick, He remained at that time in the place where He was for two days. <sup>7</sup>Then after this He said to the disciples, Let us go into Judea again.

John 11:20-26 <sup>20</sup>Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him; but Mary sat in the house. <sup>21</sup>Then Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You. <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to her, Your brother will rise again. <sup>24</sup>Martha said to Him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection in the last day. <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes into Me, even if he should die, shall live; <sup>26</sup>And every one who lives and believes into Me shall by no means die forever. Do you believe this?

John 5:24-25 <sup>24</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, He who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment but has passed out of death into life. <sup>25</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, An hour is coming, and it is now, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

Ephesians 2:1-5 <sup>1</sup>And you, though dead in your offenses and sins, <sup>2</sup>In which you once walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit

which is now operating in the sons of disobedience; <sup>3</sup>Among whom we also all conducted ourselves once in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest; <sup>4</sup>But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup>Even when we were dead in offenses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

## **ALL PEOPLE BEING DEAD**

Now we will consider how the life of the Lord Jesus meets the need of the dead. Everyone whom the Lord saves is initially dead. Hence, in John 11 a dead person is chosen to represent man before the Lord. Every person needs to realize that he is a sinner and that he is dead. In the book of Romans man needs salvation because he is a sinner. In the book of Ephesians man needs salvation because he is dead. Although we are alive, the Bible says that we are dead. Let us consider some practical situations to prove this point.

### **Being Dead**

According to John 11, the first characteristic of a dead person is the presence of death itself. Lazarus was a dead man (v. 14). There are three aspects related to death. The first aspect is the loss of function. For example, if I am blind, my eyes are dead; if I am deaf, my ears are dead. I may have eyes and ears, but they are dead because they have lost their function. A person is dead when his functions stop. From the physical point of view, man is living. However, from the spiritual point of view, man is dead because he has completely lost his spiritual function before God.

Ephesians 2 says that we were dead in our offenses and sins (v. 1). Remaining in offenses and sins proves that we are dead. We all know that we should not live in offenses and sins, but we cannot come out of our sins, because we are dead and do not have any function. If someone falls into a mud pit, he will be able to come out of the pit if his legs are living and functional. But if his legs are withered and functionless, he will not be able to come out of the pit even though he wants to come out. If his legs have lost their function, they are dead. Similarly, electricity is “alive” when it passes through a light bulb and shines light. If the filament in the bulb is broken, however, electricity will not be able to pass through it, and the light bulb will not be able to give light. When the light bulb loses its function, it is “dead.”

This also applies to man. Man was created for God, to know God, contact God, fellowship with God, and have a relationship with God. Furthermore, man should pass through God and allow God to pass through him in order to express God. However, man does not know God, contact God, fellowship with

God, have a relationship with God, or express God. Instead, man commits sins and does evil. Man cannot do what he should do and cannot free himself from the bondage of what he should not do. Man has lost his function before God. This proves that man is dead.

The second aspect of death is the loss of feeling. Every living part in my body has feeling. If a part of my body dies and withers, it loses all feeling. Likewise, man has lost his feeling concerning sin because he is dead in sins. A person may be well-dressed and well-mannered, but he may not have any feeling concerning his sins. I once met a very well-mannered and highly educated man with a respectable family. However, he used filthy and dirty words that were unbearable to hear. He had no feeling concerning these words. His words were as filthy as sewage water. A living person would never drink sewage water. But a dead person has no feeling concerning the presence of sewage water in his mouth. The words that come out of our mouth are an indication of whether we are living or dead. Some high-class people in society like to watch dramas. A whole family may watch a drama together. When they see the worst scene, the father claps, the mother claps, and even the children clap. These people are dead because they have no feeling.

The third aspect of death is impotence. From the Lord's perspective, the impotent man who had been sick for thirty-eight years in John 5 was dead. Weakness is the precursor of death, and death is the source of weakness. It is as natural for people to sin as it is for water to flow downstream. However, pleasing God is as hard as ascending to heaven. Impotence proves that man is dead. Nearly everything that people do today shows that they are impotent. Whose behavior matches their intentions? Who wants to be entangled by their addictions or ensnared by their sins? Who desires to do immoral things? People do evil things against their will, and they do improper things against their reason. Some people desire to honor their parents but instead disobey their parents. Some people make up their minds to drop their addictions but instead are defiled by sins. Some people determine to do good but instead do evil. People know that they should not violate the law, but they end up in prison. These situations prove that man is impotent, powerless. Who can do good simply because they desire to do good? Who can eliminate their addictions based on their will alone? Who can determine to conduct themselves properly based on their determination alone? Who can refrain from doing what they know they should not do? Man is impotent because man is dead; the factor of death is in him. Man's impotence proves that he is in death and is dead.

Ephesians 2:1 through 5 presents three conditions in relation to man's being dead in sins. The first condition is walking according to the age, the customs, of this world. The second condition is obeying the ruler of the authority of the air, the spirit that is now operating in the sons of disobedience, that is, the devil. The third condition is indulging in the lusts of the flesh, that is, doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts. When man is dead in sins, he is so impotent that he cannot resist the customs of

the world, he cannot overcome the devil, and he cannot subdue the flesh. Man is impotent because man is dead.

The influence of the customs of the world may be likened to wind blowing fallen leaves. People are unable to resist the customs of the world, just as fallen leaves are unable to resist the wind. They are always being blown about by the wind. Fallen leaves are unable to resist the wind because they are dead leaves. Likewise, people are unable to resist the customs of the world because they are dead. Many promising young people resolve to not be blown about or be defiled by evil customs. They are determined to be pillars who stand against the downward current. However, when they step into society, they cannot resist the customs of the world. Just as fallen leaves are impotent before the wind, dead people are also impotent before the customs of the world.

The devil is prevailing and powerful in people's hearts. Who is able to overcome the evil spirit who is operating in the hearts of man? Who does not obey the evil troublemaker? Who is not a son of disobedience? People are captives and slaves under the hand of the devil, and they obey his every order. They are like lambs that the devil can kill at his will. The impotence of man under the manipulation of the devil proves that man is dead inwardly, lacking the power to resist.

The flesh is another invincible troubling force in man. When the lusts of the flesh operate in man, he has no choice but to walk according to the lusts of the flesh and to do the desires of the flesh. Many prominent figures in high positions commit deeds that shame themselves and harm their families because they cannot control the lusts of their flesh. Man's weakness in following the lusts of the flesh prove that he is inwardly dead. Just like Lazarus, the people in the world are dead.