

Removing the Hindrances to Movement

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O praise the name of the Lord our God! Can you imagine being in a position where that's what you want to do but you can't do because there is something that has bound you? There are graveclothes upon you and you have been risen to life and you desire to do what we just sung but you're incapable of doing it? Today we're going to talk about graveclothes. We're going to talk about the physical things in our life that sometimes hinder us from being and doing the person in Christ that we have the freedom to be. We've already had a time of confession, let's continue at this time of requesting, "Lord, we've confessed what our struggles are, now help us, O God, that the graveclothes would no longer be a part of our lives."

Let's pray.

Lord, as we come to this time, Lord, we've already had a time of confession, Lord, maybe we need to go ahead and keep on confessing. Lord, we are guilty of allowing ourselves to be wrapped with the graveclothes of life, the physical expectation and baggage of the past and over-expectation of the present and future. Lord, oftentimes we come to this place bound but, Lord, you have declared that we are free in Jesus Christ to praise the name of the Lord our God, not just with our mouths but with our lives. So help us, O God, today to experience the freedom that because of an empty grave we have the right to, not just the privilege but the right. Help us, O God, to experience that freedom today. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the Gospel of John 11. As you're turning to John 11, we find ourselves in one of the most familiar stories in the entire life and ministry of Jesus Christ. I mean, you think about all the things that are written about Jesus: he walked on the water; he healed the lame; he took the food and he multiplied it. But probably that one act, that one miracle that if we would be honest with ourselves outside of the resurrection itself that we would elevate to the top, is when he stood before a tomb and he said, "Lazarus, come forth." That which had been dead for four days, that which his sister said, "Behold, he stinketh," that which was no longer breathing, no longer moving, now had come to life. Today as we turn to John 11, we're going to come to the conclusion of the Lazarus story.

Now some of you may be thinking, "I thought that was last week? I mean, Jesus said, 'Lazarus, come forth.' That's the end of the story, right?" It's actually not the end of the

story for one of the things that we discussed last week, not just in the person of Lazarus but in our lives individually and even as a corporate body, there can be death that seeps in and when death seeps in, there are three things that are noticeably absent: there is an absence of life, there is an absence of movement, and there's an absence of influence. Lazarus lay dead in the tomb. Life was nowhere to be found but when Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth," life once again had been raised and had been instilled into his life. When you get to chapter 12, you're going to discover that the influence of Lazarus returns for he's sitting there just having a meal with his friends and family and those who opposed the person of Jesus come to him questioning his story, questioning his testimony, and he influences them by saying, "I used to be dead but now I'm alive."

But in between the life and the influence, there is movement, the ability to go where one needs to go, the ability to handle what one needs to handle, the ability to hear what someone needs to hear, or speak what somebody needs to speak. Today we're going to see the conclusion of the Lazarus story, one who had been raised and experienced a new life, but was hindered as far as his physical movement was concerned. What we're going to see today is oftentimes as happens in our lives not only individually but corporately as well.

John 11, three very simple verses beginning in verse 44. It says,

44 And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound and clothed about with a napkin. Jesus said unto them, Loose him, and let him go. 45 Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. 46 But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.

Now it seems just like a very simple passage but we need to peel away some layers here because Jesus not only said, "Lazarus, come forth," in verse 43, but in verse 44, he says, "Loose him, and let him go." What did this mean for Lazarus? What does this mean for us not just as individuals but as a corporate body?

I think the first thing we need to do, though, is we need to clarify. There needs to be some clarification here and this is very important to understand. We need to draw a line of distinction between a supernatural spiritual reality in one's life and physical graveclothes that may still reside in a person's life. Hear me very clearly: when Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth," he was as alive at that moment as he was ever going to be and with those graveclothes on him, he was alive even in the midst of them, and when they pulled the graveclothes off, he was still as alive then as he was before. The graveclothes coming off did not bring him life, Jesus brought him life, and when Jesus spoke into him, it was much like Adam in the garden of Eden when it says that he spoke unto him and he became a living soul.

