



# Sermon Growth Guide

**April 9, 2023**

**Unbind Him**



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**Unbound - "Unbind Him"**

**John 11:38-44 and 20:1-9**

**Key Verse:** John 11:44 "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.'"

**Big Idea:** Jesus was bound, Jesus died, so you could be free.

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## Foundations

Pastor Tim concludes his Easter Sunday sermon, **Unbind Him**, this way:

"Jesus has granted us new life; we act as though we are still dead. Jesus has gained us forgiveness; we act as though we are still condemned. Jesus has gained eternal life; we act as though this life is all there is.

"In many different ways, we wear the graveclothes of the dead even after the Lord has called us into new life. What are you holding onto? What are you wrapped up in? Where are you bound? Jesus says, 'Unbind! Let him go. Let her go.'

"If Jesus has the power to call Lazarus out of death and into life, if Jesus has the power to bust free of His own grave, if Jesus has the power to walk out of death and into eternal life, then Jesus has the power to set you free. Jesus was bound, Jesus died, so you could be free. **Unbound.**"

Today is a day of celebration. Celebrate together. Praise God together. Pray for the graveclothes to come off in Jesus' name. Pray for the unbinding power of Jesus to reach every person you know. And pray that you would know how to join God in His great rescue plan.

## Understanding God's Word

Together, read our two Easter Scripture passages: John 11:38-44 and John 20:1-9.

Compare these two "tomb passages."

Holding what you know about God and His Word, how might you imagine deeper into these two accounts? How might you help one another see these images afresh?

## Applying God's Word

Jesus was bound, Jesus died, so you could be free.

Identify where you still wear graveclothes. Maybe it's anxiety. Maybe doubt. Or worry. Of self-image. Or control. How can you allow your Life Group to help you join God's Spirit in walking in the Unbound life of Jesus?

## Witnessing God's Word

What might it look like to help a friend, coworker or neighbor take off the graveclothes of sin?

What rhythm might you put on your calendar this week to love your neighbors even better this summer?

Once when we were living in Charlottesville, Virginia, my mom came to visit. We had a small house and a growing family, so we were almost always in the middle of some home improvement project or other, turning hallways into closets and closets into hallways and kitchen extensions. It never stopped. We had pancakes with the kids on Saturday morning, and, as my mom remembers it, then I got up, grabbed a sledgehammer, and laid into the wall right next to her! I guess I hadn't briefed her on the day's home improvement plans. We were removing a little wall that day. "You're sure that's not structural?" she asked. "Yeah. I mean, pretty sure." Later, my mom said, "I got back home looked at all my walls differently. Are you sure you need to be there?" She looked at permanent things differently.

We look at two tombs today. Two tombs. Usually, you just get one tomb on Easter, but we get two tombs! Yes, we are looking at tombs. Easter is more than fuzzy bunnies and chocolate eggs. Easter is life and death, death and life. Two tombs. Lazarus' tomb and Jesus' tomb. They are related. Some say the first caused the other; some say religious leaders had Jesus killed by the Romans because He was so popular after raising Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus was a friend of Jesus who got sick and died. Lazarus wasn't almost dead, or mostly dead, or recently dead—Lazarus was dead and gone, four days and rotting when Jesus called him back to life. "Lazarus, come out!" Jesus said. And he did. The man who had died came out. A little while later it was Jesus in the tomb. The Father and the Spirit said, "Jesus, come out!" He did. Now, we just don't look at tombs the same way anymore. The tomb is not as permanent as you think.

The great claim of Easter is just that: death looks different. Death is something we all face. If we don't look at it directly, it sneaks up on us from the side. Even young people feel it; it's a shadow of anxiety, fear of missing out. "I'm losing time. My life is passing. I have to make the most of it!" That's actually death

whispering in your ear. Death is always there. But 73% of Americans believe in Heaven, and almost all assume they're going. Mortality casts a shadow over our lives and there is nothing we can do about it. Death is certain. Or is it? That's the question. Does Jesus have another answer? Does Jesus have something else to say? Does Jesus have the authority to shout into the tomb, "Come out!" and make death walk back, make death itself not the end, but the beginning of eternal life? Does Jesus have the power to say **Unbind Him** and make death let go? Does He, or doesn't He? What do you believe?

