

EASTER SUNDAY – GRAVE ROBBER

John 11:1-44 | Supporting: Romans 8:11; Revelation 1:18

OPENING

I want to talk to somebody today who has had a close encounter with death.

- **Not necessarily physical death** - though some of you have. Some of you have sat in a hospital room and watched monitors. Some of you have held a phone call that changed everything. Some of you have stood at a graveside and watched dirt fall on somebody you loved.
- But I also mean the other kind of death. **The death of a marriage. The death of a dream. The death of a business, a ministry, a hope. The death of who you used to be before life did what it did to you.**

I want to talk to everybody in this room - and I believe there are more of you than you think - who has watched something die and quietly wondered if it was ever coming back.

- You carried it to the tomb.
- You wrapped it up.
- You said your goodbyes.

And some of you have been living in that graveyard ever since.

Easter is not a holiday. Easter is an interruption.

It is the moment heaven invades the graveyard and says...

- I don't care how long it's been in the ground.
- I don't care how bad it smells.
- I don't care how many people have already given up on it.

When I speak what was dead has to live again!

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN DEATH SHOWS UP AT YOUR ADDRESS?

Open your Bible with me to the Gospel of John 11. I want to spend time in a graveyard today. I know that's not the most inspiring way to start an Easter message. But you cannot appreciate resurrection until you understand what resurrection is interrupting.

John 11:1 - Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

- You need to understand something about Bethany. It was not a large city. It was a small village -- two miles outside Jerusalem, a tight-knit community where everybody knew everybody. And in this village, there was a family that Jesus loved.

John 11:5 - Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

- I need you to hold onto that word for a moment.

- Because what happens next is going to feel like a contradiction to it.
- Their brother Lazarus gets sick. Sick enough that the sisters send an urgent message to Jesus: 'Lord, the one you love is sick.'
- They knew He had power. They had seen it. They had watched Him heal strangers. **And now they're calling in the relationship. 'Lord we're not asking as strangers. We're asking as the people You love.'**

And you know what Jesus does - He waits.

John 11:6 - When He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days.

- He did not rush.
- He did not panic.
- He did not send a messenger.
- He waited and while He was waiting -- Lazarus died.

I need somebody to feel the weight of that!

- Have you ever prayed for something and it felt like heaven went silent – have you ever believed God had the power to stop something and He didn't stop it...this text is for you.
- **Mary and Martha were not faithless people.** They were not strangers. They were loved. And their brother still died.

For everyone in here who has felt this I have a message from God for you...

The delay is not the denial, the silence is not the abandonment, and the grave is not the final word.

JESUS SHOWS UP AFTER THE FUNERAL

When Jesus finally arrives in Bethany - Lazarus has been in the tomb four days. Four days. Now I need you to understand why that number matters.

- In Jewish tradition at the time, there was a belief that the spirit of a person hovered near the body for three

days after death - the idea that maybe, possibly, somehow, life could still return. **But by day four?**

- By day four, **that hope was extinguished.**
- **Day four was the day you stopped hoping. Day four was when everybody agreed it was over.**
- Jesus didn't show up on day one.
- He didn't show up on day two or three, when there was still a sliver of natural hope.
- He showed up on day four. **On the day that even optimists had let go.**

He showed up when it was undeniably, unmistakably, irreversibly too late. And I'm preaching to somebody today who is living in your day four.

- **You've been waiting so long you've stopped counting.**
- **You've stopped checking.**
- **You've stopped hoping.**

- **You put the dream in the tomb, you rolled the stone, and you went home.**

Martha runs to meet Jesus - and notice she doesn't run with praise. She runs with pain. 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'

That's not unbelief - That's grief with theology mixed in.

- She still called Him Lord.
- She still came to Him.
- But she came with her question. 'Where were You? You could have stopped this. Why didn't You stop this?'

I wonder how many people are in this room today who have that same question hanging over their life? Not as accusation - but as a cry. 'Lord, if You had been here...'

And look at what Jesus says...

- He doesn't explain the timeline.

- He doesn't give her a theological lecture about sovereignty.
- He doesn't hand her a pamphlet.

He says something that is about to become the most important sentence ever spoken:

John 11:25-26 - I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?

