

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Lazarus, Come Forth John 11:38-44 Part Five

Death is a terrible thing. It is presently sneaking up on each one of us. If the Lord does not return during our lifetime death will eventually snatch our physical life from our body releasing our spirit either to go into the presence of Christ or into a place that the Scriptures describe as Hades.

But even if our spirit, through death, is released to go into the presence of Christ, it still does not make death a friend. It is an enemy.

It causes us pain each time it captures someone we love in its grasp leaving us only with our memories.

But though death is an enemy for both the believer and unbeliever, one day Christ will vanquish death. He will vanquish death at the resurrection where the righteous dead and the unrighteous dead will receive new bodies, immortal and eternal. For the followers of Christ, they will take their new bodies into heaven, and of course, for those who were not followers of Christ, they will take their new bodies into hell. Those who take their new bodies into heaven will be enjoying spiritual life since they will forever enjoy the fellowship of Christ, and of course, those who take their new bodies into hell will be experiencing spiritual death since they will be forever separated from Christ. But no matter where a person's body finally ends up, whether in heaven or hell, we can count on this: physical death will be vanquished. There never will be again a separation of a person's spirit from the bodies again.

But why should we believe that Christ has such power to vanquish death? We can believe that Christ has this kind of power based on passages such as we will be considering this weekend.

We are continuing our study of the resurrection of Lazarus in **John 11**. We have already considered two major parts of the story.

The first part of the story was the preparation for the miracle (John 11:1-16).

The second part of the story was the arrival of Jesus and His disciples in Bethany (John 11:17-37). This part of the story took us two weeks to complete. In developing this part of the story we initially considered Martha's encounter with Christ. And last week we considered Mary's encounter with Christ.

Though there was certainly a similarity between their encounters in terms of their initial greeting, there was a marked difference in the emotional tone. Martha's encounter, that we considered two weeks ago, appeared to be more cerebral, and Mary's encounter, that we considered last week, was far more emotional.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

So, how did we see this very emotional encounter with Mary end? Jesus asked Mary and those with her where they had laid the body of Lazarus. He asked them this question because Jesus was now ready to do what He had planned to do all along. He was ready to confront His enemy. He was ready to confront death itself and steal from its grasp the body of Lazarus.

This brings us to the third part of the story. The third part of the story is the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38-44).

Let me read this passage of Scripture for you. **"Jesus therefore again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. (39) Jesus said, 'Remove the stone.' Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, 'Lord, by this time there will be stench, for he has been dead four days.' (40) Jesus said to her, 'Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?' (41) And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, 'Father, I thank Three that Thou hearest Me. (42) And I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me.' (43) And when He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth.' (44) He who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'"**

My hope for this message is that any fear that you might have of death as a disciple of Christ might be replaced with a hope of ultimate triumph.

Let us begin by looking at **John 11:38**. **"Jesus therefore again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it."**

Something is happening in this verse that had happened before. This is why the apostle begins this verse with the words, **"Jesus therefore again."** So, what is happening again? Jesus is once again angry with death. Jesus was *angry* with death in John 11:33, and He is once again angry with death in John 11:38. We know that Jesus is angry both in John 11:33 and John 11:38 because the word "moved" typically, when referring to people, indicates anger or indignation.

So why was Jesus angry at death? Jesus was angry at death because it was responsible for the grief He witnessed in **John 11:33** and for the tomb in **John 11:38**

Death is an *enemy* of Christ and He is not indifferent toward it nor is He unmoved by all of the havoc that it creates (1 Corinthians 15:20-26). In light of this truth it should not be surprising that He commands that the stone blocking the entrance to the tomb, or in other words the cave, be removed. Let me read for you the very first part of **John 11:39**. **"Jesus said, 'Remove the stone.'"** Jesus was now ready to release the body of Lazarus from the grip of His enemy, but Martha quickly protested. Let us continue to read the verse. **"Jesus said, 'Remove the stone.' [then it says] Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, 'Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.'"**

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

When Jesus told them to remove the stone it produced a very definite reaction from Martha. She reminded Jesus that her brother had been dead four days and opening the tomb would therefore be a most unpleasant experience.

In light of Martha's protest in John 11:39, we are forced to conclude that she had not yet come to the place where she fully understood the *implications* of what she believed.

