



# Unbound

## Sermon Growth Guide

**April 16, 2023**

**One for All**

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**Unbound - "One for All"**

**John 11:45-53**

**Key Verse:** John 11:50 "... it is better for you that one man should die for the people ..."

**Big Idea:** We don't have to fear death.

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## Foundations

Last Sunday, we celebrated God's resurrection power, and Jesus' triumph over sin and death. This week, still basking in the shadow of Easter, we celebrate that Jesus has unbound death's power to have the last word, and that we don't have to fear death.

On this Sunday, when we remember First Pres members who've gone home to be with the Lord since last Easter, we're reminded of our own mortality. Our time on earth will one day come to an end, and we'll also experience death.

Most of us are used to being guided when we travel by either a detailed itinerary or a familiarity with where we're going. The experience of death, though, will be a new path unique and unfamiliar to us all. In contrast to the religious leaders, who were threatened and fearful of how Jesus might change their lives, we want to balance our fears and uncertainties about death with the Bible's hope and promises that can anchor us.

The Pharisees were also so intent upon preserving the status quo, they couldn't see the new thing God was doing through Jesus. To what degree do we also miss God's new initiatives in our lives and in the world because of our desire to remain in what's comfortable and familiar?

## Understanding God's Word

Together, read John 11:45-53.

How would you characterize the different responses to Jesus' raising of Lazarus between those in 11:45 and those in 11:47?

How would you summarize, in your own words, what John says Caiaphas is prophesying about Jesus in 11:50-53?

## Applying God's Word

What are some of the things that you fear?

When it comes to death and dying, what would you name as some of your fears?

How is any fear around death impacted by Jesus' resurrection, and what it means for us today?

What passages of Scripture do you find most encouraging when thinking about death?

## Witnessing God's Word

Is there someone you know well enough to ask how they feel about death, and with whom you can share the hope you have that helps lessen your fear about it?

As we conclude our *Unbound* sermon series today, I invite you to turn to chapter 11 of John's Gospel. For the past seven weeks, we've been exploring what it means to be unbound and set free by Jesus. In a moment, when we read our text, you'll notice that it begins with the word "therefore." This word in the Bible is always a clue that the text before us has been shaped by what's behind us. So, let's briefly review what's happened in this chapter.

Jesus learned that His friend Lazarus was sick, but waited another two days before going to be with him. During those two days, Lazarus' health worsened, and he died. When Jesus arrived, He declared to Lazarus' sister Martha words foundational to our faith and central to today's message: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

After approaching the tomb, Jesus commanded Lazarus to come out. You have to wonder what went through Jesus' mind, knowing that this was a dress rehearsal for His own resurrection experience. After Lazarus emerged, Jesus told the people to unbind him from his graveclothes. The greater reality is that through Jesus, Lazarus was unbound from death.

With this as a backdrop, let's read today's text:  
"Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, 'What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. 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.' But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all. 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.' He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they made plans to put him to death" (John 11:45-53).

At my first church after seminary, I led a group of young single adults in Southern California. I decided to kick off my first fall with them by teaching a series on Singleness and Sexuality. I thought the topic would be sensational enough to attract visitors, and personal enough to interest our current singles. It was great idea ... until I started working on the content and realized I was in over my head. As the series approached, I became increasingly anxious that I had little to say that would truly be helpful. I still remember sitting in worship the morning before my first lesson, wishing I was sick so I could go home!

Things didn't get any better once I started teaching. Early in the lesson, the lectern I was leaning on collapsed, knocking me further off balance within. Later, I realized I had mistakenly omitted one of my best illustrations. When I closed in prayer, I felt like I'd said 30 minutes of nothing, and I feared the looks on peoples' faces as they headed for the door.

Social anxiety, including speaking in front of others, is a common fear, and I experienced this fear that morning. If you've ever wondered why we wear robes in our Sanctuary services, it's to keep you from seeing our knees shaking when we preach!

I wonder what fears each of us might have? How many of us fear being startled by snakes or spiders? Or of the pitch dark that can prompt imaginations to run wild? How many of us become fearful when we're in closed spaces,

including claustrophobic MRI machines? A fear of heights, failing, or loneliness may also grip our hearts.

Then there's fear around death. I wonder how many of us can relate to this one?

Yes, many of us have a deep enough faith that we aren't afraid to die. But what about the experience of dying?

The fear of a painful end to our days, or of limitations that rob us of capacities we've been used to all our lives? Most of us won't take trips without knowing the path before us; the path of death will be a new and unfamiliar one for all of us.

