

Come Out of That Tomb, Pt.2  
John 11:38-44

Well, the whole chapter has been building up to this paragraph that we began to look at last time we were together. We see in verse 38 that Jesus is “deeply moved,” and the meaning is that there is a mix of compassion and care here, but also some anger at all the noise and wailing and lack of hope and unbelief in God. He is about to put an end to all of this and he commands the stone to be rolled away. He calls on others to put faith in him and what he is about to do. The stone would have been large and would have taken a number of men to removed it from the opening of the grave. But you can imagine the whole scene, because people’s attention are not just focussed on Jesus but on Martha. They are waiting on her and what she says. But look at Martha’s response in verse 39, **“Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.”** She objects and no one moves. There is a lack of faith and trust in Jesus which leads to the objection and even the disobedience to his words.

So look at verse 40, **“Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?’”** He is calling on Martha to put her trust in him. And this is the contrast throughout this section is the glory of Jesus and the great and grand promises and truths that he has presented, and the lack of faith and trust in Jesus. We even see it a little earlier when the people complain about the delay of Jesus in coming. Look at verse 37, **“But some of them said, ‘Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?’”** There is a lack of faith and trust in Jesus. This situation is just too big or beyond the control of Jesus that he can control it or bring anything good out of it.

And it is amazing because the call on Martha is to believe on him and trust him, and she will see the glory of God. And we discussed last time we were together that the glory is a manifestation of Jesus’ character and how great and true he really is. We really do see the glory of God. Let me give you an example of that. 1 Corinthians 10:13, says, **“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”** We are being tempted and it is so easy to say that I can’t stand or obey God in this situation, but God promises us that he will not tempted or test us beyond our ability but give us the necessary grace to go through it. So maybe you are in a tough marriage. It is easy when tempted to blow up or run or whatever other kind of sinful response. But we endure in kindness and forgiveness and patience. And what do we find in the end? God is faithful. He is gloriously faithful. He gave the necessary grace to go through that trial just as he promised. Well, why do we fail if he has promised the necessary grace? It is because we fail in the call of Martha right here - to believe on Jesus - to believe in his promises. And we do not see, actually see the glory of God.

You see what disobedience is, and we love to call it by so many names; we have a disorder for about every kind of wrong behaviour today; but what disobedience is - is a failure to believe God. If Martha will not give the order to roll away the stone, the reason why she disobeys the words of Christ is simple unbelief. I don’t believe God has the best in mind for me. I don’t believe that his command should be obeyed. Yes, I

know what God says, “but,” and the “but” is just an excuse for not believing God. And we do not see his glory, his faithfulness, and that he is so worthy to be trusted that as we see him and obey him we grow in seeing that he can be trusted.

So how does Martha respond? Well look at verse 41, “**So they took away the stone,**” in other words, she permitted this to go on. She trusted in Christ. Although she might not understand all that he was about to do, she put her trust in him. He is worthy to be trusted, followed and obeyed even when we do not understand all that he is doing. And so I want us to continue through this passage and see the prayer that Jesus offers up and the miracle itself. And hopefully it will expand our thoughts and vision and trust of the one who brings glory out of ashes. He truly can be trusted.

1. We need to hear this prayer of thanksgiving. Vv. 41-42

We learn so much about the relationship Jesus has with his Father, and also the ultimate purpose of this miracle, and how the glory of God would be manifested by the rolling away of the stone. And this is a hard element of believing, and that is when difficulties and suffering come and we are called to believe that God is sovereign and that he has good things planned, and his glory will ultimately shine through. He can be trusted. And we need to come back to the gospel, time and time again. Here when Jesus is put to death it looked like nothing ever good could come from it. The most innocent man that has ever lived died a criminals death and it looked like all was lost. But what came forth was the greatest good. And isn't it the same with our suffering. We love comfort. God loves holiness. And isn't it true that no one has ever said, this last year of my life has been the easiest that I have ever had, and I grew so much in my relationship with Christ. No one says that. But in the midst of hardship and suffering, and trials and tribulation we want comfort, but God is doing a work more beautiful and necessary. He is changing us into the image of none other than his Son. He is teaching us to trust him. He is in the pain accomplishing something beautiful. He is in the midst of that process and he asks us to trust him.

