

Finding Victory in Darkness

Forest Park Church

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I don't know if you've ever stopped to think that almost all the people God used in scripture became who they were in the midst of crisis.

- Noah
- Job
- Joseph
- Moses
- King David
- Samson
- Debra
- Daniel
- and Jesus

The raising of Lazarus is the last of Jesus' miracles.

It's also the clearest sign of who he is—the Son of God, the Promised Messiah, the Savior of the world.

It sets the stage for Jesus' own death and resurrection. **According to John, those who witnessed the miracle went back and told the temple leaders what happened. John writes:**

(11:47-53)

“The chief priests therefore and the Pharisees gathered a council, and said, ‘What are we doing? For this man does many signs. If we leave him alone like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’...

So from that day forward they took counsel that they might put him to death.”

What I hope you'll get out of the sermon this morning is a promise: **If Jesus can raise Lazarus from the dead, he can bring you to new life, if you're willing.**
The story begins,

John 11:1

“Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus from Bethany, of the village of Mary and her sister, Martha.”

John assumes you know the relationship.

- Mary and Martha and Lazarus were among Jesus' closest friends.
- He stayed in their home when he came to Jerusalem.
- Bethany was a small village that lay two miles (3 km) from Jerusalem.
- It was his spiritual hangout.
- He enjoyed their hospitality.
- He cherished their friendship.
- While he had many followers, Mary, Martha and Lazarus were three of his favorites.

This gives us a glimpse into the human nature of Jesus – that is, to feel a certain attraction to some, and not others. We all know what that's like. Call it chemistry, if you like, or good vibes – something about another person brings comfort, and you feel drawn to them in a special way. Why should Jesus be any different?

To Find Victory in dark times we must.....

I. Look for a bigger Plan.

John 11:4

When He heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness is not unto death. NO, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.”

This is a family that loved God and whom was loved by Christ.

- Whenever Jesus would come to town, He stayed with them and He enjoyed their presence.
- Mary, Martha, and Lazarus had a special relationship with Jesus, one that many possibly wished they could have.
- Their relationship, however, would not exonerate them from tragedy reaching their home.
- Sickness seemingly crept in through the night and struck Lazarus.
- He must have been really sick, because the sisters sent word to Jesus.
- This was their desperate attempt to deal with a situation that was bigger than anything they could control.

What was Jesus' response to all of this?

- Did He jump up and immediately run to Bethany?
- Did He speak the Word and dispatch healing angels through the air?
- Did He send the disciples to work on His behalf?

No, He hung around where He was for two more days.

If you're paying attention that should raise a question:

- But didn't Lazarus die? **The answer is: Yes, he did.**
- And that leads to a bigger question: What does it mean to live? What does it mean to die?

Philippians 1:21

21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

We know that in the end Death is Swallowed up in Life. However that doesn't mean that life is a bed of Roses.

1. Being a Christian does not mean that we will never go through any storms.
2. Whenever situations enter your life that are bigger than your capacity to handle, take it to the Lord in prayer.
3. When you pray, remember that you are not sending breaking news to God, like a reporter on the front lines. He knows everything that has and will ever happen to us.

4. Whatever He permits to enter the arena of our lives, He has purpose wrapped up in.
5. Never give up on God, no matter how grim the circumstances may seem!
6. His timing is not our timing.

To See Victory in dark times we must realize that.....

II. The Opportunity is Worth the Risk.

We put too much emphasis on this mortal life when we simply try to stay alive. We're all going to die some day. **The question is whether we'll live in the fullness of God's grace and love.**

Jesus said,

Matthew 6:33

"But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well."

Put the Lord first, and he'll give you all the strength and vitality you need to experience life in abundance, however long you live.

A: Walking with Jesus may lead us into uncomfortable situations.

Jesus stayed where he was two more days, then he told his disciples,

John 11:7

"Let's go into Judea again."

The disciples tried to stop him. They said,

John 11:8

“Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to stone you, and are you going there again?”

- In a sense, they were right: It'd be suicide for Jesus to go back to Jerusalem.
- **But again..... Jesus was on a different plain.**
- All that mattered was for him to complete his mission.