So what we see in the life of Lazarus is here is one for four days had been in the grave, for four days according to his sister, "He stinketh," he has been bound, he has been

wrapped in the customary fashion of his day. In Jewish culture, the way in which they would have prepared a body, very different than we would today but I guess for our context, kind of a pseudo-mummification. What I mean by that is this: they would have taken cloth and they would have wrapped his body very tightly but don't think in terms of sealing it like you see particularly in Egyptian history. We see stories all throughout Scripture, in fact even here in John 11, where his sisters are coming to prepare and to anoint the body. Even in Luke 24 when Jesus had been in the grave on what we know as that Easter resurrection day, the women were there before dawn to anoint his body. So the traditional fashion of which not only Lazarus but any other person in his culture would have been buried is that they would have had a special set of cloths wrapped around his entire body from head to toe.

Why is this important? Well, I don't know about you but at least in my story of hearing Lazarus all throughout my life, anytime you hear the story, "Lazarus, come forth," didn't you just think that Lazarus just got up and walked out? But that's not how the story goes. In fact, we discover Jesus calls him forth but he's not able to physically move. Now we need to clarify this: he was touched by the words of Jesus, that which was dead was made alive by Jesus, but there were some physical hindrances, there were some things from a physical perspective that were keeping him from moving, keeping him from going where he needed to go, keeping him from saying what he needed to say, and hearing what he needed to hear. You know, sometimes we forget that it is Jesus Christ alone who brings life into our lives but we also need to clarify that sometimes there can be physical things that can keep us from being where we need to be; keep us from being in a position we need to be to experience all that the Lord has for us.

This morning I want to share with you one of my favorite stories in my ministerial life. In fact, I'm going to go back 20+ years. I was a young 20 year old and I got a phone call one day as a senior in college, and it was a man who would later become a dear friend of mine. He called me up and he said, "Jeff, I got your name from somebody." He said, "Our church just lost our pastor and we need someone to preach next Sunday. We don't have anybody. Would you be willing? We call this pulpit supply, is what we call it. Would you be willing just to come in and preach one Sunday for us?" I did not know that I would become their pastor for three years and, by the way, I want to give a shout out to Bethel Heights Baptist Church in Gatesville, Texas.

This is where the story took place. In fact, that first Sunday that I showed up, there were 17 people in the congregation. A wonderful time in Tracy and I's life but I'll never forget that day because he had given me directions and I have to tell you how to get to this church to set up what took place at the church. This little town of Gatesville is about 40-45 miles outside of Waco, Texas where I went to college. I mean, you talk about middle of nowhere Texas, you're there when you're there, okay? The instructions were to come into town on the highway and to go outside of town for three miles, three miles past on this old highway. When you're three miles past town, take a left at the burned down house. True directions. Take a right at the cemetery and go a mile and a half down the dirt road.

Now this was great directions because we'd always have people call the church and say, "I need help with this. I need help with that." I'd say, "How did you hear about us?" "I saw you from the highway." No you didn't. You're lying. You didn't see us from the highway. I mean, we were out there. Those were the directions.

So I show up and this individual meets me out on the front steps of the church. On the outside it looked like a three bedroom house that had a very large living room for a sanctuary. He spoke to me. We talked, kind of got his story, kind of the history of the church. About 20, maybe 25 minutes into our conversation, I had showed up an hour early just as he had requested, he just kind of looked at me kind of strangely and he said, "Jeff, are you going to take that off?" I said, "What are you talking about?" You see, I had come in a full suit: coat, tie, whole bit, whole nine yards. He said, "You know, I think you might want to take that coat off. Nobody is going to have a coat on today." He said, "I would hate for you to make people uncomfortable. Could you take it off?" "Oh no, that's no problem." I took the coat off, put it in the car.

We made our way in. He gave me a tour of the inside of the church. It took about 38 seconds. It didn't take long at all. Walked right around. Began to share with me about Sunday school classes and various things and we just began to talk. About 10 or 15 minutes later, we were getting ready for those who had not come to Sunday school that began to come to church and we were going to greet them at the front door and he looked at me again and he said, "Jeff, can I ask you a question?" I said, "Yeah." He goes, "Do you think you'd mind taking that off?" I said, "Excuse me?" He said, "I think you need to take the tie off. I mean, seriously." He said, "Nobody here is going to be in a tie. Nobody is going to be in a suit." Here's what he said, "I sure would hate for somebody to judge what you're about to teach us based on a preconception of how they see you dressed." He said, "If you don't mind, nobody is going to have a tie or coat on, could you just take those off so that everybody is kind of comfortable?" I said, "No problem." I took the tie off.