- He doesn't say, 'There will be a resurrection.'
- He says, 'I AM the resurrection.'

Not a concept. Not a theology. Not a future event. A person.

And then He asks the most terrifying and most liberating question you will ever be asked: 'Do you believe this?'

- **Not - do you believe resurrection is possible?**

- Not - do you believe it happened once in a garden two thousand years ago?

He is asking you right now, today, about the dead thing in your life: Do you believe I AM the resurrection?

THE GOD WHO WEEPS

I have to stop here. Because this is the moment in the text that most people rush past on their way to the miracle. And if you rush past it, you miss something essential about the character of God.

John 11:33, 35 - When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit and was troubled...Jesus wept.

- The shortest verse in the Bible and one of the most important.

Jesus knew what He was about to do. He had already told the disciples 'This sickness will not end in death.' He already knew the punchline. He already knew

Lazarus was about to walk out of that tomb. And yet - He wept.

- That means your pain does not irritate Him.
- Your grief does not embarrass Him.
- Your broken heart does not make Him impatient.
- He is not standing at the edge of your situation drumming His fingers saying, 'Would you please stop crying? Don't you know I've got this?'

No - He weeps with you... **He enters the grief before He moves the stone.**

- He is not a distant deity unmoved by human suffering.
- He is a High Priest who has been touched with the feeling of our infirmities.
- He is Emmanuel - God with us - and He is with you in the middle of your worst day.

He is not waiting for you to stop hurting before He draws near. He draws near because you're hurting.

Your tears are not a sign of weakness - they are an invitation for His presence.

MOVE THE STONE

They arrive at the tomb. And Jesus gives an instruction that sounds, to everyone standing there, like a mistake.

John 11:39 - Take away the stone!

- Martha objects. You've got to appreciate Martha. She's the most practical person in this story. 'Lord, by this time he stinketh. He has been dead four days.'

And I love that this is in the Bible. Because **Martha is not wrong about the facts. She's just wrong about the conclusion.**

- Everything she said was true - and none of it was a reason to leave the stone in place.

Martha had accepted the reality of death more readily than she held onto the possibility of resurrection.

- I think that's a very human thing to do.
- We are trained by life to make peace with loss.

We become professionals at adjusting our expectations to accommodate what died.

Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'

The stone had to move before Lazarus walked out. **And I want to talk to somebody today about the stones in your life:**

- the things you have used to seal away the dead places because it was too painful to keep looking at them.
- Some of you have a stone labeled 'I've accepted it.'
- Some of you have a stone labeled 'That chapter is closed.'
- Some of you have a stone that says 'I don't believe anymore' - **not because you never believed, but**

**because you believed and got hurt and built a wall
so you wouldn't get hurt again.**

**And Jesus is standing at your tomb today saying the
same thing He said to Martha:**

TAKE AWAY THE STONE!

**Not because He needs your help moving it, but
because He wants your participation in your own
resurrection.**

**Some of you have been protecting yourself from the
very miracle you've been praying for. The stone isn't
keeping the dead thing in - it's keeping the resurrection
power out.**

THE VOICE THAT UNDOES DEATH

**Watch what happens next. Jesus prays. And then He
does the most audacious thing in the history of
religion. He does not whisper a quiet prayer over a**

grave. He lifts up His voice and He shouts at a dead man.

John 11:43 - And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

- I want you to feel the weight of that moment.
- Every mourner is standing there.
- The professional weepers, the family, the skeptics, the disciples who still didn't understand - all of them staring at a sealed tomb. And then Jesus yells.

Not - 'Lazarus, if it be Your will, and if you're ready, and if you'd like to consider...' No. He commanded. He didn't suggest resurrection to a corpse. He commanded it.

HIS VOICE DOESN'T DESCRIBE REALITY - HIS VOICE CREATES IT.

- When God speaks into darkness, darkness doesn't linger - light appears.

- When God speaks over chaos, chaos doesn't resist - order comes.

When Jesus speaks to a dead man in a sealed tomb four days gone...that dead man gets up.

John 11:44 - And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin.

