

Final Words Part 5 - Unbind Him 04.17.11

John 11:38-44 ESV

Video: "Lazarus" by Group Publishing [4:24]

Introduction: We're examining the final words of Jesus to his disciples (and to us) in these last weeks leading to Easter. "Many Rooms." "Abide in Me." "Love one another." "The Holy Spirit is Coming!" Today, in honor of Palm Sunday, we're going to move back a week or so and examine one of the key events that led both to Jesus' popular Palm Sunday parade into Jerusalem as well as his crucifixion 5 days later.

Other than his own resurrection, Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead was his greatest miracle. He had raised other people from the dead shortly after their deaths, but people could always speculate that perhaps the dead person wasn't really dead. But in Lazarus' case, he had been dead for 4 days. His sister was worried about the decay and stink in the tomb from the rotting body. **This evening I'd like to consider 6 key lessons that we can learn and apply from this miracle.**

6 Lessons We Learn from the Raising of Lazarus

Lesson #1: God's will doesn't always work out **THE WAY WE WANT**.

As Christ-followers we can identify with Lazarus, Mary and Martha. This was a family who loved Jesus... and Jesus loved them. They had provided a safe place for Jesus to hang out and just let his hair down. They were friends. They'd do anything for Jesus and he would do anything for them. Such friends are special for a preacher or teacher. There are high expectations. Someone is always wanting something. To be able to hang out, relax, and know you're safe... that you can talk and know it won't be repeated - that is very special. Jesus knew he had something very special in the Lazarus home. And the same for them. Imagine having your best friend also be the Son of God! What would you have to worry about? When the time comes to pull out the "special friend" card, what better friend to have than the Creator of the Universe! This is the guy who feeds thousands, who heals the most difficult diseases with just a touch or just a word.

Then Lazarus gets sick. And they send for Jesus. No worries. Jesus is on his way. But Jesus isn't on his way. He stays where he is two more days. When Martha sees Jesus, she is blunt:

Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." John 11:21-22 ESV

What's the game plan Jesus? You could have healed him if you came. If you would have been here, he wouldn't have died. My desire was for my brother NOT to die. I thought you loved him.

Can you identify with Martha? There are so many tough questions that we must ask about our faith. Why does such a good God permit such horrible evil? How could God allow my best friend's dad to die? How could God allow a mother to drive into a lake killing herself and 3 of her children? What's the game plan here, God? One of the toughest lessons to learn as a Christ follower is that God's will doesn't always work out the way you or I would want it to work out.

Even though Martha had faith that even now Jesus could do something, she couldn't imagine such a miracle.

Jesus said, "Remove the stone." The sister of the dead man, Martha said, "Master, by this time there's a stench. He's been dead four days!"

John 11:39 MSG

Lesson #2: We can be HONEST WITH GOD when disappointed.

When Mary arrived and saw Jesus, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died."

John 11:32 NLT

Maybe the most important lesson we take away from the Lazarus story is the complete honesty, the brutal hurt that both sisters share with Jesus. They didn't hold back their disappointment, their feeling of being let down, or their tears. "Lord, if only you had been here..." is an accusation. You could have prevented this. You could have done something. You should have been here.

Sometimes we have this view of God that demands our reverence and respect, which in turn drives a false front that we put on in front of God. We can't tell him how we really feel because that would be irreverent.

Or we worry that God will somehow fall apart and cease to be God-like if we question too much. Somehow God is fragile and needs our protection.

But we see from Mary and Martha that to be really close to someone, to really love someone, means that we must be really honest with them too. We can't be close if we are always worried about saying the right thing or acting the right way. Their whole relationship had been built on being free with one another. That didn't change when they were disappointed in Jesus. And we see that Jesus didn't scold them for their audacity in accusation. **Indeed we see this...**

Lesson #3: Our sorrow also causes CHRIST'S SORROW.

"When Jesus saw her weeping, and the people who had come with her weeping, he was intensely moved in spirit and greatly distressed."

John 11:33 NET

We must never forget that our God is an emotional God. He is not some machine, some program, a being without feelings. Jesus, we're told, was "intensely moved," "greatly distressed." For just a moment we need to stop the story and freeze frame this moment. We're all in a hurry to get to the end of the story, when Jesus "does his thing" and solves the problem, brings Lazarus back. Sometimes God's will works to bring about the good quickly and the story fits into the 40-minute television screen play. But sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes we don't see it, at least not in this lifetime. We are "forever" in this moment of sorrow, of grief.

We need to know that when we grieve, Christ grieves with us. There's no parental cliches, no "everything will work out in the end." No. He knows our hurt and our pain. And he grieves with us. There surely is a reason - a GOOD reason why it's best for us to go through whatever we are going through. But that doesn't mean that God doesn't care. It doesn't mean He doesn't get it. When we cry, He cries too. Our distress brings Him distress too.