We sat at the front door and we met everybody that came in. He had known them his whole life, I had known them for all about five minutes. I did not know at the time, I did not know, that his wife was the pianist. I did not know that one of his daughters led the choir. I mean, I did not know that the breadth of his family was half of the church and they did basically everything. So there was about 30 seconds before the service was to begin. I did not know that he was coming to talk to me about the music. I did not know he was going to talk to me about the structure. He said, "Jeff, can I ask you a question?" I said, "The answer is I'm not taking anything else off." And he took back and I said, "Well, those are the only two questions you've asked me is to take stuff off." To this day when we see each other, it's kind of a running joke but the point of the story is I think sometimes we forget that there can be physical things in our lives whether it be schedules, whether it be times, whether it be dress, that whether we mean to or not, can be graveclothes in our life. They keep us from moving. They keep us from going where the Lord wants us to go. They keep us from hearing what the Lord needs us to hear.

So I want to be real clear this morning: Jesus brought Lazarus to life irrespectively of the graveclothes. The breath was spiritual, the graveclothes were physical. But then I think we need to identify, there needs to be some identification here and I want you to know specifically what is said about Lazarus in verse 44, he was bound hand and foot with graveclothes and his face was bound about with a napkin. That's the traditional cultural means of doing things but I want you to put yourself in the position of Lazarus for just a moment. Here was a man who has been brought to life by Jesus, here is a man who is breathing once again, but he can't go where he needs to go. He can't handle what he needs to handle. He cannot hear what he needs to hear. He cannot even speak what he needs to speak. And we need to identify specifically that we oftentimes find ourselves in the exact same position when our graveclothes in our life, when there are physical boundaries in our life that hinder us spiritually, they keep us from going where we need to go. They keep us from handling what we need to handle. They keep us from hearing what we need to hear and sometimes they even keep us from speaking what we need to speak.

I want you to imagine being Lazarus for just a moment. Jesus has just spoken and you're alive again. You would want to run, but you can't run. You would want to hug, but you can't hug. You would want to shout, but you can't shout. You'd want to hear, but you can't hear. You are bound by the physical trappings of this life. You see, Lazarus was alive but he didn't have any movement and so how was it that that took place? How was it that this life that was spoken into Lazarus, how did these graveclothes get off? Well, there was some unity and what we see here, not only the need to clarify spiritual versus physical and identify the hands, the feet, the mouth and the ears, but we also need to understand the unity that was involved, the unification here, because I'm not an English major but notice what Jesus said, "And he said unto them." The last time I checked, "them" means more than one.

I want you to think about who would have been there that day. I mean, this was in our context today, this day that Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth," was the equivalent of our funeral service. This was the day when they anointed the body for the last time so Mary and Martha, his sisters, would have been there. Most likely the disciples who came with Jesus who were friends with Lazarus, they would have been there. Potentially many members of the community would have been there. This could have been a pretty significant sized group. Why is that important because it says, "Jesus said to them, 'Let him loose'"? What's important about that? That this community of family, this community of friends had to come together to loosen that one that was bound.

Now you think about that quantitatively: it took more of them to help him be unbound than the one who was bound. They had to set aside their agendas. They had to set aside their preferences. They had to set aside their, "Well, why can't he just do this himself?" and say, "Do you know what? I'm going to get involved in this situation. I'm going to help somebody who can't move have the movement that I personally possess."

But then think about the quality, that all of a sudden one who couldn't move could move again, one who couldn't hear could hear again, one who couldn't speak could speak again. It took a community of faith gathered around this person to assist not in his spiritual

awakening, Jesus is the only one that can do that, but in helping remove the physical barriers to the movement in his life so that he could be where Jesus wanted him to be, doing what Jesus desired him to do.

It's an incredible story of Lazarus, his family, his friends and his community. But today, maybe his story needs to be our story as well. If you're a guest or a visitor with us today or maybe you haven't been with us for a long time...