

JOH 11:35-44 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." 40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

Up to this point in chapter eleven we've been studying the death of Lazarus as we've followed the chain of events from the frantic request from Martha and Mary for Jesus to come and heal a very sick Lazarus, to Jesus' response to stay two more days in the area of Galilee, to Him finally showing up to find a grieving community and the two sisters of Lazarus who undoubtedly were a bit confused as to Jesus' response.

Both sisters had made similar statements when they saw the Lord, as they conceded that had Jesus been there for Lazarus he would never have died. And amidst all of the grieving Jesus could no longer contain Himself as He expressed His deep sorrow over Lazarus' death.

In response to Jesus weeping the crowd of mourners look to Him and conclude that He truly loved Lazarus. But in verse 37 we are given a response from another segment of this group that doesn't appear to be as sympathetic to Jesus.

JOH 11:37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

It appears the way in which verses 36 and 37 are framed that they are expressing somewhat conflicting perspectives. One group understands the deep feelings of Jesus during this time of grief

while the other group questions the very ability of Jesus to have healed Lazarus had He been there.

Those in verse 37 appear to suggest that the very reason for Jesus not coming to Bethany is because He couldn't have done anything for Lazarus, despite the fact that He had previously healed the man born blind. Maybe they figured His power was only sporadic, thus making Him someone less than the Son of God.

And so, our Lord's response in verse 38 could certainly have taken into account their lack of faith as He combines His grief with exasperation towards their unbelief.

JOH 11:38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.

Remember that just previously Jesus had asked Martha and Mary where they had laid Lazarus and so there was a short walk to the grave site, all the while Jesus and the rest of the mourners were weeping.

As Jesus comes to the tomb He notices that it was carved out of rock and so it was a cave-like tomb with a stone sealing the entrance. This was common in areas of Israel as you'll remember that the very tomb of Jesus was also carved out of rock.

As our Lord comes to the tomb He wastes no time in taking action to do the Father's will.

JOH 11:39 "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

Even as Jesus is about to bless Martha she stops Him and questions His intent. It appears that she thinks that He is opening the grave to go in and pay His last respects to Lazarus face to face. And so, Martha questions Jesus' actions by reminding Him that to visit Lazarus at this point would not be a very pleasant experience.

They undoubtedly had covered Lazarus' body with herbs and spices, as will be done in about three months time from this incident for the body of Jesus, but those herbs and spices were not as much a preservative as a covering of the smell death produces, which shows that even a generous amount of these spices didn't hide the smell for very long, thus Martha's response.

And by the way, the response from Martha is not unlike many of our responses at times. The Lord is always wanting to bless us and

shower us with His mercy and yet even in the midst of such blessings we sometimes rain on His parade by questioning the type of blessing or doubting that it's a blessing in the first place.

Jesus wants to bless Martha, and yet Martha only wants to talk about stench. But Jesus will not take that for an answer. He is going to bless anyway as He reminds Martha that He is the One who blesses because He is the resurrection and the life.

JOH 11:40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

Evidently Jesus had spoken to Martha about such glory as our Lord reminds her. Commentators are divided on this as to when Jesus spoke to her about such things. Some think that Jesus had taught about His glory in times past but instead of sitting at His feet as did Mary, and paying attention, Martha has a memory lapse because her interests may not have been in His teaching.

This is certainly possible, but there is a more plausible connection to a statement Jesus made only days before Lazarus' death when He told the messengers of Martha and Mary to take this message back to the sisters of a dying Lazarus.

JOH 11:3-4 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." 4 When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

And so, the two sisters of Lazarus were given the word of Christ that this sickness would not lead to death but would be used by God to bring glory to both the Father and the Son. And the implication was that Martha needed to take Jesus at His word that this would be so, which means she needed to believe Jesus.

And this is where the world seems to miss what God wants to do in our lives. The world's motto is, "seeing is believing." But God's word is, believing is seeing.

The reason for the world's motto is not unfounded because men cannot be trusted. At some point we are forced to join with Missouri where an entire state has decided that they are the "show me" state.

