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John 11:38-44 – *“Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. “Roll the stone aside,” Jesus told them. But Martha, the dead man’s sister, protested, “Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible.” Jesus responded, “Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believe?” So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.” Then Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” “And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him go!”*

Lazarus was sick and his sisters sent someone to inform Jesus about Lazarus sickness. Jesus said that the sickness would not lead to death but would result in bringing glory to Jesus as the Son of God. You might be thinking, “Jesus was wrong. Lazarus sickness did end in death.” No! His sickness led to death but ended in life. His death was the middle of the story. “Not unto death” means death would not be final; it would not have the last word.

The problem for Jesus’ friends in this passage is that he delayed in responding to the call for help. John tells us that Jesus waited two days before deciding to go to Bethany, where Lazarus was. Jesus not only failed to go when told, he actually waited until after Lazarus had died. Jesus, what are you doing? When he arrived in Bethany both Mary and Martha responded the same way: “If you had been here sooner Lazarus wouldn’t have died.”

Look at vs. 35, 36. When Jesus wept some said, “Look how he loved him”, but others said, “If he really loved him why didn’t he come earlier?” They were disappointed with Jesus because they didn’t understand why he hadn’t done things the way they thought he ought to have done them. Is there anyone here who has ever been disappointed with God? Disappointed because didn’t do things the way you thought he should have? Disappointed because he didn’t act according to your timetable?

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Here is a point we must not miss. God’s glory takes priority over our desires and comforts. Jesus could have prevented Lazarus from dying, but he allowed them to experience grief so he could reveal his power. Jesus knows what he is doing. His ways are not ours, his timing is not ours. But his ways and timing are not just different from ours, they are superior to ours!

Jesus didn’t raise Lazarus because he was sorry to see Mary, Martha & the others so sad. He didn’t raise him because he missed his friend. He did it for a more important reason. The reason is revealed in John 11:25 –***Jesus said to her, “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?”*** To raise Lazarus to life so he could live for another 40-50 years to only die again is nothing compared to granting him eternal life!

Jesus could have come to Bethany earlier. He could have healed Lazarus before he died but Jesus purpose in allowing Lazarus to die was to reveal the truth that Jesus had come to achieve a complete and permanent victory over death, both the destruction of the body and soul.

Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matt. 10:28)

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead in order to demonstrate that He had the power to grant life to dead men... NOT JUST PHYSICALLY DEAD MEN, BUT SPIRITUALLY DEAD MEN. HE DIDN’T JUST HAVE THE POWER TO EXTEND PHYSICAL LIFE, BUT TO GRANT ETERNAL LIFE. HE DIDN’T JUST HAVE THE POWER TO RAISE A DEAD BODY BUT HE HAD THE POWER TO GRANT LIFE TO A DEAD SOUL.

What they didn’t understand, and what many people don’t understand, is that all of us are dead spiritually. That is why we die physically. We need a spiritual resurrection now in order to experience the final physical

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resurrection when Jesus returns. This is what Jesus was referring to when he said the one who lives by believing in him will never die.

This picture of salvation as a resurrection from death to life is explained in:

*Ephesians 2:1-5*

*Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!)*

The resurrection of Lazarus anticipates the victory over sin and death which Jesus was going to affect through his death on the cross. It also serves as a great illustration of Christian conversion, what we call being saved.

Salvation is a resurrection to new life. This language is pervasive in the NT. John records Jesus saying we must be born again to enter the kingdom. In his letter to the Christians in the city of Colossians Paul wrote, “You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins.” In 2 Cor. – those in Christ are “new creations”. Peter writes that we have been born again through Jesus’ resurrection. Peter also describes salvation as being *called out of darkness into light*.

The call to Lazarus to “Come forth” from his tomb serves as a perfect illustration of the call of Christian conversion. To summarize my first point:

I. **Becoming a Christian (being “born again”) is a work of God by which we are resurrected from our tombs of sin and death.**

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Let's go back to the story of Lazarus because I want to use it to illustrate some other important truths regarding salvation.

Now look at verse 39, “Roll the stone aside,” Jesus told them. But Martha, the dead man's sister, protested, “Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible.

