

## INTRODUCTION

I heard a funny story about a Baptist preacher who was attempting to impress upon the congregation the reality of death. He said, "Every member of this church is going to die!" When he said that a young boy on the front row giggled. So the preacher thundered again, "I say, every member of this church is going to die!" The same kid on the front row laughed again. The preacher stopped and said, "Son, what's so funny about what I said?" The boy said, "I'm not a member of this church!"

Well, if the Lord carries all of us are going to face death – whether you're a member of this church or not. But the good news is that Jesus has conquered death. In the message from last week we read that Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live." That's the truth, and then Jesus is going to demonstrate the truth by calling Lazarus out from the tomb. It's the seventh of seven miracles that John has selected to place in His narrative to encourage us to believe on Jesus and as a result of believing in Jesus we will have life.

We finished the text last week with Jesus asking Martha if she believed. She said, "Yes, Lord I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who has come into the world."

John 11:28-44. Having said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you."

As soon as Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Jesus had not yet come into the village but was still in the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw that Mary got up quickly and went out. They followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to cry there.

As soon as Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and told him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!"

When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, he was deeply moved in his spirit and troubled. "Where have you put him?" he asked.

"Lord," they told him, "come and see." Jesus wept.

So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Couldn't he who opened the blind man's eyes also have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. "Remove the stone," Jesus said.

Martha, the dead man's sister, told him, "Lord, there is already a stench because he has been dead four days."

Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you heard me. I know that you always hear me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, so that they may believe you sent me." After he said this, he shouted with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unwrap him and let him go."

John 11:35 contains only two words: "Jesus wept." It is the shortest verse in the Bible, but it is also the deepest verse in the Bible. It reminds us of the humanity of Jesus. Jesus was 100% God and He was 100% human. So why was He crying? Most commentators suggest that Jesus was moved by the grief of the sisters, so Jesus was crying with them. However, there is also the possibility that Jesus was crying FOR Lazarus. Jesus knew that Lazarus had already been in Heaven for four days, and He wasn't doing His friend a favor by calling Him back to this world of sin, sickness, and death. As I mentioned last week, Lazarus wasn't resurrected – he was resuscitated. He would die again.

This is an amazing miracle, but every miracle of Jesus carries a spiritual message. Each sign has significance. This miracle is a picture of salvation.

The great New Testament scholar Warren Wiersbe points this out: "The experience of Lazarus is a good illustration of what happens to a sinner when he trusts the Savior. Lazarus was dead, and all sinners are dead. He was decayed, because death and decay go together. Lazarus was raised from the dead by the power of God and all who trust Christ have been given new life and lifted out of the graveyard of sin. Lazarus was set free from the graveclothes and given new liberty. Because of the great change in Lazarus, many people desired to see him and his 'living witness' was used by God to bring people to salvation." (Be Alive, p. 140)

I'm calling this message "The Lazarus Lesson" because it describes three different spiritual conditions. As we examine them, I'd like for you to identify which spiritual condition matches where you are right now.

### **I. DEAD: The picture of a lost person.**

There was only one thing wrong with Lazarus. He was physically dead. His corpse had been in that tomb for four days. But Lazarus wasn't there. It was just his body. It was just his shell. The Bible teaches that God created us in His image. Just as God is a tri-unity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are a tri-unity: body, soul, and spirit. With our body we relate to the physical world beneath us. With our soul, our personality, we related to the social world around us. And with our spirit, we related to the spiritual world. But until a person places their faith in God, the Bible says that the spirit is dead. So at one time, all of us were like Lazarus. We were dead. The Bible says, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1)

When a person places their faith in Jesus, He gives life to our spirit and we become spiritually alive. Until that happens a person is spiritually dead. So it is fully possible for a person to be physically alive and spiritually dead at the same moment.