If she had, then certainly I don't believe that she would have protested when Christ asked for the stone to be removed from the entrance of the tomb. Rather than protesting, I would think she would have been filled with a sense of wonder and joyous anticipation believing that Jesus the resurrection and the life, the Son of the Living God, could very easily raise her brother from the dead, even after four days if He chose to do so.

So, how does Jesus respond to Martha's misgiving about having the stone removed from her brother's tomb?

Let us now read **John 11:40**. "**Jesus said to her, 'Did I now say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God.'**"

Now this is a very interesting response. Did Christ actually share these exact words with Martha earlier? We have no biblical record of Christ doing such a thing. So how can we explain this? There could be a number of explanations but I believe the best explanation is this, what Jesus told Martha in John 11:40 was simply a *summary* of John 11:21-27.

In other words, if we combine Christ's promise to Martha in **John 11:23**, that her brother would rise again, with the implications of His declaration to Martha in **John 11:25**, that He was the resurrection and the life, and combine this yet again with His question of her at the end of **John 11:26**, "**Do you believe these things,**" what do we get? We get **John 11:40**. **John 11:40** is a summary statement of **John 11:21-27**.

What is the point that Christ is making to Martha in **John 11:40**? The point that Christ made to Martha in John 11:40 was that though the crowd would very shortly see a miracle, only believers would see the *glory* of God.

It is a wonderful thing to be a believer, a follower of Christ, for the simple reason that when we exercise faith, this world is immediately transformed into a wonderful display of heavenly delight as we see the hand of God working in and through the course of human events. There are times when we see His love. There are other times we see His patience. There are other times we see His compassion. There are other times when we see His power. But the bottom line is this, it is our faith that makes the glory of God come alive to us and without faith the glory of God will not come alive to us.

Did Martha possess faith? The answer would have to be yes! It might be an immature faith, but it was a real and genuine faith that Jesus, step by step, was in the process of stretching. And the positive result of this stretching process is seen in the fact that Martha apparently, after hearing the words of Christ, allowed the stone to be removed. Isn't this what John tells us at the beginning of

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

John 11:41? "And so they removed the stone."

What a great day this was going to be for the sisters of Lazarus. Not only would they once again enjoy fellowship with Lazarus, but of far greater importance they would see the glory of God.

So, what happened next? Let us continue to read John 11:41-42. **"And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, 'Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest Me. (42) And I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me.'"** So, what happened next? After the stone was removed Jesus prayed.

This prayer is interesting on a number of different counts. First of all, it is clear that Jesus, even before He approached the tomb, had already petitioned His Father and knew that it was His Father's will that Lazarus be raised from the dead (John 11:41). How do we know this? Let us once again read **John 11:41. "And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, 'Father, I thank thee that Thou heardest Me.'"** Had Jesus already petitioned His Father about the resurrection of Lazarus? Yes! Did He know even before He arrived at the tomb that it was the will of His Father that Lazarus would be raised from the dead? Yes!

Hopefully this awareness would challenge us. Hopefully this awareness would challenge us to make our prayers more deliberate and thoughtful in contrast with prayers that are simply thrown up during the course of our day rather impulsively without much deliberation. Of course there is nothing wrong in us doing this, in fact, we should be doing this, but we should not be doing this to the exclusion of a more deliberate and purposed time of prayer when we truly can search out the mind of God in terms of what He would want us to be and what He would want us to do. Certainly it is clear from **John 11:41** that this is what Christ had done.

So, what else is interesting about the prayer that Christ prays in **John 11:41-42**? Not only had Jesus already talked to His Father about the resurrection of Lazarus and knew that it was His will that Lazarus be raised before He ever got to the tomb, but Jesus prayed His prayer of thanksgiving publicly at the tomb in order to minister to the people that were there with Him (John 11:42).

Let me read for you **John 11:42. "And I know that thou hearest Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me."**

Jesus, in **John 11:41**, thanked His Father publicly for having heard His earlier request concerning the raising of Lazarus. So, why had He expressed this prayer of thanksgiving publicly? He did this because He wanted them to know that He had a very unique relationship with His Father, and that it was His father who had sent Him into this world.