## **II. Jesus calls stinking people to himself.**

When Jesus called for the stone to be removed Martha protested. “Lord, that is not a good idea, don't you know how bad he is going to stink.” But you know what, Lazarus stench didn't prevent Jesus from calling him. Is anyone here glad that Jesus didn't let the stench of your sin keep him from calling you? Luke tells us that when the religious leaders complained that Jesus and his disciples were hanging out with stinking, sick, sinners, Jesus answer to them was, “Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to repent.” There is only one kind of person Jesus can't save. The one who doesn't recognize he stinks of sin.

Sin stinks. Christ calls us to come to him despite the bad odor of our sins. Our addictions stink, our jealousy stinks, our bitterness stinks, our hatred stinks, our vulgar minds and mouths stink, our sexual immorality stinks, our greed stinks, and perhaps the greatest stench of all is our arrogant self-righteousness.” But the good news is that Jesus loves us while we stink.

## **III. Jesus calls us as we are, but He loves us too much to leave us that way.**

Look at verse 43-44. *“Then Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” “And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in grave clothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth.”*

When Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb, Lazarus still had issues. He was brought from death to life and from darkness to light, but he still had his

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grave clothes on. He couldn't walk very well, or talk very well, or see very well. He didn't smell too well either.

So Jesus commanded those around to unbind him and let him go!! Jesus calls us to COME FORTH FROM OUR TOMBS OF DEATH AND SIN, so we can GO FORTH TO LIVE A LIFE OF SERVICE TO HIM AND THOSE WHO NEED HIM.

We COME JUST AS WE ARE but we need a change of clothes so we can GO AS WE SHOULD.

Over the next few weeks we will talk about how the Holy Spirit provides us with a new wardrobe. We need to be free from the diseased and constricting clothes of our old life without Christ so we can be the people he wants us to be and do what he wants us to do. We need the Holy Spirit to help us clothe ourselves with new habits of thought and behavior.

Brad and his family are members of my former church. The first time I was at their home Brad shared his story with us. He tried all kinds of programs to become clean and sober. The problem was, while they told him of a higher power, they never identified it. He said it was only after he came to our church and discovered Jesus was his higher power that he found the power to become clean and sober.

Getting “cleaned up” is not the condition of salvation but the consequence of it. Jesus wants us clean; he wants us free. Do you think he wants his people walking around bound by stinking and restrictive grave clothes?

*Ephesians 2:10 - “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”*

*Romans 6:22 “But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life.”*

In Hebrews 12 we God tells us to lay aside every weight and sin which so easily entangles us so we can run the race God has for us.

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#### IV. Jesus calls Us to help free others from their grave clothes.

I want you to imagine being there when Lazarus came out of the grave all bound up and stinking. We don't know how long everyone was standing there, but Lazarus must have looked real silly. Was someone going to help?!! Imagine if everyone just left all excited about him being raised to new life.

Sometimes we stand by idly due to fear or maybe because we just expect Jesus to do all the work. But Jesus calls others to help. Jesus enlists us. The great mandate Jesus gave his disciples - the basis of our mission statement – involves more than baptizing new converts; it involves teaching them to obey. We have to get involved! Jesus did the hard work, we just have to be willing to get our hands dirty and help people out of their grave clothes. Then we need to help them put on the new clothes God has for them so they can run the race and fulfill God's purpose and destiny for their lives.

We are responsible to help people follow Christ, but that doesn't mean we are ultimately responsible for their spiritual growth. We need others to help us but we must take responsibility for our growth. Imagine if Lazarus said, “No thanks, I think I will keep these grave clothes on. I have become pretty used to them.” What if he went back in the tomb? What an absurd idea, right! It is no less absurd than turning back to your sin and old way of life after Jesus has called you out of it. It is no less crazy than resisting the changes Jesus wants to make in our lives.

Are you a Lazarus today that needs to step out of your tomb? Jesus is calling you today. You need to respond and move towards Him as he calls you. Maybe some of you have heard Jesus call you out of your tomb of sin, but you have still been clinging to some of your old grave clothes. Stop it! Let others help you. Some people fear leaving their old clothes behind because those clothes are all they have ever known and they fear nakedness. God has new clothes for you. A new wardrobe. He won't leave you naked!

**Raised to Life – “Lazarus, Come Out!”**

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