There are people listening to my voice right now who are dead. You say, "No, I'm alive and healthy. My heart is beating and my lungs are breathing." That may be truth, but if you don't know Jesus you are in the state of spiritual death. The Bible says in 1 John 5:12: "Whoever has the son has life. The one who doesn't have the Son doesn't have life." Jesus is the source of eternal life.

Let me illustrate it. Most of you have put up your Christmas decorations by now. If you had an artificial Christmas tree, raise your hand. Now if you had a live Christmas tree raise your hand. I didn't mean that as a trick question, but unless that tree was planted with roots in soil, it wasn't a live tree. It was a dead tree. When it was cut down, it was cut off from the source of life.

At Christmas we can take a dead tree and decorate it with lights and tinsel until it looks much fancier than it ever did before it was cut down. That reminds me of people who are spiritually dead. They may decorate their lives with all the trappings of a good life – wealth, jewelry, fancy clothes. They may even have a physically fit body. But like that Christmas tree, if they don't know Jesus, they are cut off from the source of life.

With death, comes decay and corruption. And some spiritually dead people are obviously living a life of decay and corruption. But on the other hand, some spiritually dead people seem to be living a good life.

We read that Jesus raised three people from the dead during His ministry. The young daughter of Jairus had just died and was still in her bed when Jesus said, "Little girl, get up." And she was revived. On another occasion Jesus came up on a funeral procession where the son of a widow of Nain was being carried for burial. He had been dead for several hours. But Jesus told him to get up – and He was revived. But we learn that Lazarus had been dead for four days. Of those three people, which one was the deadest? They were all three dead – whether it was four minutes, four hours, or four days, they were all dead.

Some people without Christ may commit acts of kindness while others commit evil deeds—but dead is still dead. There is only one thing a dead man needs: Life. And Jesus alone can give life.

## **II. DEFEATED: A Christian in bondage to the past.**

When Jesus called for Lazarus to come out of the tomb, Lazarus' physical life was immediately restored. The corruption of his flesh was reversed. But he still had a problem. He was wrapped up like a mummy in the grave clothes that had been wrapped around his body.

I found a picture to help you visualize what Lazarus might have been like in the graveclothes. If you ever visit Salt Lake City, at the south edge of the metro area there's a place called the Light

of the World Gardens. In this garden, sculptor Angela Johnson has re-created 35 life-sized sculptures of scenes from the life of Jesus. She portrays Lazarus as he starts to get up but he is restricted by the graveclothes that are entangling his body.

Now, of course, Jesus could have easily caused the graveclothes to just drop away. But I believe He was using this as a teachable moment. He told those friends standing by to unwrap him and let him go. He wanted us to understand what it means to be set free.

Like Lazarus, there are many people who have received life from Jesus, but they are still living in bondage to their sinful past. These kinds of Christians have been labeled "Carnal Christians." This term is based upon the King James translation of 1 Corinthians 3:1 where Paul wrote these words to the immature Christians in Corinth "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ." It's the word *sarkikos*, which means to live according to the fleshly desires instead of being led by the spirit. The new versions translate carnal as "people of the flesh." When I was first being introduced to discipleship by Campus Crusade for Christ. They had three circles. One represented a natural man – Christ outside the life and Ego on the throne. The second circle represented a spiritual man – Christ inside the circle and on the throne and Ego off the throne. The third circle was the carnal man – Christ was in the life but Ego was still on the throne. A carnal Christian is a believer who lives according to the flesh instead of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

We could call a carnal Christian someone who is still in bondage of the past, like Lazarus before his graveclothes were removed.

So there may be some of you who are no longer spiritually dead – you have heard the voice of Jesus and received life. But your problem is that you are living a defeated life. You are still entangled in the stinking graveclothes of your past. How would you know if you're a carnal Christian? Here are three signs:

### **A. A carnal Christian can't walk consistently (lifestyle).**

The mummified Lazarus couldn't walk freely. The New Testament has a lot to say about a Christian's walk. It's a reference to our daily lifestyle. You take steps forward when you walk, and the Christian life should be a steady progression toward maturity.