- Lazarus walked out of the tomb.
- Still wrapped in graveclothes
- still carrying the evidence of where he had been

BUT ALIVE. MOVING. BREATHING. RESPONDING TO A VOICE THAT DEATH COULD NOT SILENCE.

- The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead -- Romans 8:11 says - dwells in you.
- That same Spirit. Not a lesser Spirit. Not a weaker Spirit.

- The same resurrection power that split that tomb open is living inside of you right now.

EASTER MORNING AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOUR MONDAY

Lazarus was a preview. What happened on the first Easter Sunday was the real thing. Three days after the crucifixion - three days after they put Him in the ground, sealed the tomb, posted guards, and declared it over - something happened that nobody was prepared for.

- An angel rolls the stone back - not to let Jesus out, He was already gone.
- The stone was rolled away so that we could look in.
- So, we could see the empty graveclothes.
- So, we could hear the question that still echoes two thousand years later:

Luke 24:5-6 - Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here - HE IS RISEN."

He is risen...

- Not - He was a good man who taught important things and is remembered fondly.
- Not - He is risen metaphorically in our hearts and our collective spiritual memory.

He is RISEN. Bodily. Physically. Actually. Historically. The tomb is empty and it has been empty for two thousand years, and no one has ever produced a body because there is no body to produce.

DEATH MET ITS MATCH ON THAT SUNDAY MORNING AND DEATH LOST!

And Revelation 1:18 records what Jesus said about it when He appeared to John:

Revelation 1:18 - I am He that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

- Keys mean authority.
- Keys mean access.

- Keys mean what gets locked and unlocked is up to the One holding them.

And the One holding the keys is not death. It is not the grave. It is not the enemy.

THE KEYS ARE IN THE HANDS OF THE RISEN CHRIST!

- That situation that has had you locked up - He has the key.
- That grief that has had you sealed in - He has the key.
- That dead thing that everybody said was over - He has the key.

AND HE IS STANDING AT THE DOOR OF THAT TOMB TODAY. AND HE IS CALLING YOUR NAME.

- I don't know what tomb you walked in here with today.
- I don't know what you buried.
- I don't know how long it's been in the ground or how many people have already told you to move on.

But I know this: you did not come to church on Easter Sunday by accident.

- You are here because the same Jesus who stood outside Lazarus's tomb is standing outside yours.
- And He is not giving a sermon about resurrection

HE IS THE RESURRECTION

AND HE IS SPEAKING YOUR NAME.

CLOSING

I want to close by speaking directly over somebody's life today.

- You came in here carrying a grave.
- You came in here wearing the graveclothes of disappointment, of loss, of unanswered prayer, of dreams that died and hope that went quiet.
- And you've gotten so used to the weight of it that you almost don't feel it anymore.

But I hear the Spirit of God saying today..

- **It is not over - What I spoke over your life before the foundation of the world has not been cancelled by what happened last year. My purpose is not subject to your pain. My promise is not subject to your timeline.**
- **I am the God who calls things that are not as though they are. I am the God who makes rivers in the desert and roads in the wilderness.**
- **I am the God who stood at creation and spoke - and what was nothing became something. And I am standing over your life right now. And I am speaking.**

**THE GRAVE DIDN'T GET THE LAST WORD OVER MY SON
- AND IT WILL NOT GET THE LAST WORD OVER YOU.**

Come on -- somebody lift your voice and say it out loud:

HE IS RISEN!

- AND BECAUSE HE IS RISEN - I WILL RISE.
- BECAUSE HE CAME OUT OF THE GRAVE - WHAT HE PUT IN ME IS COMING OUT TOO.

BECAUSE DEATH COULDN'T HOLD HIM - IT CANNOT HOLD WHAT GOD HAS SPOKEN OVER MY LIFE.

ALTAR CALL -- INVITATION

If you are here today and you have never placed your faith in the risen Christ - not religion, not ritual, but the living Person who walked out of that tomb - today is your day.

And if you are already a believer but you've been living like resurrection isn't real - like the God who raised Jesus can't raise what died in you - I want to invite you to come to the altar today. Not to perform. Not to show anybody anything. But to roll away the stone.

To say: 'God, I've been protecting myself from the very miracle I need. And today, I'm choosing to believe again.'