



Sermon Growth Guide

April 2, 2023

Lazarus, Come Out!



Sermon Growth Guide

April 2, 2023

Unbound - "Lazarus, Come Out!"

John 11:38-44

Key Verse: John 11:40 (ESV) Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

Big Idea: When Jesus commanded Lazarus to come out of the tomb, Jesus showed that the glory of God can show up in the realities of this sick, dying and smelly world.

Foundations

Palm Sunday is when the Church remembers the triumphal entry by Jesus into Jerusalem. The masses assembled and hailed the donkey-riding Jesus, shouting "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" There was great joy and a sense of expectation that the long-awaited Messiah had come, and this Messiah would restore Jerusalem and the Jewish people to their rightful and God-given standing.

But the triumphal entry began with a smaller assembly around the tomb where Jesus' close friend Lazarus had been laid. Throughout Lent, we have been looking at different aspects of the resurrection of Lazarus in John's Gospel, chapter 11. This is a very human and relational account with Jesus interacting with Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, helping them to understand the mystery, power and hope of God.

In an emotional and drama-filled moment, Jesus commanded Lazarus to come out! And Lazarus came out, having been dead and in the tomb for four days. In this display, Jesus revealed His power to conquer death, to release the captives and to unbound those who have been shackled by sin.

And while there are a number of human questions we might ask of this text, the compelling truth is that God is glorified as lives and hearts are regenerated by the miraculous power of the Savior Jesus. Jesus is calling each of us to come out. To come out of our hard-heartedness. To come out of our bondage to sin. To come out of the deeds of the flesh. To come out and enjoy forgiveness, peace and great joy!

Understanding God's Word

Read John 11:38-44. Now go back and read it slowly and more carefully.

Verse 38 says that Jesus was deeply moved again. As you reflect on this passage, for what reason(s) might Jesus have been deeply moved?

What things from this passage stand out to you? Why?

Applying God's Word

Jesus said to Martha, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" In what ways have you seen the glory of God in your life?

Verse 42 says that the resurrection of Lazarus happened for people to believe that God had sent Jesus. In what ways has your belief been strengthened?

Witnessing God's Word

The resurrection from the dead is perhaps our greatest hope as Christians. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, conquering sin and death once and for all, those who believe in and belong to Him will also be raised to new and eternal life.

Compassion is the right first step in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. On whom do you have compassion and for whom do you wish that they would experience the power of Christ's resurrection?

Jesus came to Bethany, stood over the grave and wept. God weeps at death. I'm so sorry to begin a Palm Sunday message this way, but this week we all weep. We all saw death rage again in our world this week as a confused young woman made death her final self-expression. Her final statement was to shoot her way into Covenant Presbyterian School where she grew up and slaughter three innocent children and three kind adults. Death is not part of God's creative vision. God established all living things under the Tree of Life. By sin, death entered the world. Jesus wept. We weep because we are powerless, but God is all powerful. Jesus weeps, God weeps, because in all His power He decides to hold us so close, so near to Himself, that our pain, our suffering, our weeping becomes His own. So today, this very hour, God weeps. God weeps over the graves of three children, three adults, and over the seventh grave—a child overcome by death. God weeps with us. Knowing the end of the story does not eliminate the grief at the middle of the story. The tears are no less real because Jesus knows He will raise Lazarus. The tears are no less real because we know God will set all this evil right again in the end. We weep, and Jesus with us.

The tomb of Lazarus is a dark place, but it is not where the story ends. It is the painful middle, the weeping middle, but it becomes the beginning. It is the beginning of a parade. Parades gather at assembly points way out of view, back behind the King Soopers or something, back by the trash. Lazarus' tomb is the assembly point for the parade we celebrate today, Palm Sunday, the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. John says the same people who saw Lazarus crawl out of that cave marched in with Jesus days later shouting and singing and waving palms—a sign of royal victory. “When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead...The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took

branches of date palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!’” (John 12:9,12-13). That's why our kids are waving palm branches today. That's why we sing Hosanna today. And it all started at the tomb of Lazarus where Jesus called out in a loud voice, **Lazarus, Come Out!**

Some call this “the quickening shout.” “Lazarus, come out!” What does it mean to be **Unbound**, to be set free by Jesus? “If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed” (John 8:36). The quickening shout of Jesus is enough to bring Lazarus back to life. The quickening shout of Jesus is enough to reverse the corruption and decomposition, to reverse death, to turn your life around when you think it's too late. The quickening shout of Jesus can put your life back together when you think it is all over, done, sealed up tight. It is enough to open doors that are closed, to call you out of the heavy stench and into the fresh air of the Spirit of God, to pull you from darkness into glorious light—to take what is dead and make it alive. The quickening shout of Jesus can do all this. Have you heard His voice?

“Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it” (John 11:38). We saw last week that He was deeply moved, sharing His heart and emotions with Mary, uniting His grief with her grief. He was deeply moved in verse 33. Now, as He looks down at the tomb of His friend, He is deeply moved again. It's OK to show emotion, men (and women)! This also helps us get inside the mind of Jesus. Jesus has come to do battle. John Calvin said, “Christ does not come to the sepulcher as an idle spectator but like a wrestler preparing for the contest. No wonder he groans again, for the violent tyranny of death he had come to overcome stands before his eyes.” Time to go to war with death.

