

John 11: 38-46; “Take Away the Stone”, Sermon # 63 in the series – “That All May Honor the Son”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on May 9th, 2021, in the Morning Worship Service.

When I left off preaching to you this past Sunday, we saw that the Lord Jesus was groaning in His spirit. It says in verse 33 that when Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in His spirit and was troubled. Even though He knew what He was going to do in raising Lazarus from the dead, He groaned and was troubled. As a Wise Master Teacher, He knew that it was in this very situation that He must show forth the Perfections of His human nature in such a way that Martha and Mary and everyone there that day, would behold His glory and they would learn from Him how to think about death. He knew that when He raised Lazarus from the dead it would also lead to some of the Jews placing their faith in Him for salvation.

And so, what I want to do in this message is to show you the truth which flows forth to us, here today, in Jesus’ 3 words of Command which are found in this passage. The 1st Command is when Jesus says – Take away the stone. The 2nd is when He says – Lazarus come forth. And the 3rd is – Loose him and let him go. I want you to focus on the thought that the Lord Jesus wants you to see your own responsibility; to take away the stone which blocks your having faith in Him. If you will do this, then you will be able to look for the glory of God in all that He does, and all that He says that He will do for you, and for all believers.

1st of all – Jesus’ word of command – Take away the Stone. (verses 38-41)

Verse 38 says – “Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb.” “It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.” “Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Jesus said this to the people around him, knowing what He was going to do; that which was utterly impossible for any mere man. The only thing which people around Him could do, was to obey His commands. Now, you should understand that if Jesus had wanted to, He could have by mental command taken away the stone Himself, and raised Lazarus from the dead, without any help from any man there. But he asked others around Him to do it. Why? Because Christ will not do for us what we are capable of doing for ourselves, and especially if He commands us to do it. Jesus commanded that others around Him take away the stone to show them that He was going to do something great. He wanted to include them, and draw attention to what He was going to do.

Raising the dead is obviously not in the power of any living man except Jesus Christ, unless He delegates that authority to them. Even in the Old Testament when Elijah and Elisha raised people from the dead man they could only do it because God had given that power to them. The glory of Christ’s Person is that He is fully God and fully Man. When He raised anyone from dead, it was done because He had power in Himself as God to do so. And it was because He was one with the Father in the Essence of their Being. In my last message to you, last Sunday, I opened up for you this amazing truth that Jesus wept. This showed forth His humanity. Even though Jesus was about to do this great miracle, and raise Lazarus from the dead, which would show forth His Deity, yet it says that He wept.

There is much to learn here in this passage about both the Deity and Humanity of Christ. I said to you that in our Lord’s weeping, there was both Divine and Human sympathy being shown to Mary, Martha, and everyone looking on. I said to you, that even though the Father cannot shed tears, and even though He does not groan, for He is spirit; yet in our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, this perfection of sympathy, exists. We do not have an unfeeling Triune God. Indeed, He feels sympathy in a much greater sense than we can ever understand, because He is God. We must understand also, that this sympathy must indeed coexist in both natures of Christ; in His Divine, as well as His human nature. It is not as though, that in His Deity that He

was troubled, here at the tomb of Lazarus. He knew exactly what He was going to do in raising Lazarus from the dead. But He was troubled as a Man; a Man who had fully identified Himself with fallen sinful humanity, except that in Him there were no sinful thoughts; only good ones, even when He was troubled.

The reason that He was troubled, was two-fold. He truly felt the loss of His friend Lazarus and was troubled. Death is troubling to all human beings. Jesus was troubled by the human condition of all men; their having to come to terms with the helplessness and the loss, and the grief that death brings. But the other reason that He was troubled was because of the unbelief of many of the people around Him. Since He was God as well as a Man, it meant that He knew the hearts of everyone there. He knew all the degrees of the unbelief that resided in their hearts. He knew the unbelief of those who were skeptical of Him. Some of those people were thinking or saying the statement of verse 37 – “Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?” They thought that if Jesus had done one great miracle, why could He not have been kind and compassionate enough to come back before Lazarus died, and heal him? They didn’t pause to consider that Christ had something greater in mind.

Unbelief is a sin which plagues the hearts of those who do not know Christ. It characterizes them at many points in their lives. Unless the Holy Spirit is at work in them, striving with them in their hearts to show them the greatness and glory of Christ, they simply will not believe. Jesus would say, of the Spirit’s work, in John 16: 8 – “And He, when He comes, will convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment; of sin, because they do not believe in Me.” In another place, in John 4: 48, Jesus said to the nobleman whose son was at the point of death, “Unless you *people* see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.” The nobleman said to Him, ‘Sir, come down before my child dies!’ And Jesus said to him – “Go your way; your son lives.”

