

Fil-Am Community Church

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Key Verse: John 11:1-44

“WHEN JESUS RAISES YOU UP”

Good morning! We’re on the fourth part of our five-part series on a few of the major miracles that Jesus performed while on earth. We talked about the miracle of Jesus turning water into wine, then the miracle of Jesus calming the storm, and then last week, we looked at the miracle of Jesus making the blind see. Today, we’re going to look at the miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Why did I choose to talk about this miracle? Because it is Palm Sunday today. And what has it to do with Palm Sunday? It is because the raising of Lazarus paved the way for the people in Jerusalem to joyously receive him as their King and Messiah.

If you look at the book of John, the triumphant entry of Jesus in Jerusalem is narrated in chapter 12. The previous chapter, meanwhile, gives the story of Lazarus. Actually, at least a week transpires between the rising of Lazarus and Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem. Time enough for word to go around that the expected King and Messiah had performed the greatest miracle yet that is known to them. John 12:17-18 says, *“Many in the crowd had seen Jesus call Lazarus from the tomb, raising him from the dead, and they were telling others about it. That was the reason so many went out to meet him—because they had heard about this miraculous sign.”*

Now, before this time, Jesus had actually raised two other people, one was the only son of a widow from Nain whose story we find in Luke 7:11-14 and the

other one was the daughter of Jairus, a religious leader, whose story is recounted in Mark 5:22-43. So, what makes Lazarus so special that people were so astounded and so enthusiastic that they met Jesus with shouting and acclamation when he entered Jerusalem?

You see, people heard that Lazarus had been dead for four days when Jesus resurrected him. The Jews believe that when someone dies, the dead person's spirit hovers around for three days and there's a possibility that the spirit could come back to the dead body. Thus, that person is not 100% dead. He could come back to life on his own, so to speak. On the fourth day, they believe that the spirit is gone forever and never to come back. And so, the dead is really dead. No hope of becoming alive again. He is dead, kaput, nil! That was the case with Lazarus but not with the two other persons that Jesus brought to life. And so, when word spread around about it, finally people believed that Jesus was the real thing. He was the Messiah and King that they've waited for so long. God was glorified. Do you know see why Jesus waited for four days before he came to Bethany to raise Lazarus?

But, of course, this was not the greatest miracle of Jesus. It was yet to come. And that will be the subject of our last message next week.

Lazarus, along with his two sisters, Mary and Martha, lived in Bethany, a town about two miles east of Jerusalem. Their house was a favorite "getaway" location of Jesus. He loved them and loved to spend time with them. So he visited Bethany often. But because a significant event happened here the name of the town was changed from "Bethany" to the modern "El `Azariyeh" or "The town of Lazarus."

So, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. He was dead physically. But not all that is dead is physical. You can have a dead ambition, or dead dreams, or a dead

relationship. Or maybe you feel like your finances are dead, or you're in a situation when it seems like it's a dead-end.

The sad part is, some people are living but are not really living. They're dead inside, their dreams have died, the future seems bleak, and they don't know how to live again. Are you in that situation?

Have you been waiting for a breakthrough? A miracle to happen? Let me tell you, this morning there is hope because Jesus can raise you up. He can do a miracle in your life.

Now, our passage is taken from John 11. It is quite long and you can read it on your own afterwards. But let me give you a summary.

Jesus was staying close to the Jordan River when news arrived that his close friend Lazarus was sick. Lazarus is the brother of Mary and Martha and they lived in Bethany. Instead of hurrying up, Jesus chose to stay where he was for two days. Then, he decided to go. The disciples discouraged him because they knew that Jesus was in danger of being killed. Bethany was close Jerusalem and he met a lot of opposition there before. Jesus told them that Lazarus had fallen asleep and he would wake him up. He was saying that Lazarus was dead but his disciples did not understand and said it was better for Lazarus to just take a rest and so Jesus did not have to go. Jesus, however, said that he had to go so their faith can be strengthened. In the end, the disciples went with Jesus.

In Bethany, they were met by the grieving sisters of Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Both expressed their disappointment at Jesus for not coming sooner but Jesus tried to reassure them. But he was so filled with emotion as well that the Bible says he wept. There were other people who were around them and all of them wondered why Jesus did not heal Lazarus. Then, they went to grave site of Lazarus.

Jesus asked for the tombstone to be removed. Martha protested saying that there would be a bad odor since Lazarus had been dead for four days already. Surely, his body was already decomposing. Jesus reminded her that all she needed to do was to believe to see the glory of God. So, the stone was rolled away and after praying to the Father, Jesus called out, “Lazarus, come out”.

Lazarus came out still wrapped with linens like a mummy and Jesus gave the final command to the people to free Lazarus from his grave clothes.