And look at Jesus' prayer here in verse 41, “**So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me.'**” Jesus lifts his eyes to heaven. And this is a public prayer that is done for all present and so that all may hear, but it is a prayer of the Son to the Father. And it is unique because his enemies are saying he does all these signs by the power of Satan, and Jesus directs his attention to God the Father, and he thanks him. Obvious Jesus had already prayed to the Father about the situation, and through the power of the Father and in obedience to the Father's will was about to raise Lazarus. And the meaning of “heard” is not just that the Father has heard the words or the request of Jesus but that he has responded to that request. And how could the Father not? Jesus prays in perfect accord with the Father's will. There is never any selfish motivation in Jesus. And think of the glory and satisfaction and the beauty of the communion with Father and Son because it is never like our prayers that are hindered so often by sin. Listen to Psalm 66:18, “**If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.**” “Cherishing iniquity” is the meaning of delighting or being consumed with sin more than delight and cherishing in the presence of God. God does not hear us.

But here is Jesus, the perfect God-man who has come and there is no sin or iniquity or wrongness in him. And there is perfect and delightful and satisfying communion between Father and Son. And I think sometimes, because sin is so pervasive in us we wonder if God would ever hear our prayers. And here is where we have Jesus as our perfect representative and advocate. Hebrews 4:15-16, **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”** We come through Jesus right into the presence of God. He is the perfect man. He is our perfect and forever High Priest. It is such a glorious truth that it should cause us to come into his presence.

But just before we go on to the next verse, I want us to learn a valuable lesson that Jesus teaches us about prayer and about God, and that is he gives thanksgiving here. Listen to God’s instructions in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, **“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”** Now really how thankful of a person are you? We like to complain about anything that goes wrong in our life. And I have a sneaky suspicion it is because we have made comfort an idol in our lives. Think how irritated and angry and impatient we get when only minor things happen. The long line that we have to wait in. Or the other talkative person who keeps going when we do not feel great. We complain that it is too hot or too cold. We complain that it is not raining enough or too much. We complain about our order at the restaurant. We complain about the children not taking off their shoes. We complain when someone is late. When we do not get our comfortable way we tend to complain. We can notice complainers around us, but how much does complaint dominate your life?

Jesus thanks God here because he knows God is acting. Do you know that? Do you know that God is active in your life from the great things that happen, to the unexpected, to the mundane and normal? There is never a moment or circumstance that God is not active in your life. We might go to the doctor and we might get the diagnosis that is not favourable. But can we thank God that he is active in that diagnosis? “I thank you God that you are active, and you have planned this before the foundation of the world. I thank you that this is for your glory and my good. I thank you Lord that my ultimate hope is in you and not in this life?” How about when some secret sin is discovered in your child? We get frustrated and angry and talk down to them. But do we ever consider that God is active? “I thank you Lord that you have exposed their sin and did not get away with it. I thank you Lord that you are not just working on his or her heart but also mine. I thank you Lord for your grace in a way that represents you.” God gifts us every day and every moment with his grace. We just are blind to it, or we just do not believe it is there. There is never a moment in your life that Jesus is not active, seeking to sanctify us whether it is in the everyday mundane grind of life or it is the unexpected. We have so much to be thankful for.

We need to see the reason why Jesus prayed. Look at verse 42, **“I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”** So here is Jesus praying to the Father and says that he is praying that Lazarus would rise from the grave “on account of the

people standing around,” in other words, there were people who did not believe and probably were incensed that Jesus had the stone rolled away and that the sisters had to go through this fiasco. So the rising of Lazarus is done not for some personal reason in Jesus, like that Jesus feels bad or just needs to see his friend again, but it is done because of the unbelief of the people, and ultimately as the text says, **“that they may believe that you sent me.”** And remember why these miracles are selected by John in his gospel. John 20:30-31 gives us that purpose, **“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”** He knows where ultimately Lazarus is going because of his trust in him. But these individuals before him do not believe. And so they will believe, we have this miracle. And the miracles are signs that point that Jesus is the Christ who has come from the Father. Life is found in him - listen to him, trust him. Jesus never does miracles out of ego but out of care and concern for others - and ultimately he cares for their greatest need, and that is sins forgiven through trust in him. He really does have authority over the grave. Jesus really is able to provide a covering for my sin.