B. Walking with Jesus gives us the opportunity to see the real priorities.

John 11:9-10

*“Aren't there twelve hours of daylight?
If a man walks in the day, he doesn't stumble,
because he sees the light of this world.
But if a man walks in the night, he stumbles,
because the light isn't in him.”*

It's easy to get caught up in what others would have you think, say and do.

To be faithful is to seek God's will for your life and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit ... and let the chips fall where they may.

Jesus would go back to Jerusalem.
If it cost him his life, so be it.

C. Walking with Jesus gives us the opportunity to put tragedy into perspective.

John 11:11-15

After saying these things, he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.”¹² The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.”

D. Walking with Jesus gives us the opportunity to build faith.

Vs 13

Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died,¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

Just as a man’s blindness gave Jesus an opportunity to demonstrate the power of God to give sight to the blind (**John 9:1-41**),

Lazarus’ death will give Jesus an opportunity to demonstrate the power of God to raise the dead to new life.

God doesn’t cause bad things to happen to innocent people, but God can use misfortune to bless us in unexpected ways, if we turn to him. In this way we have an opportunity to be a witness of faith to others.

Years ago I read of a man who was diagnosed with cancer and given only a few months to live. Friends and family gathered to console him. I’ll never forget what his best friend said, “All these years you’ve shown your boys how a man of faith lives out his life; now you have a chance to show them how a man of faith goes about the business of dying.”

To See Victory in dark times we must realize.....

III. God is right on time.

In this text it’s interesting to see how Jesus deals with two different personalities very differently.

A: Jesus met strength with answers

When Jesus got near Bethany, Martha rushed out to greet him.

John 11:20

So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

Hear the anger? “If only you’d gotten here sooner ... What took you so long?!”

Don’t be too hard on Martha. When tragedy strikes ... when a loved one dies ... when you experience disappointment and loss first-hand, it’s only natural to lash out.

Jesus told Martha, “Your brother will rise again.” (**John 11:23**)

Martha took this to mean that Lazarus would rise again at the resurrection on the last day. This was a standard belief among the Jews. But that’s not what Jesus meant. He said,

John 11:25-26

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

He asked Martha, point blank: “Do you believe this?”

Martha said, **John 11:27**

“Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

B: Jesus met brokenness with compassion.

John 11:28-32

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” ²⁹ And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she

fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

John 11:34

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. ³⁴ And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”

They took him to the tomb where Lazarus was buried, and, in the shortest verse of the Bible, John says,

“Jesus wept.” (John 11:35)

But for all its grammatical simplicity, this verse is packed with unfathomable complexity.

Jesus wept after speaking with Lazarus’s grieving sisters, Martha and Mary, and seeing all the mourners. That seems natural enough. Except that Jesus had come to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead. He knew that in a few short minutes all this weeping would turn to astonished joy, and then tearful laughter, and then worship.

So, one would think that Jesus would be a confident, joyful calm in that storm of sorrow. But he was “greatly troubled”

Consider the significance of these two words: Jesus wept.

- If ever you need permission to grieve, here it is.
- The verb used here literally means “to quake.”
- The sense of it is this: Jesus didn’t simply get teary-eyed;
- he shook with emotion from the depth of his soul.
- If you’ve ever wept uncontrollably and in anguish, you know what I mean.
- Faith in God and the pain of separation and loss often go hand-in-hand.

In his book, *Don’t Take My Grief Away*, Doug Manning tells of a young couple whose 18-month-old daughter developed a croup and was taken to the hospital.

She was put under an oxygen tent and given antibiotics. In spite of everything the doctors did, she died less than an hour later.

When Doug got there, the mother was crying hysterically. He was a young minister, and he tried to console her. He said, "There, there, you must get hold of yourself." He said the young woman looked at him straight in the eye and said with fire in her voice, "Don't take my grief away from me. I deserve it, and I'm going to have it." (61)

He said he learned from that experience how important grief is to the healing process. He writes,

"Grieving is as natural as crying when you are hurt, sleeping when you are tired, eating when you are hungry, or sneezing when your nose itches. It's nature's way of healing a broken heart." (P. 60)

When Jesus was confronted with the death of a close friend, he wept, and so may we.

