



LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Grave Robber
John 11: 1-45

We are going to spend a little time this morning speaking about an amazing moment in the life and death of a guy called Lazarus. It would appear from what we can see in scripture that Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha were friends of Jesus. The word that Jesus' sisters send is, "Lord, the one you love is sick." Jesus tells his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep." In the following chapter we find Jesus being hosted by Lazarus, Mary and Martha. Scripture points to a relationship with depth. You may be very familiar with this story.

It begins with the words, "A man named Lazarus was sick."

Lazarus,

Hey Martha, Mary, can you come here please? I don't feel too good, I don't know if it's something that I ate or what the deal is. All I know is that I feel bad really bad. I was fine yesterday when I went up to the synagogue, hung out with a few friends, went for a walk after I was finished working. Oh, man I need to sit down. Hey Martha, Mary, are you guys around? I feel like I need to throw up, is this a rash, oh boy, I didn't have that before. Maybe I need to see a Doctor; I seem to be sweating a lot and I don't need this swelling. Now, I've been sick before but never like this, this could be serious. Maybe if I just lie down, close my eyes that will take away the pain, that's what I need, just to lie down. Hey Martha, Mary, I don't feel good, I think I need to sleep, just a little sleep.

Martha,

Lazarus, wake up! Are you not going to work today, we need the harvest, come on get up. Lazarus, LAZARUS! Oh, Mary, I think you should come in here, there's something wrong with our brother. No, I don't think he's just sleeping, he's got a temperature, I really think there's something seriously wrong. MARY, can you please come in here. We need help. I don't think that there is enough time to get a doctor. I don't know what to do. Maybe.....maybe Jesus could help, he always seems to know what to do in times like this. Maybe he could take this sickness away. Mary, quick send someone for Jesus. Yes now!

At the end of chapter 10 we see that Jesus was beyond the Jordan River. He was approximately 2 days from where Lazarus was sick. Jesus is in no hurry to get to his friend; instead, he knows immediately that he will use this to glorify God. We read in verse 6 that Jesus hangs around for 2 days before he decides it's time to go. He had a greater plan that was important. Jesus' disciples are not too happy at the thought of going back to Judea, the last time they were there, they tried to stone Jesus in the temple. His disciples take him literally when he says that Lazarus is sleeping. In verse 14 you can see that Jesus makes it very simple for them, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Martha.

I didn't understand it. He didn't come. I was sure Jesus would be here as soon as he heard my brother was sick. I have to confess, I was a little mad, I was a little upset but mostly I was just confused. I knew Jesus loved Lazarus, I knew he did. But he didn't come. We buried my brother. Simple as that, we still don't know about his sickness, but we do know that it was too much for him. He seemed to die peacefully. It was a big funeral. We are close to Jerusalem and a lot of folks came to pay their respects. I was in the house with Mary when I heard that Jesus was coming. My brother had been dead for 4 days. He was late. I ran to meet him and couldn't help myself, I blurted out, "Lord if you had been there my brother would not have died." I knew it wasn't his fault, but I was upset. I did let him know, that I knew God would give him whatever he asked. Then he got all weird, he started talking about Lazarus rising and eternity and things like that. He knew I believed; but it was a strange time to preach at me. He asked about Mary, so I sent her out to meet with him. We met with him at the tomb. That was when he first got emotional. When he saw us cry, he started to cry as well. He really loved my brother. Then he got weird again, he asked for the stone in front of the tomb to be moved away, was he crazy?

Lazarus,

Where am I? It's dark. It's cold. I need to think. Where am I? The last thing I remember is feeling bad, really bad. I don't know what kind of sickness I had but it was painful. I remember being swollen, and sweating heavily, I was going to throw up, and then I went to sleep. That's right, I needed sleep. I remember vague conversations, Mary & Martha talking about me, how sick I was. Where was Jesus? And lots of crying, why were they so sad. Then deep sleep, and a crazy dream. It was like I was in heaven; I saw

Moses and Elijah. It was so warm and bright, but this place is so cold and dark, where is this? Well, anyway whatever it was that wrong with me seems to have cleared up, I feel a lot better, that sleep must have done me some good. I am very hungry though; I feel like I haven't eaten for days and what is that smell? It's not pleasant at all. My goodness is that me? I need a shower big time! Why are my legs bound together? Are these strips of cloth? So many questions wait a minute, I know this place, The last time I was in here I was laying my dad to rest, what am I doing in here? Is someone playing a joke on me, it's not very funny! Wait a minute there's some light. Is that my name? I think I hear Jesus; I'm going to see what he wants; maybe he can explain all this to me.

Scripture tells us of three times that Jesus raised a person from the dead. In Mark 5, he raises the daughter of Jairus and in Luke 7 he raises the son of a widow of Nain. What is different here is that Lazarus has been dead for 4 days. He has been buried. The Gospel writer leaves us in no doubt that he had died. Martha's comment, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." is the grim reality of the situation. But still Jesus calls to the dead man, "Lazarus come out." And to the others, "Unbind him, let him go."

So, what are we to make of this?

We can see much of Jesus in this story, he is in control, he has compassion, and he wants to display God's glory. If we read on in the chapter we find that this is the event that causes the Pharisees and chief priests to plan Jesus' death. It is the culmination of Jesus' signs in John's Gospel and is the start of the chain reaction that leads to the cross.

None of us may actually be dead here, some may be asleep but that's another matter. But in Ephesians chapter 2, Paul writes, "You were dead through the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked."

Our sin leaves us dead, with no relationship with God. I do not think it is reading too much into the passage for us to consider that without Jesus, we can connect to the death of Lazarus, to hear Jesus call to us, "Come out!" Unbind them, let them go." Because that is what the cross did for us. That is what following Jesus does for us. It unbinds us. The New International Version, translates that verse as, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." Lazarus would have been bound in grave clothes. It may have been hard for him to move. Jesus still looks at our sin and says, take those grave clothes off them, let them go. That this event is so connected to the cross is no

coincidence. Lazarus life from death, leads to the cross and tomb, Jesus life from death which leads to our sins being forgiven, our life from death.

For some of us, it may feel like, it is your faith that is dead, or dying. It is not what it was. You yearn for the days when your faith felt vibrant and alive. Hear the words of Jesus, “Come out! Take those graves clothes off. Take comfort also from the words we heard earlier in Ezekiel when the people of Israel, said, “‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ The prophet says, “‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land.” That same hope is surely ours.

We often embrace this relationship with Jesus but continue to be bound by our grave clothes. We pray a confession every week for a reason. It is good for the soul, but the assurance of pardon is equally important. Accept and trust in that forgiveness from God,

God still does the impossible, still brings life to that which we’d given up as dead. We can all change our behavior, but only God will change and renew our heart, our part is to seek the things of God, talk to God, and listen to God, love God and love God’s people.

There is a reason that verse 25 shows up in nearly every funeral service, “Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life.^{f1} Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” But then Jesus says something else to Martha that doesn’t always make it to the funeral. “Do you believe this?” That was his challenge.

Friends believe this. Believe this. Because those who believe this will never die, they will live. That is our hope. That is our promise.

Lazarus.

I don’t know about all that stuff. But I do know when I walked out of that tomb, I was alive. I was alive. I had been dead; I had been left and life was going on without me. Don’t ask me why Jesus chose me, people die all the time, I will die again, but my life continued that day because Jesus wanted to forget what was normal and acceptable and do something incredible. He brought life to one who was dead. I hope and pray, that for you. Jesus is still a man of miracles; still trying to forget what your world says is normal and still bringing life to that which was dead.