And, it says: “So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went on his way.” “And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, ‘Your son lives!’” “Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better.” “And they said to him, ‘Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.’” “So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, ‘Your son lives.’” “And he himself believed, and his whole household.” I want you to see how this man’s faith was in exercise at every point where Jesus told him to do something. “Go your way; your son lives.” True and saving faith always believes Jesus’ words, even before it sees the miracle performed. Exercising faith leads to proving the truth of Christ’s words.

Unbelief always focuses on, not what Christ is commanding, but upon our own analysis of what God and Christ are doing, and whether we approve of it, or whether we think that it is wise or right. We should understand that Christ is always wise and always right. Unbelief will often draw conclusions too quickly, and the person will not stop to consider what it is that Christ has in mind in the way that He goes about doing the miracle. Such was the case here with dear Martha. When Jesus said – Take away the stone, Martha protested and said to Jesus – “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.” The word “dead” is not in the Greek text, and so it could be read – for he has been four days, there.

Her faith couldn’t rise to the point of thinking that Jesus had something much greater in mind than their ministering to Lazarus’ dead body. She was reluctant to be put herself and everyone there through the difficulty of seeing his dead decomposing body exhumed. It was the words – “Take away the stone” which were said by Jesus, that brought this reaction from Martha. There is a lesson for us here. It is that when the Lord Jesus commands us to do something that we should not question His reasoning or motives in doing so. He always has God’s glory, and our good in mind.

We must learn to pause and consider – What might the purpose be, for the Lord Jesus commanding this? Would He lead me and guide me into a situation where I must trust in Him, and look to Him to do what only He can do? Yes He would. Well, Martha had already been told. This sickness is not unto death. That was the word that the messenger had brought back to her from Jesus. This word would have been enough, it would have been fine, if Jesus had come back right away. But since He had waited and Lazarus had died; Jesus' words seemed to contradict each other. Martha had thought, how can it glorify God to wait and let my brother die? And now that Jesus is back, and standing in front of the tomb, since it has been four days, her own reasoning tells her that nothing further can be done than to minister to a dead body. But Jesus now reminds Martha – “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”

So, Jesus is telling her that there is a “stone” in her thinking which needed to be rolled away, just as much as the literal stone in front of the tomb needed to be taken away. It was her unbelief. It was her not thinking about the words that He had given to her. And so, in verse 41 says that they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. The truth that we need to take away from this is this: When Jesus tells us that He will do the great thing of raising the dead, whether it is physical or spiritual, we need to stop and consider that He can do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we can ask or think according to the power that is in Him.

Let us not incline to our own reasonings of how we expect things to fall out in regard to the death of a loved one, or one of our relatives being saved from their sins, and being Born Again by the Spirit of God. We must pause to consider that He is able to do both equally well. Our part is to roll the stone away; not to be afraid, not to be disappointed, and not to be unbelieving. Roll all of your doubts away that Jesus cannot do something much greater than your reason can take in. Roll all of your fears away that He is sitting at the right hand of God presently and will not do great things in the hearts of people today. Receive Jesus' promise to Martha and make it your own; that if you will believe, you will see the glory of God.

You will see Christ do something much greater than you can presently conceive, if you will simply stop focusing on the dead body of your own reasonings, and perhaps even a literal dead body which has been dead for some days now. Rest your faith and hope completely on Christ's words of command and His promise, and see what He will do. It is always good to expect that Christ will do something that is greater and better than that which we can conceive in our own mind.

The 2nd Word of command which Jesus gives here, is for Lazarus to come forth.

Verse 41 – “Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying.” “And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.’” “And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.” “Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth!’” So our Lord reverently addresses His Father in prayer as a Man; the greatest of men. He lifted His eyes to heaven, realizing that as a Son, He was addressing His Father as the One whom He loved and trusted in; that He would hear Him. He uses words which show to everyone around Him that His communion in prayer to the Father was constant and continual; that He had the expectation that He would be heard, and that He would thank God for the answer to His prayer.

This mighty work must needs be done in visible submission to the Father, not simply at His own word. As God the Son He was capable of raising the dead on His own, but He wanted everyone there must know that He and His Father were one in purpose as well as in Essence. But also as a Man, that He wanted to show that He was submissive to the Father's will at every point, in everything. And so He says that He knows that the Father always heard Him, and this

was because He always did those things which pleased the Father. And also because He was in the Father and the Father in Him. He would show forth the fact that He was going to do this great work of raising Lazarus so that they would see that the Father had sent Him to do it; that He had sent Him into the world, and providentially ordered that all of His works be done to the Father's glory.