Later John will write that we should walk in the light as He is in the light. Paul wrote that we should walk worthy of the One who has called us. He writes that if we walk in the Spirit, we will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.

How is your walk with the Lord? Are you daily spending time alone with Him? Are you aware of His presence at all times?

Do you demonstrate your faith in Jesus by your daily lifestyle? If someone followed you around for a week, would they be able to say, "Now that is a Christian who is walking with the Lord?"

Here's another way to put it. If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there even be enough evidence to convict you?

Be honest with yourself. Are there still some smelly graveclothes of your past that keep you from growing toward maturity? Jesus wants you to be set free so you can walk consistently.

### **B. A carnal Christian can't see clearly (insight).**

Our text says that a cloth was covering Lazarus' face – he couldn't see. A Carnal Christian is someone who has received life, but they are still struggling with spiritual blindness. When you are still engaged in past habits and sins, it can blind you to spiritual truth.

All of us have hind-sight – we can always look back at what happened. Only a few people have fore-sight – the ability to predict what will happen. But when you are filled with the Spirit you are giving insight – the ability to understand what God is doing right now in your life.

Years ago in a church I served in Alabama, a high-school football coach came to know Christ. He got excited about the Lord and started reading the Bible and sharing his faith. He would talk to me about how he just couldn't put the Bible down. He said, "Pastor, when I read the Bible now, it's like someone has turned on the light!" I encouraged him to keep on growing.

Then he came to me one Sunday and his smile was gone. I said, "What's wrong, coach?" He was reluctant to tell me at first. But then he said, "After I came to know the Lord, I forgot to cancel my subscription to Playboy magazine." That was a magazine with pornographic pictures. He said, "I know I shouldn't have but I looked through the magazine. Then I threw it way and picked up my Bible. But it was as if someone had turned out the light."

I prayed with him and we talked about staying in the Word every day, and refusing to look at that filth. He agreed, and it wasn't long before he came to me and said, "Pastor, the Lord has turned back on the light." Let me ask you, when you read God's Word, is He able to illuminate it by His Spirit, or are you allowing your old graveclothes to prevent you from seeing?

### **C. A carnal Christian can't talk correctly (vocabulary).**

The world has a vocabulary that includes words that stink worse than graveclothes. I recall my dad telling me that he can remember going to see *Gone with the Wind* in 1940. At the end, Rhett Butler said to Scarlett O'Hara, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a .... And you know what he didn't give." My dad said there was an audible gasp of outrage that such a dirty word would be spoken on a movie screen. Well, we've come a loooooong way since then.

I had a friend this week tell me she took her 13-year old to see the new *Jumanji* movie and said the thing that stood out to her was the number of G-D's and other curse words.

Christians should have a different vocabulary than the world. The Bible says in Ephesians 4:29 that "No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need."

As you probably know, Kanye West is now singing for the Lord. I'm going to give Him the benefit of the doubt and hope He is sincere because he can certainly influence many people. One way you'll be able to tell if he is sincere, will be to see if he drops his profanity. Because Jesus said in Matthew 23, "Out of the abundance of a person's heart, their mouth speaks." I hope God sends someone to disciple him in the Word and prayer. There is one hopeful sign. He has announced that he plans to go back and re-record his earlier music and remove the profanity.

But you aren't responsible for Kanye's speech. What about your vocabulary? Does any unwholesome talk come of your mouth? There may be some graveclothes you need to throw away.

### **III. DELIVERED AND DANGEROUS: A dynamic witness for Jesus.**

Because of the holidays I turned this outline in before Christmas. I want to add another word. Lazarus wasn't just dangerous. He was delivered AND dangerous, so add that word to your notes.

