

The City Life Church

Living a Lazarus Life

Feb 23, 2019

A. Set-up context:

- a. Starting at John 11, we immediately see that Lazarus is sick.
- b. Lazarus is the brother of Mary and Martha who live in Bethany (2 miles east of Jerusalem).
- c. Mary—the one who sat at the feet of Jesus—sent messengers to tell him, “Lord, the one you love is *sick*.”
- d. The Greek word for sick is *astheneo*.
- e. **Jesus’ delay**
 - Jesus was about 20 miles away when Mary and Martha sent for him (a day’s journey by foot).
 - It probably took the messenger at least a day to find Jesus and then Jesus spent “two more days” in the same place.
 - On the fourth day, he went to Bethany and found Lazarus had been dead for four days.
 - When we consider days, distance, and the delay, I believe, as some others do, that Lazarus died the day the messenger left to find Jesus.
 - In other words, the delay did not directly influence whether Lazarus died or not.
- f. **Now, why is four days important?**

- i. Jews believed the soul of the dead person would hover over the body for three days before departing.

According to *Forensic Anthropologist*, there are four stages of human decomposition:

1. **Stage One (days 1-3)** is Autolysis, or self-digestion, and begins immediately after death. Once circulation and respiration stop, the body has no way of getting oxygen or removing waste so the excess carbon dioxide causes an acidic environment, which causes membranes to rupture. This is when rigor mortis sets.
2. **Stage Two (days 3-5)** is known as the Bloat stage. The leaked enzymes from stage one begins producing gases and these gases produce extremely unpleasant odors called putrefaction. It's what alerts others that a person has died.
3. **Stage Three (days 5 on)** is Active Decay.
4. **Stage Four (after a month or so)** the body starts to liquefy: known as Skeletonization.

Our friend Lazarus was in stage two - *the bloat stage* – which Martha brings up later.

Then, in verse 35, the Bible states that **Jesus wept**.

- Maybe it was his “**compassion for suffering.**” Jesus is the embodiment of empathy.
- Or, it could be the “**calamity of sin.**” In other words, it wasn't supposed to be like this. Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, he's watched sin and death roll roughshod over humanity.

Some said, “**See how much he loved him!**”

But others said, “**Could not he who opened the eyes of a blind man have kept this man from dying?**”

B. Final Five Statements and Five Challenges

1. “TAKE AWAY THE STONE.”

I believe the first challenge to us in 2019 is to **OVERCOME OUR OBSTACLES.**

In *The Obstacle Is The Way*, Ryan Holiday said, “Every obstacle is unique to each of us. But the responses they elicit are the same: Fear. Frustration. Confusion. Helplessness. Depression. Anxiety. And anger.”

Our stone, our obstacle, may be called many things.

From shame, pornography, and pride, to fear, selfishness, and control.

This year must be different.

This is the year God is speaking directly to us and he says: TAKE AWAY THE STONE!

In order to do that, there’s a couple of things we need to understand.

First, much of what stands in our way is spiritual.

In 1 Thess 2:18, Paul said, “For we wanted to come to you – certainly, I did, again and again – but Satan *blocked* our way.”

The Greek word for “blocked” is *enkopto* which means, “to hinder; to impede one’s course by cutting off his way.”

It’s the same word Paul uses when speaking to the Galatians in 5:7, “You were running a good race. Who *cut in* on you to keep you from obeying the truth?”

Remember: we can’t fight spiritual battles with human effort.

We can’t just try harder.

We need spiritual weapons: We need prayer. We need worship. We need Holy Spirit conviction followed quickly by our obedience.

Along with recognizing the spiritual nature of our obstacle, **we need other people to help.**

As the stone was rolled away, even though the smell of death came out of the grave, the light of life shined in.

2. “DID I NOT TELL YOU THAT IF YOU BELIEVED, YOU WOULD SEE THE GLORY OF GOD?”

Our second challenge for 2019, is **believing is seeing.**

In other words, for you and for me, this must be a year of INCREASED FAITH.

In John Maxwell’s new book, *Leadershift*, he said, “My experience over the 40+ years in the leadership industry has convinced me that *we receive what we believe.*”

His “circle of faith model” looks like this:

Belief encourages anticipation. Anticipation creates intention. Intention helps us prioritize focus. And then, only then, does our focus *help us see* opportunity. Once we see opportunity, we’re able to act on it. When we do, it increases our passion to move forward. That in turn fuels more belief. Which leads to increased faith. And the cycle begins all over again.

But, it all begins with believing.

One of the greatest definitions of faith comes from Hebrews 11:1, “**Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.**”

One of my favorite words within this verse is CONFIDENCE.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, a professor at Harvard Business School wrote a book called, *Confidence*, in which she said, “Confidence determines whether our steps—individually or collectively—are tiny and tentative or big and bold.”

