

## **Lazarus's resurrection: Evangelism and Discipleship in the Church**

John 11:32-44

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In the past several weeks, Pastor Dawn has been teaching from the Gospel of Mark. Some of these lessons are about serving, healing and baptizing. All of these are hallmarks of work done by Christians who are motivated by the power of the Holy Spirit. She has instructed you by using the lives of Peter and his mother-in-law as well as John the Baptist.

In this lesson from John chapter 11, there are 3 more important people. There are 2 sisters and their brother. In an earlier passage from Luke 10, we are introduced to Martha and Mary. Martha is shown to be a serving woman. She offered to open her home to Jesus and His disciples and offered to prepare them a meal. Mary was not helping Martha. She was sitting with the others, listening to Jesus. Martha was not happy about it and Jesus answered her by saying that Mary had made a better choice. So we see that Martha is a server, Mary is a learner. Lazarus was not mentioned in this passage. It was very common in their day that the male in the home was the main provider. It could be that the 3 of them had a good relationship and the women, who were capable on their own, would depend on their brother to be a responsible provider.

Now we can move on to our passage from John 11:32-44. (Please read these verses before continuing)

Lazarus has become ill and has died. This was very upsetting to the sisters, especially Martha. Both women, upon meeting Jesus coming to see them, made a troubling statement. First Martha stated it in vs. 21, and then Mary stated it vs. 32. They asked, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus understood the depth of their sorrow. They recognized his power to heal their brother. But he arrived 2 days too late. Lazarus was dead for 4 days and had already been in the tomb for 2 days.

You can't help but feel sorry for Martha and Mary, or Lazarus for that fact. Jesus certainly did. He wept. The reasons for His weeping? (Yes, I said reasons, plural) Reluctant disciples, false belief, death, sorrow, anger. None of these things were part of God's original plan. So Jesus does what He does best. He calls upon God, then, in His power, he pushes all that aside and performs the miracle of resurrection. Look deeper at the process and see the parallel for us in the church.

What stood in the way of Lazarus living again? A stone. A large stone. A stone you cannot move alone. Jesus said to remove the stone. So *they* removed it. (v.41) Who were *they*? We don't know for sure. It could have been the disciples along with some of the people crowding around. *They* are not identified, but *they* are very important to the story.

What does it mean to be "dead to God"? Ezekiel 36:26 said that the people of God had become hardened against Him. They had a heart of stone. The "stone" heart has no life, it is cold and hard. We meet people like that all the time. We were once dead to God (Eph. 2:1). Thank God for the ones who showed us the way to Jesus! We now have a new heart, one that has life and has a heartbeat for Him. God puts others into our lives so we can share the love of God and his Gospel. The stone of a dead heart is what separates them from Jesus. So when we share the Gospel that's called evangelism. We are working to remove the stone.

Lazarus's heart had stopped. He was dead. When the tombstone was rolled away, it started beating again! When Jesus called him to come out, he came out. Lazarus was alive but he was not running and dancing. He was still wrapped in his grave clothes. So Jesus told *them* to unbind him so he could be free. Once again, we don't know who *them* were. Willing people, excited to see Lazarus alive, jumped in and took the grave clothes off of him.

Evangelism and Discipleship: The 2 commandments within the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

We share our faith in Christ with others. We pray and talk and wait. Then we pray, talk, and wait some more. We are removing a stone. We don't do it alone. God is with us. He wants people to know Him. We don't do it without exertion. Rarely will we see anyone respond immediately to the Gospel. We keep at it. The person we are evangelizing has an eternal destiny. We want them to reach Heaven and spend that eternity with Jesus, just as we are. Finally, the stone is removed. Unbelief turns into belief! The heart of stone is turned into a heart of flesh, beating with new life! But are the problems gone? Is the power of their addiction or depression or anger or bitterness gone?

What comes next is the unbinding. Patience, wisdom, teaching and prayer are the gifts God gives us to continue the process called discipleship. We can call it "getting our hands dirty for Jesus". Those disciples who removed the bindings from Lazarus got their hands dirty. You can use your imagination about the condition of Lazarus's formerly dead body. Jewish people have many rules about dead bodies and blood and such things. They call it unclean. It is likely that the ones who buried Lazarus

were still unclean in the few days that had gone by. But Lazarus was no longer dead. Could it be that their excitement of his resurrection energized them to unbind him, regardless of any laws?

Discipling new believers is difficult. Many of their old ways hang on a long time. I have a phrase for it. I call it "compassion fatigue". But they are newborn babes in the faith. Taking care of newborns is hard. It leads to fatigue. But all of us who have raised our infants did not give up. We watch them and help them grow from infants to toddlers, then to adolescents, then teenagers, then adults. If you have accomplished this, you know there are rewards all along the way. Let's use that same joy and enthusiasm to inspire us to do the work of evangelism and discipleship. The church has many ways of doing this. The list is long but it should include Sunday School, group Bible studies, one on one studies, counseling in groups, meals and supplies for the needy, etc. What's most important is we need one another to do this. *WE* are the *THEY* and *THEM* of this story.

God bless you all.