“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’” (John 11:39). I don't always feel compelled to

turn to the King James Version, but here is a classic line: “Lord, by this time he stinketh.” Lazarus has been buried four days. Martha is concerned for the propriety, the honor due her brother, the reality that to open that tomb is to let everyone in on the grotesque reality of a decomposing body. That should not be the last memory of Lazarus. What this tells us is, seriously, this is not a sleeping person, this is not a man who swooned and passed out; this is not even a recently deceased person, like the daughter of Jairus or the son of the widow at Nain. This is a man who has been dead four days. It’s not just a matter of restarting the systems. The systems, the biological, physiological systems of the body of Lazarus—they’re gone. They’re in total decay. “Take away the stone,” says Jesus.

“Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 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’” (John 11:40–42). Jesus had said to Martha before that this is about faith, this is about belief. “Do you believe this?” She did believe. Now Jesus reminds her, and everyone else, this is an occasion to find faith, to trust in God, to believe in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. That’s what this is. That’s why Jesus said all the way up at the beginning that He was glad he wasn’t there in time to save Lazarus in the first place, “and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him” (John 11:15). For your sake. For our sake. A chance to believe.

The Gospel of John is arranged—along with the seven “I AM” statements we talked about two weeks ago—around seven signs, seven miracles. This is the last of the seven signs demonstrating the power of Christ. It is an occasion to believe, to have faith. So, Jesus points out when He prays, “I’m not praying for my sake. I’m praying for your sake. I’m not praying out loud for my own good.

I know my Father hears my voice. I’m praying out loud so you can see that this is not an ordinary affair. God is at work. God is doing something. I am doing something beyond the ordinary, something supernatural. Life is breaking into death. Eternity is entering into time. I have the authority to run death in reverse. Watch.” Jesus is doing this so those around Him will believe, so you and I will believe in Him. Remember, Lazarus will die again. Legend says he died a martyr. If natural death was the problem Jesus was trying to solve, He failed. But by faith in Christ, the real problem is solved, the real sickness is cured, the relationship with God is reconciled, and eternal life is opened up, even after physical death. That’s why Jesus came. Today is an opportunity to have faith, to believe, and to be saved.

“When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out’” (John 11:43). Then the pause. Then the waiting. If the tomb is where they think it is, it’s still there to visit. It looks like this. The opening is flat to the surface, not like Jesus’ doorway. The stone would have lain flat across it, and underneath are 24 steps into the darkness below.



Imagine the crowd waiting. Waiting. Waiting. Then—there he is! Yes! It happened! Lazarus has answered the call of Jesus. Jesus has called him back from death into life. Up he emerges, still wrapped in graveclothes. And it is time to start the parade. Strike up the band. “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 11:44). Unbind him. That’s where we will pick up next week.

The man who had died came out. The man who had died came out under the quickening cry of Jesus. A dead man answered when Jesus said, “Come to me.” Why? Jesus is very clear. This is an occasion for faith. This is a moment to believe—in order that you believe. These moments come and go. Jesus opens up these moments, these divine appointments, these convictional and transformational experiences, and, do you know what? You can miss them. You can walk away. I know it’s hard to believe, but some people stood there and watched as Lazarus came out, and they still didn’t believe. They still closed off their hearts. How do they explain that day? I don’t know, but they didn’t turn to Jesus. When the moment comes, when Jesus presents Himself to you, don’t harden your heart against Him and walk away. To say no is to deny the power of God. To say nothing is to say no, and another callous grows over your spiritually numbed soul. When Jesus calls, answer. And strike up the parade.

It’s time to start the march! O, church arise! O, Lord arise! Let your glory shine. Enough of the church being pushed down and repressed by so many things. Enough of God’s love being obscured and confused by so many lies. Enough of pain and darkness and confusion and death. Jesus marches in with the joy of this crowd. “He did what he said he would. He is who he says he is. He is as good as his word and his gospel is good news! Hosanna!” Let the church arise. It’s time. It is time for Christians to be Christian, to name our primary devotion is to Jesus Christ and Him alone. It is time to get our

kids upstairs every Sunday to grow up knowing the Word of God. It is time to get our students across the street and off to camp to know the love of Jesus, to support each other as young men and women of faith in the rising generation. It is time to put church on our calendars again and get up and drive downtown and gather with our brothers and sisters to worship together, to lift up the name of Jesus right here and be formed after His likeness. It is time to get the invitation out this week to those who might just join us for Easter and might just hear the voice of Jesus for themselves, hear His quickening shout and move from death into life. It is time. Strike up the band and start the parade. Hosanna! Great God Almighty, arise.

The quickening shout of Jesus has authority to bring life. Jesus promised it would. Earlier in His teaching, He said, “Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out” (John 5:28). Sure enough. Lazarus isn’t the last one. Lazarus isn’t the only one. Because Jesus came, and because Jesus died, and because Jesus rose again, Jesus, and Jesus alone, has the authority of the quickening cry. Life over death. Light over darkness. Love over hatred. Hope over the grave. Jesus, who died for you, calls you to come out and live. Will you?