

Lazarus, Love Leader

Have you ever known a *love leader*?

- Someone who, though they may not come across as the most prominent person in the room, nevertheless exudes a gentle caring that touches everyone there.
- Someone who, though they may not necessarily be noted for their ability or responsibility, is acknowledged by all as a tower of strength and a person you can resort to in time of trouble.

I believe that Lazarus was such a man, and that is why he so deeply touched the heart of our Lord and Savior.

Five times in the Gospel of John the Scripture makes reference to the disciple whom Jesus loved. We'll look at each occurrence as we make our way through this teaching.

Thinking about the disciple whom Jesus loved, have you ever asked yourself: Why would God want to point out that our Lord and Savior loved a specific individual so particularly?

What personal character trait do you think Jesus would have admired the most? Surely the answer would have to be *love*. Surely the greatest Lover of all time would have selected friends who, like him, evidenced love. Yet there was one he loved most particularly.

This disciple Lazarus, however, was not one of the twelve.

- He is never noted in what might be traditionally considered a leadership capacity. Nevertheless, all of the twelve recognized the trait in which he clearly excelled: *caring*.

As we learn more about this man from the Scriptures, we'll see that among Jesus' closest associates, Lazarus stands out as a *love leader*.

Earlier today we learned about the record in Luke where Jesus explained in a parable what it was to love your neighbor (the one near you). What was the answer? That the man who truly loved his neighbor was the one who *showed him mercy*. In the parable, the Samaritan and the man in need were complete strangers to one another.

Romans 12:8 is part of a list of eight different kinds of ministries, and the last one listed is *showing mercy*. So where do we get this idea that to have a ministry, you have to have a congregation? A minister of mercy has the whole world as his field of operation and opportunity. We need to see our lives and ministries so much bigger, and not be defined by the world.

Phileō, the Love of a Friend

Getting back to Lazarus, Lazarus was a leader in *friendship*.

What exactly *is* a friend, biblically speaking?

Jesus defined friendship for his disciples.

John 15:13-15:

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life [soul] for his friends.

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

The concept of friendship is being rapidly eroded in today's culture. In the language of my youth, I would *befriend* you, meaning I would act as a true friend to you. In contemporary speech, we talk of "friending" someone, meaning to send them an electronic invitation to view a digital representation of our life — hardly the same thing.

To more fully appreciate our Lord and Savior we would do well, then, to understand friendship from the point of view of the Eastern mentality prevalent in Bible times.

The Greek word for “friend”, φίλος *philos*, is derived from the verb φιλέω *phileō*, to **dearly love**. Originally used as an adjective (meaning “loved, beloved, dear”) *philos* only later came to be used as a noun (meaning “a loved one, a **friend**”).

Where is friendship learned? Ideally, in the home. Our first notion of a friend is our father or mother, the one who takes care of our every need. We reach out for them and cling to them because even before we learn to speak, we sense the tenderness of their embrace. This is what the biblical expression “in the bosom [on the breast or chest]” illustrates.

John 1:18:

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.

The loving father draws his son *near* to him. He holds him *dear* to him, on his chest, where he breathes and his heart beats.

In the modern, Western world, people often keep their distance from each other. In contrast, in the ancient Eastern world, people were much more comfortable with physical proximity. For example, the Jews of Jesus’ time, when dining at table, would frequently recline on cushions with one person lying right next to the other, all within reach of the common dish on the low table before them. In order to eat in this position, they would have to prop themselves up on their left arm so that their right hand was free to partake of the food. This leaning posture would typically place the head of one guest quite close to the chest of his neighbor. An honored dinner guest might thus find himself in whispering distance from his host, sometimes referred to as being “on his bosom [or chest].” Such physical proximity was also frequently an indicator of a heart-to-heart relationship.

Even today we have the English expression “bosom buddies”, indicating very close friends. Isn’t that the essence of a loving, *phileō* friendship: *to hold someone near and dear*?

Friends of the Master: the “Bethany Bunch”

With this background, let’s go to the Gospel of John to begin considering the friendship of Jesus, Lazarus and his sisters.

John 11:1-3:

Now a certain *man* was sick, *named* Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha [I call them “the Bethany bunch”].

(It was *that* Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.)

Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, *he whom thou lovest* [Greek φιλέω, *phileō*] is sick.

This is the first of five references to the disciple whom Jesus loved. Note that the word here used for “love” is φιλέω *phileō*, the root of the word “friend.” Jesus held Lazarus near and dear to his heart.

John 11:4, 5:

When Jesus heard *that*, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

Now *Jesus loved* [Greek αγαπάω, *agapaō*] Martha, and her sister, and *Lazarus*.

Here we learn that Jesus loved not only Lazarus, but his sisters Martha and Mary. This word “loved” is the Greek *agapaō*, “to regard with God’s loving favor.” What a special relationship they all enjoyed together!

John 11:6-10:

When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.

Then after that saith he to *his* disciples, Let us go into Judaea again.

