

Rescued for Life [John 11:38-44]



Today we begin our journey to the cross and the empty tomb. Easter is only two weeks away! Today we commence a new three-part series called “The Unbelievable Story of our Rescue.” Let’s look at John 11:38 together. This episode was of utmost importance to the Apostle John and is the single longest account of any part of Jesus’ ministry outside of the Passion narratives. It is also the 7th and final sigh of the Messiah’s public ministry.

Let me catch you up to what we are about to read in the Word: 2 miles away in the village Bethany, Lazarus a friend of Jesus is sick (Lazarus/Eliezer means God is my help). Lazarus’s friends dispatch messengers who tell Jesus, Lazarus is sick (11:3). Jesus replied “this sickness will not end in death” (11:4). So, Jesus remains in Jerusalem. **Guess what? Lazarus died!** When Jesus arrives on the scene he found that Lazarus had been in the tomb 4 days (11:17). And now, Christ wants to see the tomb. And this is where we pick up in the Word. Today’s message is entitled: Rescued for New Life!

Read [John 11:38-44]

Tomb Rescued for new life. What a beautiful picture of good news! Jesus deeply moved went to the grave. The tomb was a hollow in the rock face, the entrance would be sealed w/a stone of suitable size and shape. The tomb of Lazarus would very much mirror the resting place of the Lord after His crucifixion.

What a powerful picture, Jesus was not content leaving Lazarus dead in the tomb. God’s desire for Lazarus was life, new life, abundant life, and immediate life. This is God’s desire for you. Jesus came that you might have life and have it in abundance (John 10:10).

This abundant life does not begin when we die. It began when Jesus died for you! Too often we equate heaven with life in Christ. Jesus didn't walk to the tomb and say, "well glad he is in heaven!" too often we are content to wait until we die to grab hold of the life that is offered today!

The biblical truth is that you are already dead. Eph 2 affirms that we were/are dead in our sins and trespasses. You are Lazarus! But, you don't have to stay in your sins. You don't have to rest in the tomb. He has rescued for abundant Life!

Remove If Jesus is going to heal Lazarus, obviously, he would not stay in the tomb. Thus, Jesus asks for the removal of the door. Martha, as practical as ever cautions, Lord the effect of removing the stone entrance will be unpleasant. After 4 days the odor will be intense. These 4 days only magnify the divine power and miracle about to take place.

Jesus somewhat sharply responds, "didn't I tell you if you believe you would see the glory of God?" Later, in verse 41 Jesus prays openly so that the crowds who heard would believe.

Throughout the Gospels, seeing signs provokes the most basic of faith. Jesus calls Martha, call you, to a much deeper faith. Truth faith saves. True faith transforms. True faith trusts with a childlike hope. **Do you have basic knowledge or a robust faith in the Messiah?**

Faith prepares the way for the power, mercy, and goodness of God, that they might be displayed towards us –John Calvin. This is the story of our rescue... by faith alone.

After this He shouted. Jesus didn't walk up to the tomb and whisper. Possibly because Lazarus wasn't the first man in history to be hard of hearing/selective hearing. More likely, Messiah shouted so that crowds could hear. It is interesting that Lazarus was raised to new life not by touch but by command. Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard through the message of Christ (Rom. 10:17). The Bible is God's shout to you, I have rescued you to new life!

The verbal declaration is the same audible voice that calls His sheep by name (John 10:3). Did you notice what Jesus calls him from the tomb? Hey you? Dead man? Bro? He calls him by name. Did you know, that Jesus knows your name if you have responded to the gospel by faith? You are not just another person or a #, Jesus knows your name.

In raising Lazarus, Jesus exhibited a visible token of his spiritual grace, which we experience every day by the perception of faith, when he shows that his voice give life. – John Calvin.

The dead man came out. Like the body of Jesus later, Lazarus was wrapped in grave clothes with a “sweat rag” around his head. The tight bindings surely would have prevented Lazarus from walking even if he was alive.

Then Jesus turns to the bystanders and says, “unwrap him and let him go.” Jesus gave new life, “but Christ intended to employ the hands of the spectators as his witnesses.” In the same way, God’s purpose in your life is to live as a witness to a dead world. Who in your life is simply waiting to hear that Jesus saves, unwrap them and let them go! You will be my witnesses!

Conclusion

And from this moment Jesus raised the dead, things changed. Some believed (11:45). Some saw the power of the saving Christ and responded by faith and trust. Others, from that moment conspired to kill Jesus and Lazarus (12:9). Simply, they rejected the Lordship and authority of the Messiah in their lives. Why? **Because there is no neutral ground.** You are either made alive or still dead. Where are you? This is the unbelievable story of our rescue: that one man should die for the people (11: 50). Who is ready to find new life. That is God’s desire for you to have abundant life, and live in abundant life. **Lazarus, come out!**

Notes

- To raise Lazarus from the dead, Jesus would have to go to Judea, a place of hostility, risking death (11:7-8, 14-16) (Keener).
- The raising of Lazarus helps frame the ministry of Christ in John
 - The opening sign (2:1-11) recounts Jesus' benevolence at a wedding
 - The last sign involves a funeral.
 - Does this parallel Moses? First sign = water to blood and last plague the death of firstborn sons (Keener)
- The raising of Lazarus was of utmost importance for John. This is the longest single sign account in the Gospel and apart from the Passion Narrative, the longest narrative without a substantial discourse section (Keener, 837).