It's Easter morning. And what happened on Easter? Jesus rose from the dead. "Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb" (John 20:1). She suspected grave robbers but when Peter and John ran over, this is what they saw: "And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself" (John 20:5-7). All that stuff they used to wrap Jesus' body on Friday night after the crucifixion was lying there. No grave robber would take that stuff off, carefully fold it up, and leave it behind. That's weird. There were three things: a big linen sheet they just sort of folded the body up in (like the Shroud of Turin), linen straps like ace bandages they wrapped Him up in like a mummy, and a napkin over His face. All that stuff was left behind. Jesus was free of all of it, and the tomb, and death itself. Soon they saw Him alive again. They sat with Him for over a month. Can you believe that?

It just wasn't that long ago that they were all standing in front of another tomb two miles away. Lazarus was dead and buried. He was behind a rock. He was wrapped up and lying dead, and Jesus was standing there, saying, "If you guys believe in me, if you trust in me, then you

will see glorious things, amazing things.” “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...’ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’” (John 11:40–41,43). And he did! Lazarus did come out. But he was still wrapped up in all that stuff. The shroud, and the linen straps, and the face cloth. Jesus said, get that stuff off him. “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! What do you think the people did? Martha and Mary, and Thomas, and Peter and John, and the rest, what did they do? Shove him back in the tomb and slam the door shut? No. This isn't Scooby Doo. They unbound him. They loosed him. They set him free. They took that stuff off of him, with joy, like Christmas morning! My brother is back—back from the dead. This is the joy of the people of God receiving back a brother who was dead, like the feast at the end of the parable of the Prodigal Son, when the father says, “We had to celebrate. My son was dead, and now he's alive!” This is the celebration of the church, the family of God, when someone is so lost and gone and so far from God, so far from home, so far from the light, so far from joy and love and gladness and peace, so far away—and something turns, and the lights go on, Jesus shows up, and they come home. They come to themselves again. They wake up. They settle a bit and find peace, joy and love. We celebrate. Maybe that's you right now, or maybe it needs to be. You need to get home. You need to get out of the dark, out of the tomb, out of the stink, you need to walk out of all that, leave it behind, and hear the voice of Jesus calling, “Come out! Come to me.” Today's the day.

They took that stuff off of him. Jesus wanted that stuff off of him. Jesus wants that stuff off of you. Lazarus came out with his graveclothes still on. “The man

was wholly raised, but not wholly freed.” (Charles Spurgeon) Time to get that stuff off. Some say Christianity is a straitjacket, but Jesus says, “Unbind him, and let him go.” Three things. The napkin over the face, the straps wrapping around, and the shroud. Get that stuff off. The napkin covers the face. You can't see. It's a veil. Can you see the things of God? Can you see spiritually? Isaiah said the veil is death, death is a veil only the Messiah can take away: “And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever” (Isaiah 25:7–8). What are you wrapped up in that keeps you from seeing God clearly? What is in the way of you seeing Jesus? The Bible is the Word of God. It's a light to your eyes. Get that veil off and see, learn a little more about Jesus in the Bible. Let someone show you a little more about Jesus. Take off the veil, come out of the dark and step into the light to see Jesus.

The straps. Where are you bound? Where do you feel tied up in the past? See, this whole thing, most of it, is about forgiveness. We get all wrapped up in past mistakes, all tied up in mistakes we have made and the ways we have hurt ourselves and others. Is your past keeping you from your future? Jesus came and died on the cross to pay the debts of our mistakes and sins. He died so that you and I could be forgiven, so the past wouldn't tie us down. Sometimes it isn't what we've done, but what was done to us, that ties us down, and it's more about finding a way to forgive and move on from what somebody else did to you. Forgiveness. There is more freedom in Christ than you might have imagined. There is fresh air and light and freedom; forgiveness. Let the straps come off.