His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?

Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.

But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.

What a great encouragement this exhortation is! Jesus Christ lived in one of the darkest times ever, yet he recognized that with God's light in his heart, fully half the hours of the day consist of broad daylight!

John 11:11:

These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend [Greek φίλος, *philos*] Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

Not only was Lazarus the friend of Jesus, he was "*our* friend", the friend of all the disciples. So they must have all known him and cared for him. How did they meet him?

The greater part of Jesus' ministry took place in Galilee, far from Judaea where Lazarus and his sisters lived, in the village of Bethany. However, according to the law, all Jewish men were expected to travel to Jerusalem annually for each of the three feasts: Passover (in April), Pentecost (in June), and Tabernacles (in September). Jesus and the twelve were no exception to this requirement. However, from the time that Jesus first cleared out the tables of the money-changers in the Temple, he had been the target of the scribes and Pharisees and could not readily show his face in Jerusalem. So where would Jesus and the twelve stay when they were in town? As it is written in Matthew 8:20: "... foxes have holes, and the birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay *his* head."

Being located just outside of Jerusalem, Bethany would have provided a likely place of respite for the Master and his disciples during their journeys to the feasts. This could account for their familiarity as individuals with Lazarus.

John 11:12-17:

Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.

Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.

Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.

Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him [Look how even Thomas loved him so!]

Then when Jesus came, he found that he had *lain* in the grave four days already.

Certainly, there was nothing random about this particular challenge arising at this time. Jesus had been telling his disciples for months that he would suffer, be killed, and rise again the third day. Now he was about to raise a man who had been dead for four days. And not just any man, but one of his closest friends.

John 11:32-35:

Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled,

Jesus was deeply touched to see Mary weeping. Undoubtedly the full pathos of the moment was also hitting him personally at this time as he considered the suffering and death of his dear friend.

John 11:34, 35:

And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see.

Jesus wept.

We have seen how very attached Jesus was to this family from Bethany. By this time in Jesus' life, he had already lost numerous dear ones who were irreplaceable: his father Joseph and his cousin and friend John the Baptist, to name a few. Now he had also lost this giant of a friend, the "disciple whom Jesus loved."

John 11:36-38:

Then said the Jews, **Behold how he loved him** [φιλέω, *phileō*, **held him near and dear**]!

And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?

Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

Again, we learn how Jesus loved the man. When he groaned in himself, it must have been with everything he had within him. But God had already shown Jesus what it was going to be possible for him to do for his friend, interceding on his behalf before the Father.

John 11:39-42:

Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days.

Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?

Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up *his* eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.

And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said *it*, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

Just think for a minute about what a pivotal moment this must have been in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. He knew his own suffering and death were imminent, and he was convinced that God would raise him again the third day, just like he would raise Lazarus now.

John 11:43, 44:

And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

A Friend Shares in Persecution

The next time we see Lazarus, he is alive and well and hosting the Master with his sisters at their home in Bethany. That was when Mary wiped his feet with her hair. All three of them were there: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

John 12:9-11:

Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead.

But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death;

Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.

You would think that the religious leaders would have been glad to see that Lazarus had his life back; but no, instead, they wanted to kill him. From this time Lazarus realized that he was a wanted man, just like Jesus of Nazareth. But did he let that stop him from going where he

needed and following the Master's lead? Hardly. Several days later we find him reclining at table with the Master at the last supper.

Friend as Confidant

Many have assumed that the one next to Jesus at this event was John, though that is never directly stated. Scripture does not reveal the location of the last supper; but we do know for several reasons that the last supper was not the Passover meal, which would have had to take place in Jerusalem. The biblical record does indicate that up to this point, Jesus and the twelve had been dining and lodging in Bethany, where Lazarus lived.

John 13:23:

Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved [*agapaō*].

We saw earlier that a host would normally seat their most honored guest next to them at table. If Lazarus were indeed the host on this occasion, that could explain why Jesus was reclining right next to him.

John 13:24, 25:

Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake.

He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it?

That Lazarus could ask such privileged information clearly suggests the high esteem the Master had for him. More than just a friend, here we see Lazarus as a confidant.

Friend as Family

On one more occasion we see Lazarus with Jesus before his crucifixion: the only male disciple recorded at the foot of the cross.

Lazarus must have known that there was a bounty on his head, but he refused to be intimidated by the threats. After all, if through the

ministry of Jesus Christ, God had raised him from the dead, precisely what was left for him to fear? Nothing at all.

John 19:25-27a:

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.

When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and [the disciple standing by, whom he loved](#) [*agapaō*], he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!

Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother!...

