

Death & Life: The Story of Lazarus 2 - Roll Away the Stone

Intro

In case you missed the last week, Jesus' friend, Lazarus, was dead. From the perspective of Lazarus, along with his two sisters Mary and Martha, at this point the story in John 11 is a story about God not showing up when you call on Him to do something in your life. Last time we ended with Jesus, finally showing His face to a family who called for Him so many days earlier. He stood face to face with Martha, and she uttered these powerful words: "Lord, if you had been here... my brother would not have died."

This is where we all find ourselves at some point or another. "God, I needed You..." "Jesus, I asked You..." "And You did nothing."

John 11:17-44 pg. 523

17 Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

18 Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. 20 So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will 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. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

28 When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 29 And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. 34 And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus wept. 36 So 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 also have kept this man from dying?"

38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 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." 43 When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." 44 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."

The Good News

Last week was the bad news. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” We all experience this in one way or another. That’s the bad news.

Here is the good news. Even now, God can raise the dead. He can breathe life into the horrible situations in your life. Notice this statement that Martha made to Jesus: “Lord, if only you had been here... but even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask.” (v21-22)

We spent last week looking at a dark tunnel that seemed to have no light at the end of it. However, there is not a situation on Earth that God can’t breathe hope into. There is not a circumstance so sinful and fallen that it cannot be redeemed by the Redeemer. There is not an aspect of creation that cannot be made a new creation by the One True Creator. Furthermore, there is no grave filled with death that the Savior cannot speak life into.

Even now, God can bring life into our situations. Even now, Jesus can breathe life into our existences. Even now, the Holy Spirit can create life out of death.

Its Never Hopeless with Jesus

Today, if you remember nothing else, remember this: *If you are in a relationship with Jesus, then there is no such thing as hopelessness.*

That does not negate the suffering and struggling nor does it completely wipe out the, “Lord, if You had been here...” times. We will suffer, we will struggle, and there are things in our lives that God will allow to die. However, it’s never hopeless. Even now, all hope is not lost.

I don’t know what you’re dealing with and I don’t know how long you have been struggling. However, no matter what you might be going through, I can tell you that all hope is not lost. I don’t say that because it’s my own opinion, but I say it on the authority of Jesus Christ the risen Son of God. All hope is not lost.

Martha, grieving the loss of her brother, made an incredible statement of faith. She told Jesus that she believed that Jesus had the power to raise her brother to life on the last day and give him everlasting life. In the midst of death, Martha spoke of everlasting life in perfection with God.

Its not about *what* He can do but *who* He is

Now here’s the thing: Martha said, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day,” and Jesus said, “True... but that’s not all.” (V24)

Jesus did all sorts of miracles. He started with a neat trick involving water and wine. He cast out demons, healed the sick, and basically did whatever was needed to help those who came to Him.

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus knew Jesus as the healer-miracle man, but they’re about to know Him as so much more. He told Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

While Martha was talking about doctrine, Jesus is talking about an immediate fact of life. Martha was looking forward to that future day where there will be a new heaven, a new Earth, and where God will wipe every tear from every eye (which will happen, by the way Revelation chapters 21 & 22). However, Jesus talked about a present reality.

“I am the resurrection and the life” is not just a statement talking about everlasting life. It’s for here and now. The resurrection power of Jesus Christ is not only for after you die. It’s for right now.

We don’t become Christians just because we want to go to heaven. We become followers of Jesus, because we want to know Him and His power of resurrection and life in our lives right now and at this very moment.

Jesus did not respond to Martha by telling her, “I can resurrect. I am able to perform a miracle of resurrecting a dead body.” That’s not what He said!

It wasn’t about the fact that He had the power to resurrect. It was about the fact that He *was* the resurrection. He *is* the resurrection. You can put faith in Him because of *who* He *is*. This is not about what Jesus can do. This is all about who He is.

Think about it this way, Jesus was able to perform a resurrection. However, as cool as that miracle was, Lazarus still would die again at a later time. So, it doesn’t matter as much what Jesus can do, but it mattered more than anything else that He was and is the resurrection and the life.

Do you believe this?

Jesus told Martha that this wasn’t about raising up Lazarus at the last day, but this was about Him being the resurrection and the life right now in the midst of her dead circumstance. And then He asked her, “Do you believe this?” This is something that Jesus will ask every single one of us at one point or another— “Do you believe this?”

Jesus didn’t ask, “Do you believe in what I can do? Do you believe in some miracles I can perform?” Jesus asked Martha and asks us, “Do you believe in who I am? Will you put your trust in who I am?”

Did you notice that Jesus doesn’t ask her, “Do you understand?” Jesus knows that we don’t understand the suffering, grief, and death in our lives. We don’t have to understand everything to believe in who He is. We don’t need to erase all of our problems and doubts in order to have faith that He is the resurrection and the life.