Hopefully understanding this will challenge us. Challenge us to do what? To think of ways that we might minister to others through public prayer.

It is very disappointing to me how professing Christians willingly abandon wonderful opportunities to personally encourage people, to strengthen people, to challenge people through genuine and sincere prayers addressed to our heavenly Father. This is particularly disappointing to me when the reason they abandon this ministry opportunity is because they are fearful of praying publicly, or in other words out loud.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

If you are one of those people you need to confess your selfishness and take immediate action to correct this? It is a wonderful thing for the saints to pray and to pray out loud when their prayers are sincere and meant not only to glorify God, but to minister to the people in their hearing.

So, what happens next? What happens after Christ's prayer to His Father? Let us now read **John 11:43**. "**And when He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth.'**"

We have now reached the dramatic high point of the story. When Christ cried out with a loud voice "Lazarus, come forth," it was a shout of raw authority. He was fully expecting that His enemy death would quickly and helplessly relinquish its prey and that Lazarus would, in fact, come to them.

So let me ask you a question. Would a whisper from Christ have been just as effective? And the answer would have to be yes. In fact, I doubt if Jesus would have even had to speak a single word to get death to relinquish its prey. All that was truly necessary was for Christ to simply will it so.

So the question is why did He cry out? Why did He shout of this command to Lazarus? It was not for the sake of Lazarus or for the sake of death, but rather it was for the sake of the people that were assembled around Him. He wanted them to see the glory of God, or in other words He wanted them to see His power over death.

Then what happened after Christ cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth?" Did Lazarus, in fact, come to Him? Let us now read the first part of **John 11:44**. "**He who died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth.**"

This is an amazing picture that is being painted here by John. The one who had been dead for four days and who had been bound had not just opened his eyes and had begun to moan. He did not just wiggle around on the inside of the tomb making loud noises. He was actually able, in spite of the bindings, to get him self to at least the entrance of the tomb.

So, how did he do this? People seeking to answer this question have actually answered it in different ways. Some people, supposing that the bindings of Lazarus would have been so restrictive that he could not possibly have maneuvered himself to the entrance of the tomb, see a miracle within a miracle thinking perhaps that perhaps Lazarus simply floated to the entrance of the tomb. But since John does not point to any other miracle than the miracle of the resurrection I don't believe that this would be the best explanation of how Lazarus was able to exit the tomb. So, what is the best explanation?

The best explanation of how Lazarus was able exit the tomb is that his bindings were not all that restrictive.

So, how exactly were the dead prepared for burial in those days? The corpse was customarily laid on a sheet of linen wide enough to envelop the body completely and more than twice the length. After this was done the linen would then be pulled over the head and back down to the feet. The feet were then bound at the ankles, and the arms were tied to the body with linen strips. And finally, the face was bound with another cloth. So if this was the way Lazarus' body had been prepared for burial, how would this have affected his ability to move?

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

If the body of Lazarus had been prepared for burial in a typical Jewish way, he would not have been able to *walk*, but he could have hopped or shuffled.

So, what would you think would happen next? You might think that the people would have immediately rushed forward to help Lazarus, but this is not what happened at all. These people were in total shock and apparently totally paralyzed by all that they were observing.

This led Christ to utter His final words in this account of the raising of Lazarus. And what were those words? Let us again read **John 11:44**. **"He who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'"**

Through the centuries this story has brought comfort to Christians as they contemplate death. Do you remember the words of Jesus to Martha in **John 11:23-27**? What did He tell her?

"Jesus said to her, 'Your brother shall rise again.' (24) Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' (25) Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, (26) and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.'" And then what did He say to her? "Do you believe this?"

This is the same question that I am asking you this morning. Do you believe this? Do you believe that Christ, the only begotten Son of God, through His death, burial and resurrection is able to save you from your sin and all its consequences? If you do then you have nothing to fear ultimately from death. Oh it may cause you some immediate or temporary difficulty, but death will no longer have a sting associated with it, nor will it ultimately be victorious.

What does **1 Corinthians 15:55-57** say? **"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' (56) The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; (57) but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."**

May we, as the disciples of Christ, be free from the fear of death, whether that is physical or spiritual, knowing that God has given us the *victory* through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.