In other words, don't tell me about what you're going to do, just do it. In fact, even God takes that attitude with us when the half-brother of Jesus Himself records for us in his letter to the church,

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (JAM 1:22)

But when it comes to God’s faithfulness there is never to be any doubt that He will do what He says. And this is the reason that we cannot apply the same attitude to God that we might to men, who must prove themselves before we can believe them.

God says of Himself, ‘believe Me and then see.’ This is where trust and faith come in. But unfortunately we have a tendency to treat God the same way we treat men. We won’t believe unless we first see. In other words, if God will show us some miracle, or if God blesses a certain way, then we’ll believe.

But to really experience the blessings of God we must first believe that He is the giver of all good gifts and then simply trust that He is a faithful loving God who will bless in His time in the way He wants to bless.

This was the case with Lazarus. Jesus plainly told Martha and Mary that this sickness would not be unto death, but rather his sickness would be used to glorify the Father and Christ.

What they did with that truth would not alter the plan of Christ but it did alter their ability to live in confidence and peace in that truth. Instead of trusting Christ and being comforted, they fretted and grieved and questioned the purpose of Christ, thus missing out on being able to glorify Christ with their lives at that time.

But as I said last week, if their faith were the final determining factor for Lazarus being raised from the dead he would still be in the grave even after Jesus came on to the scene. But praise God, in His mercy and love, His plan will not be thwarted even by our lack of faith.

Now, up to this point the crowd has been persuaded by Martha that it would not be a good idea to roll away the stone. Jesus told them to remove it, but no one moves after Martha points out the smell. Only after Jesus takes charge and exercises His authority here by reminding everyone that they must believe that He is the Son of God, does anyone move.

JOH 11:41-42 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

A couple of things to notice here. Jesus is about to raise Lazarus from the dead. If He can raise a dead man from the grave why can't he just tell the stone to move as well? Why does He enlist the help of the crowd to move it?

Well, the answer is first of all, yes He could have moved the stone with simply a word. He could have had it fly off into space or just levitated it in front of the crowd as He then went over to it and moved it out of the way with His pinkie finger.

But this is the amazing thing about God's will and purposes. He doesn't exclude our involvement in His ways, and in fact He welcomes us to participate in His will.

Think of it. As wonderful as it would be to see God raise someone from the dead, there is a greater miracle that you and I are invited by God to be involved in every day of our lives, and that is the miracle of new birth, or being born from above, born again.

Now it's true that we don't cause anyone to be born again any more than the people around the grave of Lazarus caused him to come back to life, but we are given the privilege to participate in the process as these people at the tomb were given the privilege to participate in the process of Lazarus being given life by Christ.

I don't believe these people in our text had any idea of the blessing of being involved in Lazarus being given life by Christ. In fact, it probably escaped them completely because they weren't expecting such a miracle, and so they weren't able to rejoice in the process, only the final outcome.

But God wants us to rejoice in both. He wants us to rejoice in the final outcome of Him doing a special work in our lives or in the lives of others, as someone comes to Christ, for example. But He also wants us to rejoice in the process of accomplishing His will as only He can.

He wants us to realize how He has enlisted us in doing His will on a daily basis. Unfortunately we often don't always see our involvement in God's will. We're like these people at the grave who only see the moving of the stone as an unpleasant or common work.

But it was that common work which partially resulted in Lazarus walking out of the tomb. Now, granted, as I said a moment ago, only Jesus can ultimately give life, but for whatever reason He

rejoices in involving us as we are given the privilege to be part of the process.

I mean think about it. Who would be more effective in sharing the gospel? God as He calls out from heaven and lays out the plan of salvation, or you and me as we stumble through the truth when suddenly called upon to give the hope that is within us?

My money is on God. And yet, what has God given us? He has given us the privilege of being entrusted with His word; that word which leads to eternal life as it points people to the life-Giver, Jesus Christ.

This is what Paul was telling the Romans when he wrote to them about the truth of the gospel.

ROM 6:17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.

Entrusted by whom? Paul? No. By God Himself as Paul related this truth to them.

You and I have been entrusted by God Himself to protect the truth and to share the truth He has given us in Christ. That's an awesome privilege that we should not lose sight of, which is why Paul wrote to Timothy to remind him not to lose sight of that very thing.