Friends, there's no better time to lean into the subject of death than on the Sunday after Easter, when our celebration of Christ's resurrection still lingers. For more than 50 years, this church has celebrated on this Sunday those who've gone home to be with the Lord in the past year. We find comfort in the Bible's promise that they're experiencing life more fully on the other side of death, and that we'll be with them again. Remembering these dear ones also reminds us that our time on earth will one day come to an end. We declare on this Sunday that we're unbound from death's power to have the last word, and that fear doesn't have to get the better of us. So, let's listen to and learn from what today's text has to offer us.

It's a passage steeped in fear. We read: "Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, 'What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. 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.'" (John 11:45-48).

Jesus' raising of Lazarus was a life-changing event for some, who responded by placing their faith in Him. However, it was a life-threatening event to others, who feared what they

might lose because of Jesus' actions. The Sanhedrin consisted of religious leaders who'd been granted authority by their Roman occupiers. The peoples' response to what they saw Jesus do fueled concern that this power equation could change.

In the same way that we tend to avoid the things we fear, the Sanhedrin met to discuss their response. Notice, there was no marveling that Jesus had brought life from death, or consideration that He might truly be from God. Instead, their fearful focus was that any uprising for Jesus could lead the Romans to react in ways that weren't good. What they were really saying was that if the temple and nation were destroyed, these leaders would lose everything. This fear prompted a willingness to do whatever was necessary to maintain their power and status.

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. 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" (John 11:49-50). Motivated by self-preservation, the focus of his words is revealing: "It is better for you." Then Caiaphas says, "It is better for you that Jesus should die for the people." That would avoid trouble with the Romans, and things would remain the same. The great irony is that when John wrote these words, Jerusalem had already been destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, while Christ's death, proposed by Caiaphas, had become the source of life for many.

Without realizing it, Caiaphas' statement was a prophetic word from God. John can't help but offer a sidenote that God was saying a lot more thru Caiaphas than he realized: "He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are



scattered abroad. So from that day on they made plans to put him to death” (John 11:51-53).

As these fearful men began looking for an opening, thinking they were in control, God was writing a much bigger narrative. Jesus’ death and resurrection would lead to a saving of people far beyond what Caiaphas could’ve imagined. It would also draw together as one body Christ followers from around the world. Dale Bruner put it this way: “The Cross would work as both blotter and magnet, to cover (wiping out) and to attract (drawing in).”

Caiaphas declared that Jesus should die for all. Jesus proclaimed that He conquered death for all. Because of His resurrection power, we’re unbound from death’s power to have the last word. No longer can it separate us from God or to bring an end to our lives. Yes, some fear is natural when it comes to the uncertainty of our final days. But here’s what I believe: The same power that conquered death will strengthen us in that experience. And the same presence with us throughout our years will accompany us in that moment of life.

Remember that Sunday morning when I was so fearful about the response I’d receive after my lesson? That experience remains vivid for me because of what happened next. Before I left that day, one person told me it was the best presentation they’d heard on that topic, and another asked if it was recorded. I realized in that moment that God was working in something I had feared, to redeem it and bring good from it.

Friends, God will do the same when it comes to our experience of death one day. We can trust that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, that gives everlasting life to all who believe in Jesus, will be at work to bring good even from something we fear like dying.

Years ago, George MacDonald wrote of a beautiful conversation around death.

Leopold, who is dying, says to two of his friends, “I wish you two could be with me when I am dying. ... It will be just like saying good-bye at the pier and pushing off alone. ... Out, out alone, into the infinite ocean of nobody knows what or where.”

One of Leopold’s friends responded, “Except those that are there already, and they will be waiting to receive you.”

And then MacDonald wrote these words: “You may well hope, if you have friends to see you off, that you will have friends to welcome you too. But I think it’s not so much like setting off from the pier as it is landing at the pier, where your friends are all standing waiting for you.”

Today, we celebrate friends who have left us since last Easter by reading their names. As we do, we remember their contribution to us personally and to this family of faith. We also find comfort in this thought: those we’re remembering today, recently arrived on the other side of death, will one day be waiting to welcome us, delighted to see us when we make the same journey. They’ll be led by Jesus, who offered this assurance a few days after today’s text:

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going” (John 14:1-4).

As we read these names now, it may be that many will be unfamiliar to you. If that’s the case, think of others who’ve played a significant role in your life, whom you miss today, and who will also one day welcome you into life eternal. Amen.