Now, in the miracle that Jesus performed in Bethany, we see three other minor miracles that happened. Three minor miracles that can have a major impact on your life. Let’s look at these three this morning. These are miracles that happen as Jesus raises you up.

First,

I. The Miracle of Perspective – “Why?”

Martha says in verse 21, “*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask.*” The question she is asking is “Why did you let this happen?!” She says, “Jesus, if you would have simply come when we asked you to, you could have healed Lazarus and he would be fine, he would not have died. Jesus, WHY didn’t you come and help us?”

This is a question we often ask - Why did God let this happen. Normally what we are really asking is “Why did God let this happen TO ME? Normally, we are okay to accept the consequences of living in a fallen world as long as those consequences happen to someone else. But when bad things happen to us, it shakes our faith. We question the goodness of God. But we need to realize that God uses crisis to change our lives. Personal crisis will test personal faith.

In the midst of hope, Jesus challenges Martha to believe. He promises, her brother will live, but she thinks he is talking only of the future resurrection. Jesus

assures her of his power to give eternal life, and then uses this as a chance to remind her of her faith. In verse 26, Jesus asks her if she believes, to which she gives this remarkable response in verse 27: *“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”*

She declares her belief in Jesus. But notice, in verse 39, she doubts again. When Jesus asks for the tombstone to be removed, she protests and says that there is a bad odor already. Jesus rebukes her mildly in verse 40. *“Didn’t I tell you that you will see God’s glory if you believe?”*

The response of Jesus is God’s response whenever bad things happen to us and we ask “Why?” God allows bad things to happen so He may show us his glory. Why does God allow tragedy? He desires to show his glory. He shows himself strong when we are weak.

Martha is given a new perspective - a new way of looking at things. I read that in one missions conference, one of the speakers gave this illustration. He said a man had four rowdy kids at the bus station; they were loud and out of control. Someone approached him about how loud his kids were and the man said, “Yes, I know. Their mother died yesterday, and they’re having a difficult time knowing how to process all the emotions. Suddenly, the observer’s perspective changed. From one of judgment to one of compassion.

Here Jesus changes Martha’s perspective of one of questioning and complaint to one of hope and anticipation. She is focused on “Why?” Instead of answering why, she is simply reminded that Jesus is God’s promise of life. There is no problem that he does not care about. Jesus helps her to see that He already IS at work, even though she has not seen it. So, in verse 40, Jesus tells her that she should just believe. And finally, she turns over the situation to the Lord.

We too may have moments of doubt. Sometimes, it takes a lot of assurances from God that he is in control of our situation. What I see here is Jesus compassion

and love for his children. He will keep on assuring us though we may falter in our faith. You see, it is easy to question and complain, but when we remember that God is sovereign and over all, then we can simply accept whatever happens without having to know why.

I remember years ago, God was speaking to my heart and instructing me to take on a task that I wasn't sure I could do. I kept pushing it to the side while God always reminded me about it. Until I asked, "Lord, why do you want me to do it?" And he spoke gently to my heart and said, "Rolly, do I have to explain to you everything I wanted you to do?"

Job himself questions God when he loses cattle, lands, family, health, wealth, and peace. His friends come to tell him all this has happened because of his sin. Job is a righteous man, one who tries to follow God, so he does not accept their accusations. But after a while He questions God as to "Why?" He never finds out why even though we do. But God simply reminds Job who is God and who is man. Whatever God has chosen to have us go through, should be okay with us.

I'm not talking a fatalism that we need to embrace all kinds of tragedy, but let's not place ourselves in the position of needing to know every reason either. Let's remember Romans 8:28, "*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*" Folks, we can rely on him to work for us.

Martha's miracle comes as her perspective changes of one of question to one of faith. Next we come to

II. The Miracle of Presence – "Who?"

The second miracle we see in this passage is one of presence. This is Mary's miracle. And it also is tied to a question. The question is "who" - "who will be with me?" Who will take care of me - who can I lean upon, who will guide me - who can I turn to? Lazarus had been the head of the family. The Bible doesn't say, but it

seems their parents are already gone. Now suddenly Mary's world is in upheaval. Death often does that. One day everything is going great, and the next day you don't know how you will get on with life. Death so often comes unexpectedly.

Mary greets Jesus with a similar statement in v. 32, "*Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.*" But, you see, in the original language there is a very different emphasis. Martha is focused on the premature death of her brother. Mary, on the other hand, emphasizes "**my**" brother - she is focused on the relationship. As we see in the gospels, Mary is characterized as someone focusing on relationship, in contrast with Martha who is focused on action.