So, then Martha sent word for her sister to come and speak to Jesus, telling her that, “Jesus is calling for you.” While she was sitting, mourning, grieving, suffering, and struggling, Jesus called out for her. And maybe, while you sit, mourn, grieve, suffer, and struggle, Jesus is calling out for you too. Will you go to Him?

Jesus Wept...

Martha sent word for her sister to come and speak to Jesus. For a second, it seemed like we're going to get the same picture we got with Martha, because Mary echoed her sister's words, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Yet, something changed in this exchange with Mary. Jesus didn't tell Mary what He told Martha. Instead, Jesus looked around, and He saw not only Mary but a crowd of people who were grieving the loss of Lazarus.

In verse 35, the Bible gives us a verse that you should probably memorize: "Jesus wept." And this isn't just some funny little memory verse, or a fun trivia fact for "What is the shortest verse in the Bible?" It's so much more than that.

We have a God who weeps. The One True God is not distant and disconnected from our times of struggling and pain. It's one thing to know that God exists. It's another thing entirely to know that He cares.

Jesus wept. He didn't weep over Lazarus or out of grief for the loss of a friend (because He knew what He was about to do). Jesus wept out of sorrow for the brokenness and pain that people felt.

Our pain moves the very heart of God. Our mourning causes God to mourn with us. God is not some high-in-the-sky Creator who is just watching us without getting too involved because He couldn't care less. Apparently, God couldn't care more.

God relates to us, and He stands with us in our pain, feeling pain simply because He doesn't like seeing us in pain. He knows how He's going to bring us out of it, but just like a good friend, He doesn't leave or ignore us in our times of suffering.

Roll Away the Stone

So, after this amazing picture of the loving, personal side of Jesus, we are ready to see the authoritative, miraculous side of Him. He called out for the mourners and told them to, "Take away the stone." Maybe, for some of you, this is what God is calling you to do. He is the resurrection. He is the life. He is the One about to perform the miracle, but you need to move the stone away first.

Yet, this is the complaint the Bible tells us that they made: "Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible." The King James Version says, "Lord, by this time he stinketh." (That's a good biblical word right there: "stinketh".)

Seriously! Jesus was ready to perform an absolutely incredible miracle, and when He told them to move the stone away, their response was it probably smelled in there. "God, death has eaten away at Lazarus for days now, and it is not a pretty sight in there."

God may be calling you to take away the stone that is hiding the death in your life so that He can deal with it. However, sometimes we are too worried about exposing ourselves, because if we take away the stone, people may see—and smell—the death that we've experienced. But in order for Jesus to bring life into our dead situations, we need to be willing to put up with the smell for a moment.

I want you to consider that for yourselves today. That we have times of struggling, times of suffering, and times of death. We can't be afraid of the smell and try to hide it away. We need to be honest and authentic—with God and with others—and allow Jesus to be the resurrection and the life in our lives. It doesn't matter how it smells. Take the stone away.

Conclusion

Maybe you've faced a dead situation for days, or months, or years. Maybe you've wondered where God is and when He's going to do something, and you need to hear right now: "Jesus is calling for you. Do you believe in who He is?"

Jesus can do whatever He wants to, but let's not focus on what He can do and lose sight of who He is in our hard times. He's still the Redeemer. He's still the Creator. He's still the Savior. He's still the Resurrection and the Life.

Even when He seems distant, and you can't get a sense of Him in what you're going through, He will bring life into your dead situation – one way or another – because there is no such thing as hopelessness.

Small Group Questions

- We always hear about how “Jesus brings life.” How would you explain what this means to someone who has never heard about Jesus before?
- In your life, you will never fully understand why everything happens, and why God doesn’t always show up in the way you’d expect.
 - How does that make you feel?
 - Can someone have a strong faith in God even if they don’t understand everything? Why or why not?

- Read Philippians 4:11-13.

11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

- How would you summarize this verse your own words.
- Paul’s said “I can do all things through Christ,” right after talking about facing difficulties. How can this apply to our lives?

- Read Romans 8:35-37

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

- How would you summarize this verse your own words.
- If we are facing all kinds of struggles (like listed in verse 35), how can we still have victory (like verse 37 says)?

- “It’s one thing to know that God exists, it’s another thing to know that God actually cares.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- John 11:35, the shortest verse in the Bible, says “Jesus wept.” What does it mean for you to know that we have a God who cares enough to weep over us?
- What is the difference between trusting in what God can do and trusting in who He is?
- Respond to this statement: “If you are in a relationship with Jesus, then there is no such thing as hopelessness.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- Spend time praying for each other.
 - Pray that each person would experience the life and hope that comes only through Jesus.
 - Pray that God would bring life out of any difficult circumstances that may come their way.