This leads me to say that is a great part of the gospel, that we tell people who we speak to, of the glory of Christ. It is good that we speak of the Father sending the Son into the world to be the Man who would do all things well, and that He has done all things to the Father's glory, perfectly. We should speak of Him as He is; the Light of the World, the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and that He perfectly represent the Father in everything He said and everything He did. And then, when He had finished praying, He cried out with a loud voice, and said – Lazarus come forth!" Why would He use a loud voice? I believe that He used a loud voice because He is the Captain of all of His people's salvation. He has gone to war against the powers of sin and death and He would overcome them at every point.

He was attacking the gates of death as a Mighty Warrior who saves, here. He was alerting heaven and earth, angels and men, that this mighty work would be done. Soldiers often shout when they go into battle to storm the ramparts. He would alert everyone there to the greatness of this work of storming death's gates, tearing them off and carrying them away, spiritually speaking. Death would not have the victory, and Lazarus the captive of death, would be released! This loud voice that the Lord Jesus commanded Lazarus to come forth with, it prefigures what He will do at the last Day for all of the righteous dead. If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. And when Christ comes this 2nd Time, every eye shall see Him. He shall descend with a shout and the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God. We shall be raised and changed to be with Him forever!

Let us remember also, that Lazarus was some distance from where Jesus was, and as life was being given to Him by Christ, he would also hear His loud voice call to him to come forth. And he would respond. He would exert himself, to free himself from the confines of the cave and struggle his way out. We can apply this to the spiritual effectual call of the believer which brings them from darkness to light and from death to life by the call of the Savior. It is no uncertain call, no uncertain voice that is heard by each believer, spiritually there in their heart. It is not an audible voice in many. It was to Saul on the road to Damascus, but not many others. But is spiritually loud and clear to the heart that spiritually hears and knows the voice of the Shepherd. Lazarus was asleep, as Jesus said, and so, He would with this loud voice, wake Him up.

Only the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, can awake the sleeping dead. Only Christ who has life in Himself can give life to those who have no life in themselves. But this is what He does, together with the Father and the Spirit, in the New Birth. He gives life, and then for as long as you live, He gives it more abundantly. But we must do as Lazarus did and respond to Christ's call to come forth and struggle out into the light as best we can. We awake from the sleep of death, and we rise from the death of sin to the newness of the life that we will live for Him. We labor to come out of the darkness and into the light, and we take the kingdom by holy violence and take it by forth. We will come forth, because Christ calls.

Is this you? Have you decidedly and decisively answered Christ's call? Remember the words of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 5: 8-14 – "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." "Walk as children of light) for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord." "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them." "For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret." "But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light." "Therefore, He say: 'Awake you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.'" This is how you ought to respond the call of Christ

to come forth from your death in trespasses and sins, and struggle to leave your grave clothes behind.

3rd – The Command of Christ to loose him and let him go.

Verse 44 – “And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth.” “Jesus said to them, ‘Loose him, and let him go.’” It appears that Lazarus’ whole body was bound with grave clothes from head to foot, according to the manner of that day. Because of this, he could not very well use his hands or his feet. And his face was bound about with a cloth as well. Jesus had to tell his friends to go and loose him from these grave clothes. Even so, we must understand that after we answer the call of Christ to salvation and a new life, that we may carry the remnants of the old life with us for a time. We may need the help of other believers to help us to understand how to come out of our old life and into the new life of practicing righteousness; putting off the Old Man and putting on the New.

“A dead soul, when raised, may still be entangled in some things from their past life.” (David Thomas) “Just as the body of Lazarus, after he had left the grave, was bound in grave clothes, so old prejudices, associations, habits, often entangle a risen soul.” “The work of the living Church and a living ministry is to loose encumbered souls.” Brethren, will you not pray about how you might help new believers and young believers off with the grave cloths of their former life. Carefully unwrap from them, the old ways of thinking by sharing the truth of the Bible with them. Show them how they have a new life and that they can leave these old things of sin and worldliness behind.

You can help loose them from the past by working through with them what it was like when you first heard Christ’s call; the sins that you repented of, and the bad habits that needed to go. Remind them that since they have heard Christ’s voice in their heart and are now risen from the dead to newness of life, that you will be there to help them to understand the new and better way, the new and living way which Christ has consecrated for us, through the veil, that is His flesh. Tell them that they can draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having their heart sprinkled from and evil conscience and their bodies washed with pure water.” Tell them to hold fast their confession of their hope without wavering, for Christ who has called them will be faithful. And consider how you might stir them up to love and good works.