2. We need to see the miracle itself. Vv. 43-44.

One of the things that is so amazing about this miracle of Jesus is that there is no mysticism or mystical spell that is conjured up. You see that so often in people that claim divine power. There are certain phrases or incantations that need to be spoken at the right time and in the right order for the wonder to come to pass. But Jesus doesn't use some book of spells but his divine command. And because he is Creator God, all have to listen to the authoritative demand of Jesus.

And it must have been something to be there. There must have been so many emotions running through all the people who are gathered there. Jesus has made some bold requests and claims. One was to have the stone removed. The other was that the Father always hears him and responds to him, and that he alone has been sent by the Father. And I am sure there are many that happen to be in the crowd that want to object and are frustrated, thinking that all the bold claims are just going to in the end be empty and add to the sorrow and the afflictions of both Martha and Mary.

But all of this is happening so quickly, no one would have time to object before what happens next. Look at the text and think of someone saying this at a funeral service and claiming the things that Jesus claimed, **“When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out.’”** After he had finished this short prayer of thanksgiving to the Father, we hear that he cried with a loud voice. And the idea of the loud voice is not that if he spoke softly then Lazarus would not have risen from the dead. Jesus spoke in a loud voice to emphasize his authority, and for all to hear that he is speaking and he is giving this authoritative and effective command. Remember, the whole purpose in the prayer is that others would not be dazzled per say, but those in the crowd would believe on Jesus. He is the Christ and have life through his name. And again, the command is so simple isn't it!

Now look at what happens in verse 42, **“The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus**

said to them, **'Unbind him, and let him go.'**" All that anger and frustration with Jesus must have turned to shock and even fear of the one who gave the command, because Lazarus struggles forth to come from the grave still wrapped with the grave clothes. The grave clothes were usually a long narrow sheets and the body was placed in the middle and then secured. A separate cloth was placed or wrapped over the head. The man who was four days in the grave comes forth in life. It must have been such a sight, and caused the people to see none other than the glory of Christ. Again, the whole goal is to believe on him. And what is the message that they are believing on? And the message is that this one has power and authority over death.

And let me make a couple comments about this. One is that this prefigures our own resurrection, because the way that we are given life again, physical life is similar to Lazarus but also different. It is different in the sense that we will never die again. Lazarus would. But our resurrection will give us a humanity after the pattern of Jesus Christ's resurrection body. Listen to 1 John 3:2, **"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."** Imagine, having a physically that is untouched by the fall and sin, that is eternal in nature. This is what Christ has purchased for us. But our resurrection is like his in that it is accomplished in the same way, and that is through the authoritative command of Jesus Christ. Listen to 1 Thessalonians 4:16, **"For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."** And listen a earlier in this gospel Jesus says of himself in John 5:28-29, **"Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."** I mean how authoritative is Jesus that all he has to do is speak and every person who has ever lived will be resurrected, some to eternal life with him but some to judgment? Just like the crowd present, this should expands our thoughts on Jesus and cause us to worship and love him and trust him.

But not only does it prefigure our coming resurrection but it is also an apt illustration of what has already been done for us in Jesus Christ. Because like Lazarus, we were dead in trespasses and sins and we could not even respond to the gospel message because of our spiritual deadness. But what has Jesus done? He has given us life so that we can respond and do respond to the voice of Jesus through the gospel. Listen to Ephesians 2:4-9, but listen to this familiar passage with Lazarus in mind. Unless Jesus gives him life he cannot obey the summons's to come out of the grave. This is exactly what Jesus has done for us, marvel at his life-giving grace: **"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."**

So with all of our difficulties and struggles, in light of the authority, power and willingness of Christ to give grace and life do you really believe that your life is too difficult for Jesus? Remember, the reason why we disobey is chiefly we do not believe in Jesus. These texts are given to change us. He has power of death. He has power over all and he can be trusted.