2 Timothy 1:13-14 ¹³ Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ *Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.*

I'm amazed God uses any of us, but I'm more amazed that Christians rarely understand that the God of this universe allows us to share in His plan in a vital way, and therefore we should rejoice in that fact and be all the more desirous of being used by God.

In any event, our Lord uses these people to move the stone. But before He calls Lazarus out of the tomb He does something all of us should do before we start any work of God, and that is pray.

JOH 11:41-42 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

“Then Jesus looked up.” Why is this important? Well, keep in mind that there were Jews who accused Jesus of doing these signs and wonders by the power of Satan. In a gesture, which makes plain who our Lord is serving and pleasing, He looks up to heaven and then speaks with His Father. “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.”

It’s interesting that Jesus speaks here in the past tense. And yet, when we look at our text there is no time at which we are told that Jesus prayed to the Father during this incident at the tomb. And yet, it is precisely this truth that shows us that Jesus was always speaking with His Father.

I’m sure no one heard Him, but we must assume that while Jesus was walking to the tomb He was pouring His heart out to the Father and rejoicing that He was about to carry out His will. And when He finally comes to that point where He is to bring Lazarus out of the tomb He pauses to give thanks to the Father, even before the culmination of the Father’s will being accomplished.

There is so much here. But we can only touch on it.

Notice what Jesus thanks the Father for and when He thanks Him. He doesn’t thank Him after Lazarus comes out of the tomb, He thanks Him before and He thanks the Father for hearing His prayer.

Now, keeping in mind that Jesus is the Son of God and knows and does the Father’s will perfectly, this is still a pattern for all of us to follow. First of all, how often do we pray without ceasing, if you will?

In other words, how often in the course of the day do we quietly turn our attention to our heavenly Father and just speak to Him? But then how often do we thank Him for just hearing our prayer, and acknowledging that He is always there to hear our prayer?

Jesus begins with thanks, and that’s not a bad place for us to start when we approach the throne of God. But we also ought to be thankful that we can approach His throne at all. It is a privilege that we must not lose sight of. But it is a privilege which must also take into account that it delights God when we come to Him in thanks and praise.

There’s nothing wrong with asking God for something. But you can go to God without having to ask Him for anything. You can lift your heart up to Him right now and just give Him thanks for

always being there for us and allowing us to be used by Him in this world.

But there is one more element in our text that must not be overlooked and that is that this prayer is a response to a previous prayer for a reason. The previous prayer was evidently silent and came from the heart of Jesus. This prayer in our text is out loud and for a specific reason.

We're told in verse 42 what this reason is. "I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

Sometimes it is appropriate to pray out loud. But praying out loud should not be done to bring attention to ourselves but to the One we are praying to that others may acknowledge Him.

Now, granted whenever you open your mouth in public you are going to attract some attention, be it at a restaurant as you thank God for the food, or in a prayer meeting. But if we realize that God is actually listening and delighting in us coming to Him, His name is lifted up on high and you are blessed in the process.

But in this case in our text the reason Jesus prays out loud to the Father as He gives thanks is not for His benefit, but for the benefit of the people who are standing around Him.

Now, why would that be important for Jesus to do? Well, because it will allow these people to see that what He is about to do is vitally connected to the God He claims to know and serve; the God the Jews also claim to know. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jesus is acknowledging that He is serving the one true God and that His Father is about to use Him in a miraculous way.

This prayer of Jesus is short and sweet and to the point. It is a prayer of thanks in the midst of suffering, mourning and doubt.

JOH 11:43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

My guess is that Jesus yelled at the tomb where Lazarus lay. In fact, the word loud as it is used here in our text is the Greek word *meGas* which has a variety of meanings depending on the context. But here it is used to infer that Jesus was trying to make sure everyone heard.

Megas. You ever hear of a megaphone? Before the invention of microphones with speakers, people would put these large funnel

shaped implements to their mouths to help their voice carry. Jesus didn't have a megaphone, but you can bet He was loud enough to wake the dead.

He yelled, "Lazarus, come out!" By the way, Jesus could have whispered that and Lazarus would have come out, but this was for the benefit of those standing around Him

JOH 11:44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

At this point we need to ask a question because it goes to the heart of how God gives eternal life to His people.

The question is this: Did Lazarus respond to Christ's command to come out of the tomb before or after Jesus literally caused life to be brought back into his dead body?