The shroud. Are you haunted by death? If not by death, then by the fear of missing out on life? The anxiety of missing out, the pressure? The weight of making the most of it all, of making the most of your life? The shroud. I'm not pretending this morning that the shroud of death is some light and airy thing, some little sheet

that will easily blow away in the wind. Death is heavy. The shroud of death is heavy. We have people in this church who lost their spouses this year. There are people in this church who have lost children. I think of Covenant Presbyterian in Nashville gathering to worship today. Death is heavy. Here is the secret. Jesus removes the shroud of death and mortality. He says, "This life is awesome, it can be sweet, but it is just the beginning. Eternal life is coming. It is my gift to you. Fulfillment of all your hopes, needs, longings. Eternal, full, heavenly life. It starts today when you believe in me."

Unbind him. Take all that stuff off. It's time to live free again! See, Jesus got Himself out of all that stuff. The power of God knocked that stone out of the way. Jesus walked out of His own graveclothes and stepped out in the power of the Holy Spirit over the threshold of His tomb. That's Jesus. He let Himself get taken down to death, then He beat it. "The weakness of God proved itself to be stronger than death and mightier than the grave." (Charles Spurgeon) That's Jesus. That's Easter! But the fun thing about Lazarus is how Jesus included his friends. Can you imagine? They'd never forget it. "I wrenched the stone off the door. I undid the straps. I unwrapped the face cloth. I helped rip that shroud off." The community got to be part of it. The power was Jesus, but the joy was the church. We get to do this stuff for one another today in the power and presence of Jesus. He gives us the joy of helping one another to freedom. Together we remove the napkin of ignorance, the straps of unforgiveness, the shrouds of doom. We do all that for each other in the power of Christ. And today we are all here, church, but we need this every day. We need this community all the time. Jesus wants us to have this joy, the joy of helping one another see, helping one another forgive, and helping one another release the past and embrace the future. Jesus wants us to have the joy of the community of faith all the time! We need it. It's a gift. What I'm saying is, come back again, not next Easter, not next Christmas, next week.

Jesus says, "If you believe, you will see." If you believe, you will see the glory of God. You have to take a step. You have to open your mind up a little. You can't just sit there arms crossed, cynical, smarter than others; that's the posture of our age, smarter than everyone around me, smarter than your family. But smarter than Jesus? Come on. Can you open your mind a little? Jesus is not an idea or a figure trapped in history—Jesus is the Son of God come to save us; and He died on the cross, that much is sure; and He rose again from the dead. Jesus has the power to forgive, to set us free from the past and open up the future, to pull away the shroud of death and open us up to the light of eternal life. Jesus.

Jesus granted us new life; we act like we are still dead. Jesus has won us forgiveness; we act like we are still condemned. Jesus gained eternal life; we act like this life is all there is. We wear the graveclothes of the dead even after the Lord calls us into new life. What are you holding on to? What are you wrapped up in? Where are you bound? Jesus says, "Unbind! Let him go. Let her go. That one is my child. His sins are on me; my righteousness is his. Her shame is on me; my holiness is hers. Unbind him! Unbind her!" If Jesus has the power to call Lazarus out of death and into life, if Jesus has the power to bust free of His own grave, walk out of death and into eternal life, then Jesus has the power to set you free. Jesus was bound, Jesus died, so you could be free. **Unbound.**

So, let's pray together today. It's Easter. Open your heart to pray to Jesus. Use your own voice to talk to Him. I'll give you words. Just follow after me: **"Lord Jesus Christ; You set Lazarus free; You set yourself free; You can set me free; Thank you for giving your life; I want to give you mine; I trust you Jesus; Show me how to be unbound and free with you. In Jesus' name, amen."**