This is the year of big and bold steps!

Because true faith in God is not some wispy optimism but a bedrock of belief that sustains us in difficult times.

3. “FATHER, I THANK YOU THAT YOU HAVE HEARD ME. I KNEW THAT YOU ALWAYS HEAR ME, BUT I SAID THIS FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE PEOPLE STANDING HERE, THAT THEY MIGHT BELIEVE THAT YOU SENT ME.”

What I believe God is saying with this prayer is a challenge for us in 2019 to **EMBRACE THE SPIRIT OF SONSHIP.**

When we accept this challenge, it creates *an Identity Shift.*

Read Romans 8:14-16

By “orphan” I am referring to a sense of:

Abandonment – Loneliness – and Isolation

The orphan spirit creates men who can’t connect emotionally with their family and friends.

The orphan spirit causes women to struggle with their self-image and ultimately settle for less.

This list is from Pastor Joseph Mattera’s book *Generational Blessings*:

- I. The orphan spirit operates out of insecurity and jealousy.
 - a. The spirit of sonship functions out of love and acceptance.
- II. The orphan spirit serves God to earn the Father’s love.
 - a. The mature son and daughter serve God out of divine acceptance and gratitude.
- III. The orphan spirit is driven by the need for success.
 - a. Sonship leads children into their calling and a greater mission.
- IV. The orphan spirit acts out in anger and fits of rage.
 - a. The spirit of sonship rests in the Father’s peace and his ability to control and guide the future.
- V. The orphan spirit receives its primary identity through material possessions, physical appearance, and activities.
 - a. The spirit of sonship is grounded in the Father’s acceptance and affirmation.

4. “LAZARUS! COME OUT!”

It’s a challenge that brings **CONFIDENCE to our CALLING.**

Everyone here tonight can replace Lazarus' name with their name!

“ _____, **COME OUT!**”

The moment we respond to this call, we begin to discover our **true IDENTITY**.

“We can never truly understand who we are and what we were created for until we respond to Jesus calling our name.”

But, because of distractions and divided affections, our ears and hearts have become deaf to his voice which causes us to live a lesser life.

Did you ever stop to think what happened when Lazarus heard his name?

Some people believe Jesus had to specify *Lazarus's name* or all the dead within earshot would have responded to his command!

But, just as Lazarus gained consciousness, he was faced with a choice.

Just as we are.

Does he lie back down and give into death or does he get up and walk toward Jesus?

Saint Irenaeus, “The glory of God is man fully alive.”

What does “fully alive” look like?

Where do we even start?

One place to start is a book by Erik Rees called *SHAPE*.

SHAPE stands for:

- Spiritual gifts
- Heart
- Abilities
- Personality
- Experiences

Reese defines **our calling** as, “Your specific contribution to the body of Christ, within your generation, that causes you to totally depend on God and authentically displays his love toward others – all through the expression of your unique SHAPE.”

Paul said something similar to the church at Corinth:

“Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits” (1 Cor 12:7, MSG).

5. “TAKE OFF THE GRAVE CLOTHES...AND LET HIM GO”

This final statement provides the twofold promise of **FREEDOM IN COMMUNITY** that brings **FULLNESS OF LIFE**.

Did you notice that God “book-ended” his most amazing miracle with two statements that require community?

“**TAKE** away the stone...”

“**TAKE** off the grave clothes...”

We are part of a community.

And our freedom is connected to other believers.

In his book *Scary Close*, Donald Miller said, “As much as we are independent beings, contained in our own skin, the ideas and experiences we exchange with others grows into us like vines and reveal themselves in our mannerisms, language, and outlook on life.”

We would agree that it’s an amazing sight when we see someone who was lost come to Christ.

But that isn’t the finish line, it’s the starting line.

Luke 15:7 says all heaven celebrates when one sinner repents.

First there’s a celebration and then there’s the sanctification.

I get it, most of us would rather witness a resurrection than participate in one.

But the participation is what helps usher in transformation.

It's our principle of transformation by participation.

And sometimes, participation requires you and I to get around some old grave clothes and gently, lovingly, set free the person underneath.

And that freedom is what Jesus refers to when he says, "...AND LET HIM GO!"

FREEDOM IN COMMUNITY brings **FULLNESS OF LIFE!**

Too many folks are walking around wearing the bandages of their old lives.

Tell him tonight that you are ready to *overcome the obstacles in your life.*

Tell him you are ready to *increase your faith by believing before seeing!*

Tell him that in 2019, you are ready to *live as a child of God* with all its rights and privileges.

Tell him that you are ready to *walk with more confidence* in who he's created you to be.

And lastly, tell him that you are both *willing to be vulnerable and part of community* knowing that as you do, you will experience more *life and fulfillment.*