Mary's miracle is one of understanding that Jesus is God's promise of love. We face no problems alone. Before he went up to heaven, his final words to his disciples as recorded in Matthew 28:20 are these: "*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*"

Jesus understands the reality of grief. In verse 33 it says in the Phillips translation, "*He was deeply moved and visibly distressed.*" Does Jesus understand the feelings and emotions of grief? Yes, far more than we even understand it ourselves. In verse 35 as Jesus comes to the tomb he weeps. But Jesus brings hope even in times of grief.

It is interesting that for Martha, Jesus responds to her questions by reminding her of her faith, by reminding her of who he was. For Mary, she simply needs to be reminded that Jesus is with her. She does not need dialog, she simply needs a shoulder to lean on. Jesus did not say anything to her. He just wept with her.

Sometimes we go to funerals, or hospitals, or to visit those going through difficult times, and we think we need to come up with lots of reassuring verses of Scripture to remind them that God knows what he is doing. Sometimes the best

thing we can do is to SHUT UP and simply let our presence be a comfort. Sometimes the best thing we can say is nothing.

I remember many years ago, when I was quite new in the State and still living with my sister in California, I became friends with a guy because his 6-year old son and my 6-year-old nephew were friends. Almost every day we were in the community swimming pool and we talked while the children were having fun in the pool. One day, he poured out his heart to me, saying that his marriage was in trouble. He exposed his hurts and everything that was going wrong in his life. Thinking I would offer some comfort, I advised him to do this and that, sounding like I knew all that stuff. Then, he just said, “Thank you”, stood up and walked away. I realized that I should have just kept quiet and listened to him. The lesson: don’t speak unless you’re asked to in those moments when someone is lamenting deeply.

For Mary, as she is reminded of the presence of the Lord, she is satisfied. When Jesus is present, everything will turn out all right.

In our lives as well, sometimes we don’t need answers, we simply need to be reminded that we are not alone in our grief, in our struggles, in our problems. And Jesus is always right there with us. Ready to raise us up, when troubles come our way. His grace is strong and he allows us to experience it.

YOU RAISE ME UP

The third miracle we see here is

III. The Miracle of Power – “What?”

And the question here is “What?” Jesus, what can you do? Lazarus is dead, life is forever changed for his family, so Jesus, what can you do about it? Look in verse 37, “*But some of them said, ‘Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?’*” They are questioning Jesus’ power - “what

can Jesus do?” Sometimes we ask the same question in our own lives. I’ve got a bad marriage - my spouse just doesn’t understand me - my boss is sexually harassing me - my kids won’t listen to a thing I tell them –

but what can God do about it? Yes, sure, I believe that God worked in the past doing all those miracles, but what can God do today - surely he doesn’t do miracles today, does he?

To the question of “what can Jesus do?” we need to see Jesus as having all the power and authority of God. There is no problem too big for him to handle. And he loves to prove himself strong on the behalf of those who trust in him. Look in verse 42, as Jesus prays, he says, *“I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”* His purpose in doing the miracle is to bring about belief in those who see his power displayed.

Jesus has the ability to work in any problem situation we face in this life - and he loves to do it to show his power so we will believe in him. But often Jesus wants us to do what we can do before he will do what only he can do. Notice here in verse 39 - Jesus calls them to do what they can do - roll the stone away. They give excuses like – there is a bad odor. I like what the King James Version says, “Lord, by this time, he stinketh” (v. 39b) - but Jesus does not want to hear their “stinking” excuses. He wants them to do what they CAN do.

We come up with a lot of stinking excuses as to why we can’t do anything for God, why we can’t give up a sin that we enjoy, why we don’t choose to change, even when we know we need to change. We have lots of stinking excuses.

Jesus calls Lazarus to come out - and he comes out. No matter what your stinking problem, when God calls you to move, get moving! Don’t wait for another day, do it right away. Lazarus comes out in the power of God. And we also can live and work and act in the same power of God. We don’t need to give in to sin - 1

Cor. 10:13 tells us that *“when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”*

Folks, God shows you his glory by raising you up. As he raises you up, three miraculous things take place. First, he changes your perspective. He allows you to see our circumstances in a different light. Second, he assures you of his presence. He makes you feel that you are truly loved and he will never leave you nor forsake you. And third, he shows you his power. He wants you to know that he can do the impossible.

Have you been asking God “why” a certain situation has come? Instead of asking why, choose to believe, choose to have faith, remember that God is at work in your life, and instead of focusing on the problem, focus on the power of God at work in your life.

Have you asked “who cares about me?” Have you felt alone and forsaken, alone in your grief or guilt or pain? Remember that Jesus is there. Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you is his promise.

Have you asked, “what can God do in my situation?” If so, remember there is no problem too big for God to handle. But it starts with us doing what WE can do, and then letting him do what only he can do.

As you see God at work, calling you out of your comfort zone to embrace a new challenge, will you respond in obedience and faith, or will you resist and reject God’s way?

Shall we pray?