Lesson #4: God's will brings about GOD'S GLORY.

Ultimately, though, it's important that we know that our life and our world is much more complex than the simple way in which we see it. There's a bigger picture, a bigger game plan going on than we even know about or can fathom. And that *in the end* it will bring God glory!

When Jesus heard this, he said, "This sickness will not end in death. It is for the glory of God, to bring glory to the Son of God."

John 11:4 NCV

The first response of Jesus is not the one we expected. He doesn't rush home to his friend's side. He waits. He stays where he is for two days. And he affirms - This will bring glory to God and to His Son.

One of the hardest, most mature, and sometimes impossible things for us to affirm is the goodness of God in the midst of sickness and evil.

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28 ESV

Sometimes we say the words with our lips, but don't really believe in our hearts. This was the case for Mary and Martha.

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

In the end, everything we do from as simple as eating or drinking, to going through the hard things of life, both living and dying, loving life and struggling through life... we do to bring glory to God.

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."
1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV

Here's a small piece of advice to help us with this. Let God be God. Let us be human. We don't have to worry about how God will be glorified in some of the things that happen in life. Most of life is out of our control. To the extent that I have control, that I have ability, authority, strength, influence - I bring glory to God. The rest? Trust!

Lesson #5: God's miraculous works brings BOTH:

- more BELIEVERS in Christ
- more OPPOSITION to Christ

Haven't you ever thought to yourself, or prayed to God: "If only you would grant this one miracle of healing or restoration of relationship or whatever it is that we so desperately desire, then more people would believe in You! Don't do it just for me. Do it to bring glory to You!"

But here's the truth. When God does miracles - and He still does, we need to know that it always works BOTH ways. Some people will believe, but some will bring even more opposition.

"That was a turnaround for many of the Jews who were with Mary. They saw what Jesus did, and believed in him. But some went back to the Pharisees and told on Jesus." John 11:45-46 MSG

God has provided no shortage of miracles. We have the Word of God filled with stories of days stopping, of men walking in furnaces, of the lion's mouths being shut, of bushes that never burn up, of seas that part so millions may cross. And all that is before Jesus! Even if a miracle happened before our eyes, we'd have to CHOOSE to believe!

The most important lesson of all...

Lesson #6: Jesus holds the power of **RESURRECTED LIFE**.

When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." 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." John 11:43-44 ESV

Maybe the most famous preacher story of all is that the reason Jesus cries out "Lazarus" is that without the proper name all the dead would have arose with that instruction. Within days of his own crucifixion, Jesus raises a dead man, rotting and stinking after 4 days in the tomb, back to life. It was important for you and I to KNOW that Jesus not only had the power to bring himself back to life, but also he has the power to bring you and I back to life too! We live life differently as Christ followers knowing that one day we too will be resurrected.

Illustration - This past week was a tough one for me. My best friend, Roc Marietta, lost his dad. We buried Riley Marietta on Wednesday. It was an incredible funeral. His many grandchildren all sang and played instruments. It was a sad moment, but because of Riley's faith - and his family's faith - it was also a great testimony to the hope of resurrection.

For me, though, it was a sadness of a different kind. The moment of Riley's passing - a moment of great sadness for Roc - was also a moment of great joy and celebration for me. When Roc texted me that his dad had passed from this life to the next, I was sitting at my 80-year-old dad's birthday party table, surrounded by every child, grandchild and great grandchild. We were all sharing our happy memories and famous Grandpa sayings with him and with one another. Without even realizing what he was saying, my brother Todd (in a moment of great happiness) said, "This is just like a funeral, except no one had to die - all joy and no sorrow."

I don't want to go through that moment of sorrow. I'd like it if God could just do me this one little personal favor and keep my dad safe to me. Of the 4 best friends - Kim, Mary Kay, Roc and me - we've said goodbye to all the dads but mine. And I admit I don't want to say goodbye. Ever.

Conclusion: But God's timing is perfect, as always. He had this sermon for me to prepare. Throughout this week He has reminded me that I need to have my spiritual eyes opened. I need to be able to see things that go beyond my life, that go beyond my plans, that go beyond my short-term, selfish wishes. I've been praying, and singing, "Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord." Help me to remember that God's will doesn't always work out according to my plans. I can be honest with God. My sorrow is often His as well. Ultimately things will work out to bring Him glory.

What about you tonight? Do you have your spiritual eyes open? Can you see God's glory even when it isn't immediately apparent? Are you choosing to believe God's miracle, whether you receive a personal one or not? Will this resurrection week be a time of celebration for you as you CHOOSE TO BELIEVE that you will be resurrected someday?

Congregation Sings: "Open the Eyes of My Heart" by Hillsong

Communion and Prayer