As the eldest son of his widowed mother, Jesus bore the responsibility of taking care of her in her widowhood. Now he was about to expire; but where were his brothers and sisters? Apparently, not at the foot of the cross with their mother. How their absence must have pained Jesus and his mother from a personal point of view! But God had provided consolation by the presence of Lazarus. As Jesus stated in Mark 12:50:

For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary were like brother and sisters to the Lord, for they believed on him without any reservation. Surely his mother Mary must have known the three of them as well. Indeed, she may have even stayed at their house during Jesus' travels. Encouraged by their tender care and great love, she could have felt confident in her new surroundings. Jesus Christ with his great love covered for Mary's every need, both current and future! Shortly after this, Jesus took of the vinegar and cried "It is finished" before drawing his last breath.

John 19:27a:

And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own *home*.

What a beautiful act on the part of a caring friend in an hour of need! And certainly, from this point on, it was no secret to anyone the close relationship that Jesus had with this man.

A Friend Sees and Believes

In those dark days, Mary was staying in Bethany with Lazarus. His very presence was a daily reminder of God's indisputable power to raise the dead, shedding light and hope in what might have otherwise seemed a hopeless situation. Furthermore, Lazarus was the most tender and caring of individuals, comforting Mary's heart.

Inexorably and virtually unnoticed, the time of the resurrection drew nigh. And who is one of the first to show up at the empty tomb? None other than Lazarus!

John 20:1, 2:

The first *day* of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.

Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to [the other disciple, whom Jesus loved](#) [*phileō* — held near and dear], and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

Why do you think these gentlemen were together at this time, and why would Mary have known where they were and sought them out? Clearly, she considered them the first who needed to know.

John 20:3,4:

Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.

So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.

You might be pretty fast too if you'd just been raised from the dead!

John 20:5-9:

And he stooping down, *and looking in*, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in.

Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie,

And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.

Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.

For as yet they knew not [before that, they had not yet understood] the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

Seeing the undisturbed graveclothes left behind, Lazarus believed. Due to his own personal experience, he registered this reality as being truly phenomenal. Christ's resurrection was evidently something different than his own. When Lazarus was raised, he had to be loosed from his graveclothes so he could breathe. Jesus Christ, in contrast, had passed right through the graveclothes. Clearly, Christ's new body was not animated by the same life principle nor bound by physical constraints.

First to Believe, First to See

Lazarus had been at both the cross and at the empty tomb. As we'll see from the next record, he was also among those who saw the resurrected Lord in his new body.

John 21:1-4:

After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself.

There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. [So you had Peter, James, John, Thomas, Nathanael and two other disciples who weren't named.]

Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing.

But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.

He was about a hundred yards away — the length of a football field.

John 21:5:

[You can imagine him shouting.] Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any... [fish]? They answered him, No.

They still didn't know who he was; but watch what happens next.

John 21:6:

And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and **ye shall find**. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.

By now you would think that someone might begin to start figuring things out. But who would be the first one?

John 21:7a:

Therefore **that disciple whom Jesus loved** [*agapaō*] saith unto Peter, It is the Lord...

We saw earlier that the disciple whom Jesus loved had been with Peter at the empty tomb. Though Peter was the first to enter the tomb, it was Lazarus who was first to see and believe. Now, this beloved man who *believes* becomes the first one to also *see* — that is, to see that the stranger on the shore was the Lord Jesus Christ!

John 21:7-9:

... Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt *his* fisher's coat *unto him*, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea.

And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes.

As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.

Jesus had not been out fishing with them. Nevertheless, he has already prepared a meal of fresh catch for everyone.

John 21:10-12:

Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught.

Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.

Jesus saith unto them, Come *and* dine. And none of the disciples durst ["dared"] ask him, Who art thou? knowing [literally, "seeing"] that it was the Lord.

The disciples marveled seeing the huge catch and the unbroken net. Putting the evidence together, they realized that it had to be the Lord.

In contrast, Lazarus had recognized the resurrected Christ before anyone else did, not because he saw him face-to-face (for he was 100 yards away), but because when he saw that the net was too full to draw in, he immediately perceived in his heart the spiritual reality behind what was going on in the physical world.

Here in this final earthly encounter with Jesus, Lazarus was a step ahead of the rest, not because he was a leader in responsibility, but because he was a leader in love. His love for the Master enabled him to see Jesus Christ, and thereby to see God.

John 14:9:

... he that hath seen me hath seen the Father;...

Matthew 5:8:

Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see [perceive] God.

Purity of heart enables us to see or perceive God, and issues in love.

Peter clearly recognized how Lazarus' love was a refreshment to the Master.

John 21:20-22:

Then Peter, turning about, seeth [the disciple whom Jesus loved](#) following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?

Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?

Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.

People know it when they've been loved with the love of God. Peter and the other disciples knew firsthand why Jesus Christ so loved the loving disciple Lazarus. How else can you explain the Master entrusting his own widowed mother to Lazarus' care? The greatest testimony of Lazarus' life was not his leadership, but his love.

Our love doesn't depend on our ability or works, but on the accomplished work of Christ. That is why no matter our accomplishments or our genetic package, every one of us has the opportunity to [lead by loving](#). Isn't that just what Lazarus' example inspires us to do: [to lead the way in love](#)?

God bless you all. I hold you near and dear with God's love.