The raising of Lazarus is the climax of the series of 'signs' which characterize John's record of Jesus' public ministry, serving as manifestations of the divine glory which is resident in the incarnate Word (Bruce, 249).

The seven signs in the book of John

- Changing water into wine at the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-11);
- Healing the royal official's son (Jn 4:46-54);
- Healing the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem (Jn 5:1-15);
- Feeding the 5,000 (Jn 6:5-14);
- Walking on water (Jn 6:16-21);
- Healing the man born blind (Jn 9:1-7); and
- Raising Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11:1-45).

Lazarus's resuscitation prefigures Jesus' resurrection for the fourth Gospel, and has striking parallels such as the stone, essential role of women, and the wrappings (Keener, 848).

Lazarus, Eliazer (He who God helps).

John 11:38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. **39** "Remove the stone," Jesus said.

Deeply Moved Possibly by the unbelief of the Jews, or that Jesus inability to heal Lazarus from dying were said with a sneer (Phillips, 216).

Tomb The tomb was a hollow in the rock, the entrance to which was blocked by a stone of suitable size and shape, fitting into it more or less like a cork. The description is quite like that of the tomb in which the body of Jesus himself was later laid (Bruce, 247).

Martha, the dead man's sister, told him, "Lord, there is already a stench because he has been dead four days."

Martha, practical as ever, points out the effect of removing the stone, as Jesus had directed, will be unpleasant (Bruce, 247).

This arises from the weakness of faith. Distracted in various ways, we fight with ourselves, and while we stretch out the one hand to ask assistance from God, we repel, with the other hand, that very assistance, as soon as it is offered. —John Calvin

After four days the stench would be intense. Also, many felt the soul departed after three days and decomposition started. The fourth day only highlights the divine miracle.

Unlike ancient Egyptians, Jewish people did not embalm the dead, but in this period actually encouraged decomposition to allow for secondary burial a year later (Keener, 848).

John 11:40 Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

Jesus reminds her of his promise, much like the declaration already made to the disciples in 11:4.

If you believed

If thou believe. This is said, not only because faith opens our eyes, that we may be able to see the power of God shining in his works, but because our faith prepares the way for the power, mercy, and goodness of God, that they may be displayed towards us, as it is said, Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it, ([Psalm 81:10](#).) In like manner, unbelief, on the other hand, hinders God from approaching us, and may be said to keep his hands shut. On this account it is said elsewhere, that Jesus –John Calvin

Throughout the Gospel seeing signs often provokes the most basic level of faith, Jesus calls Martha, who already has confessed her faith to a deeper level of faith. If she believes then she will see (Keener, 848).

John 11:41 So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you heard me. **42** I know that you always hear me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, so that they may believe you sent me.”

Lifting one’s face toward heaven was a known posture of prayer and many people in the ancient Mediterranean would have distrusted a silent prayer (Keener, 849).

In Lazarus’s case, people must remove the stone, but Jesus’ resurrection produces an immortal body and the stone is already removed.

The raising of the dead is a divine prerogative which the Father shares with the Son (John 5:21-29), and it is important that the bystanders should understand this. So, in their hearing, he thanks God for having heard him.

43 After he said this, he shouted with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” **44** The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unwrap him and let him go.”

Shout

The shout which calls Lazarus back to life is a parable of that coming day when all who are in the tombs will hear the same quickening shout and come out (Bruce, 248).

Jesus spoke loudly to Lazarus, presumably partly so the crowd could also hear. In the same way, that he calls his name may recall 10:3: the sheep hear my voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

It is interesting that Lazarus is raised to new life not by a touch but by command (Keener, 850).

And therefore, in raising Lazarus, he exhibited a visible token of his spiritual grace, which we experience every day by the perception of faith, when he shows that his voice gives life.
—John Calvin

Grave Clothes

The body of Lazarus, like the body of Jesus later, had been swathed in winding sheets and a napkin (a loanword from Latin sudarium, ‘sweatrag’) had been wrapped around his head.

Jewish sources frequently mention such shrouds for wrapping and binding the corpse. To prevent premature distortion of tissue, those preparing the body would bind the cheeks to keep the mouth closed (Keener, 850).

The binding of grave clothes would surely have prevented Lazarus from walking out of the tomb even if alive. To watch Lazarus shuffle slowly would have required an extraordinary amount of patience from the bystanders (Keener, 850).

For Christ might have removed the bandages with which Lazarus was bound, or made them to give way of themselves; but Christ intended to employ the hands of the spectators as his witnesses. —John Calvin

Application

The biblical story was memorialized by Alfred Lord Tennyson in Memoriam canto 31.

*When Lazarus left his charnel-cave,
And home to Mary's house return'd,
Was this demanded—if he yearn'd
To hear her weeping by his grave?*

*"Where wert thou, brother, those four days?"
There lives no record of reply,
Which telling what it is to die
Had surely added praise to praise.*

*From every house the neighbours met,
The streets were fill'd with joyful sound,
A solemn gladness even crown'd
The purple brows of Olivet.*

*Behold a man raised up by Christ!
The rest remaineth unreveal'd;
He told it not; or something seal'd
The lips of that Evangelist.*