Jesus told the people there to UNWRAP HIM AND LET HIM GO. When Lazarus was disentangled, he was delivered, and then he became dangerous. But it's a good kind of dangerous. He became a dangerous witness against the devil and the enemies of Christ. Lazarus became such a dynamic witness that the Jewish leaders wanted to kill him as well. In John 12 they had a big party for Jesus and Lazarus was there eating with Jesus. "Then a large crowd of the Jews learned he was there. They came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, the one he had raised from the dead. But the chief priests had decided to kill Lazarus also, because he was the reason many of the Jews were deserting them and believing in Jesus." (John 12:9-11)

Jesus gave Lazarus life, then He gave Him liberty, and now Lazarus is enjoying a fellowship meal with Jesus. Some people think the Christian life is like a funeral but it's more like a feast. He invites you from the spiritual tomb of your lostness to the spiritual table of fellowship with Him.

As you examine your spiritual condition, let me ask you two questions:

#### **A. Are you freed from old thought patterns and habits?**

Have all the stinking grave clothes of your life before Christ been removed? When you come to know Christ, you are no longer conformed to the habits and mindset of the world. Jesus transforms your mind so that you look at everything from the perspective of the word of God.

I've said it before, but don't you allow your worldview to be shaped by Fox News or CNN or any other secular source. You and I must have a Biblical world view.

The ministry of the church isn't only to call people out from the tomb of spiritual deadness, but to unwrap the saints so they can be set free to be dangerous for the Kingdom.

Can you honestly say as we sing, "My chains are gone, I've been set free?" The great old hymn O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing says: "He breaks the power of cancelled sin. He sets the prisoners free."

### **B. Are you dangerous to the devil's work?**

The FBI keeps a list of the Ten Most Wanted Men. These are dangerous criminals. If the devil had a list of the most dangerous Christians, would you be on it?

Leonard Ravenhill has a chapter in his book *Why Revival Tarries* entitled Known in Hell. It's based on an obscure event that is described in Acts 19. Paul had been preaching in Ephesus for 2 years—longer than he stayed anywhere else. A city-wide revival broke out and thousands came to Christ, and God was performing miracles through Paul. There were 7 Jewish men who claimed to be exorcists. They had heard the words Paul used to cast out demons, so they tried to copy that formula. So these seven brothers went into a house where a demon possessed man was and they said, "I command you by the name of Jesus who Paul preaches!" The demon in the man actually spoke to them:

The evil spirit answered them, "I know Jesus, and I recognize Paul—but who are you?" (Acts 19:15)

Then the demonized man proceeded to jump on the seven brothers and beat them up until they ran out of the house bleeding and naked. Now, the point of that story is that this demon knew Jesus of course, but he also recognized the name of Paul. Paul was so dangerous against the devil's work that his name was known.

Two thousand years ago Jesus told a dead man, "Lazarus, come out!" Today, Jesus is still calling out to dead people to give them life. Two thousand years ago, Jesus told them to unwrap Lazarus so he could be free. And today, Jesus is still setting people free with His truth. And today, Jesus is looking for Christians like Lazarus who will be dangerous warriors for the Kingdom of God. When you are totally sold out, don't expect the world to love you. Remember, they wanted to kill Lazarus, too.

Adrian Rogers once said: "We're people twice-born in a world of once-born people and we're going to be going against the tide all the time. You let a church really stand for the Lord Jesus, and the world will resist it. You let a real Lazarus come forth; one who has been set free from the old life. I'm talking about someone whose life is so radically changed that people all around know that God is in business and this world will try to snuff you out."

So where are you in these three conditions? Are you spiritually dead? You can come to Jesus for life today. Are you saved, but you are defeated? Jesus wants to deliver you today from your old grave clothes and transform you into a living witness for Him.



## OUTLINE

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- B. See clearly (insight).
- C. Talk correctly (vocabulary).

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The evil spirit answered them, "I know Jesus, and I recognize Paul—but who are you?" *Acts 19:15*

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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