And a follow up question might help to put this into perspective. Would Lazarus have ever responded unless he had first been given life?

What we see here is a beautiful picture of the work that Christ did in all of our lives who have trusted Him as Lord and Savior. Lazarus was dead. There was nothing in Lazarus in that condition which would have allowed him to walk out of that grave. If you and I were there we could have yelled until we were blue in the face and it would have made no difference.

In a spiritual sense all of us, according to Paul in Eph.2:1, were dead in our trespasses and sins. The word dead there in Ephesians is the Greek word *nekros* which means a corpse. Like Lazarus, we were all corpses, dead in our sin, unable and unwilling to respond to the call of God's word.

But when the Son of God calls us from death to life we will respond. Why? Because He is the resurrection and the life and He causes us to be born from above.

Wasn't that the exact point Jesus made to Nicodemus when He told him that no one can see the Kingdom of God unless He is born from above, which He then went on to describe as being born of water and the Spirit which was a direct reference to the book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 36:24-28 ²⁴ "For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ "Then

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ "Moreover, *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you;* and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ ***"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes,*** and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. ²⁸ "You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.

It was after this declaration by God, where He promises to restore the Israel of God, as He sprinkles them with the living water and gives them a new heart and a new spirit. This is the reference Jesus uses with Nicodemus.

But then Ezekiel is given a picture of this new life, as found in a parable that the Lord gives to the prophet in a vision, in the very next chapter.

Ezekiel 37:1-10 ^{NAU} The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. ² He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, *there were* very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, *they were* very dry. ³ He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." ⁴ Again He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.' ⁵ ***"Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life.*** ⁶ I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.'" ⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, ***'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.'***" ¹⁰ So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

What Ezekiel is being shown is the condition of Israel as they are spiritually dead in their transgressions and sins. They have no ability to bring themselves back to life. Only as God reconstitutes

their dry bones and breathes into them, (a reference to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit), does a remnant of the people stand on their feet.

The dry bones of all people in the world are in the same spiritual condition. Outside of Christ we litter the world with our deadness and we love the darkness rather than the light. This is why God and only God is able to take us from our spiritually dead condition and breathe into us His life, and only then as He calls His elect out of the tomb are we able to respond.

This is what we see in Lazarus. It was the Son of God who gave life to Lazarus. But not just life, but also the command to live it.

He didn't command Lazarus to simply start breathing with the intent of laying in that tomb for the rest of his life, like some couch potato. He commanded him to come out. And when Christ gives us life and we are told to come out, as we pass from death to life, we need to respond by faith and live the life He's given us.

JOH 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

Lazarus crossed over from death to life here in our text in a physical way. But Lazarus had already crossed over from death to life in a spiritual way because He had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and now this coming out of the grave was going to dramatically show how this life was given to him by Christ as He called out to Lazarus.

This, by the way, is also a wonderful picture of the resurrection of all believers when Christ comes for us.

1TH 4:16-17 *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*

Lazarus come out. What does Lazarus do?

JOH 11:44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

What else could Lazarus do? People who are alive don't belong in tombs. He got up and shuffled toward the entrance and finally made his way out of the grave. He is still wrapped in the grave clothes which included a cloth around his face. Since he was bound he wasn't able to take this linen off himself.

And yet, everyone seems to be so astonished that they just look at him struggling. It takes another command from Jesus to bring them to their senses. "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

What an amazing event. What an amazing testimony to the goodness and the power of God who is the only One able to bring life where there was death. What a merciful God and Savior we have who so loved us that He came into this world to die in our place as He has taken our penalty for sin in full and in turn gives us His life; His resurrection life.

We'll pick up here next week. We're not done with the new improved and living Lazarus.

But let me leave you with this. If you are in Christ by faith in Him alone you are alive. And if you have His life then by all means live it. Come out and live that life in the light and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

COL 2:13-15 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, ***God made you alive with Christ***. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Ephesians 2:4-7 ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ ***even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*** ⁶ ***and raised us up with Him,*** and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

But having said this we need then to move away from sin and unto the Lord as we live lives of love and obedience to His honor and glory.

COL 3:1-5 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, ***set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand***

of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.
3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4
When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear
with him in glory. 5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to
your earthly nature....