Why?

1. Compassion for Suffering
 2. The Calamity of Sin
- Or Possibly:
3. The Cost of Redemption

The greatest Victory of all time is that IV. Death is defeated.

1. We are called to obedience even if we don't understand.

There are two verses which are in one way quite natural and in another somewhat interesting.

Vs 34 And he said, *“Where have you laid him?”* They said to him, *“Lord, come and see.”*

Vs 39 Jesus said, *“Take away the stone.”* Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, *“Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.”*

If your struggling with an addiction
If that sin continues to haunt you
If worry consumes you
If your family is Broken

I Cor 15:54

54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

55 “O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

2. God handles the rest.

Vs 40

Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” 43 When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” 44 The

man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth.

Christ's Victory meets that.....

V. We Are Set Free.

Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

As Lazarus emerges, we find him wrapped up in death, with burial clothes around his feet, his hand, and even his head. And while these clothes reflect the rituals and practicalities of death, they are clear metaphors for the ways we are bound in life.

A: One the one hand, our feet, too are bound.

So often, we find ourselves in places where it seems impossible to move.

- Perhaps it's in a job that we hate but cannot leave.
- Perhaps it's a situation where no good path can be found,
- and we are immobilized by the fear of what could be.

So often bound by the place itself. Sometimes, the very place we are in bind us –

it's not done that way, we say;

or we don't do that here.

B: Our hands are bound too.

- How often we feel powerless to help – others and ourselves.
- We might know where we must go or what we must do, but the ability to accomplish it seems well beyond our reach or capacity.

- At times this is external to us – we lack the resources or political capacity to make the change we need, or others are telling us that we can't do something.

We so often find ourselves bound by the broken actions of our life.

- We all know the lingering power of past hurts inflicted upon us.
- The pain or fear of that hurtful action done 10, 20, 30, even 50 years ago can be as real today as it was then,
- It bind us as strongly as chains can bind.
- The same is true of those hurts we have caused to others.

“Unbind him, and let him go.”

Romans 6:7-11

"For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus."

But my Favorite is simply this:

John 8:36 –

"So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free."

Conclusion:

This is an extraordinary story filled with

- mysterious dialogues,
- doubting disciples,
- tears and passion,

It culminates in the authoritative shout of Jesus, “Lazarus come out”. At which point a mummy-like figure staggers out from inside the tomb, much to the amazement of the gathered crowd.

vs 45

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, 46 but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47 So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” 49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. 50 Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” 51 He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. 53 So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

IF A MAN DIES, CAN HE LIVE AGAIN?”

While we appreciate a good night’s rest, who wants to go to sleep forever? What hope do we have that the dead who lie asleep in the grave will return to life—as Lazarus did?

The patriarch Job raised that very question when he felt near to death.

“If a man dies, can he live again?” he asked.—**Job 14:14.**

Addressing Almighty God, Job answered his own question, saying: *“You will call, and I will answer you. You will long for the work of your hands.”* **Job 14:15**

Job felt sure that God longed for the day when He would resurrect His faithful servant. Was that mere wishful thinking on Job’s part? Not at all.

The resurrections performed by Jesus offered clear proof that God gave Jesus power over death. In fact, the Bible says that Jesus now possesses

“the keys of death.” **Revelation 1:18**

So Jesus will unlock the gates of the grave, just as he ordered that the stone of Lazarus’ tomb be rolled away.

The Bible repeats this resurrection promise time and again. An angel assured the prophet Daniel: “You will rest, but you will stand up for your lot at the end of the days.” (Daniel 12:13) Jesus told the Sadducees, Jewish leaders who denied the resurrection promise: “You are mistaken, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.” (Matthew 22:23, 29) The apostle Paul said: “I have hope toward God . . . that there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.”—Acts 24:15.

Group Questions:

1. When was a time that you missed God’s bigger plan in a situation? How did that affect your perception of the situation?
2. What are some risks we take today to be a connected follower of Christ?
3. What are some opportunities we will miss if we don't take risk?
4. How is God’s timing different than our timing?