

Iain Macritchie: John 11

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

- [0 : 0 0] If we can turn back now to God's word as we find it in the Gospel of John and I'd like us to read together verses 38 to 44 again and we'll come back to the version of the screen in a wee while.
- When Jesus deeply moved again came to the tomb, it was a cave, a stone and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, take away the stone.
- Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, Lord by this time there will be an odour, for he has been dead for days.
- Jesus said to her, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God, so they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me.
- I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.
- [1 : 1 0] When he had said these things he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out. The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped with a cloth.
- Jesus said to them, unbind him and let him go. If we can look at these words again, when he had said these things he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out.
- Well, friends, we've come to the very last of our series of our encounters with Christ. This is our sixth in a series where we've looked at the various different encounters that a variety of different people had with Jesus.
- Now, the encounter that we have here tonight is perhaps one of the most powerful encounters in the New Testament.
- And it's an encounter that so vividly shows why it is that Christ came to the earth.
- [2 : 3 1] It shows that he came to transform the lives of men and women, boys and girls like you and like me from a state of death to a state of everlasting life.
- Here then we see a man called Lazarus who went from the grave to his master's table. Now, for a short time this evening and seeking the Lord's blessing, I'd like us just to walk through verses 38 to 44 together by looking firstly at the condition of Lazarus and then looking at the call of Lazarus and lastly looking at the change that we see in Lazarus.
- Now we read earlier in the chapter, I'm not going to go through what's happened before, but we read earlier in this chapter of Lazarus being ill. But when we pick up our reading here in verse 38, we see that Lazarus has actually died.
- He's passed away. His body's in a grave. It's in a tomb with a stone against it. And here we find his family and his friends outside the tomb mourning his passing.
- The sisters where Mary and Martha, we've mentioned them briefly in our other encounters with Christ and we see them here at the tomb naturally feeling defeated.
- [4 : 0 8] Their brother has been taken from them. As far as they can see, there's no going back. Their relationship with him has ended.

And as they stood there, no doubt the question arose in their minds. Why is it that Jesus who so evidently loved Lazarus, we read that earlier in the chapter, we read that he even wept when Lazarus died.

Why is it that Jesus who loved Lazarus, why is it that Jesus, the Son of God, couldn't have done something to have stopped him dying?

Should it's only those of us who have felt that chilling intrusion of death into our lives who can go into exactly how these sisters are feeling here at the side of the tomb?

When we lose a loved one, a world comes crashing down around us and we can so understandably be stricken with grief and with despair, we can question God.

[5 : 23] We can wonder why this has happened. But friends, what a blessing it is tonight that if we are mourning the passing of a loved one who has known Christ, we don't mourn or grieve as we read in 1 Thessalonians 4.13 as those who have no hope.

Yes, we are surely devastated. Our world is never the same and in a sense we never get over the loss of a loved one.

We can never get used to that empty place within our home. But yet we know that for those who die in Christ, that is in many ways when life begins.

And so Lazarus lies here in the silence of the tomb. He's completely unaware of course of all the grief that is going on around him, all the upset and no doubt the wailing.

He can't hear the tears. He's unable to respond and to comfort his loved ones as he once could in the past.

[6 : 35] And even when Christ comes to the tomb and Christ has his dialogue with Mary and Martha and the others, he still cannot hear.

He's dead. His eyes and his ears are closed. And you know I believe that this is a picture, such a clear picture of another death that I'd like us to look at tonight just for a short time.

A death that we don't need to wait until we breathe our last to experience. A death that makes us numb to the cries and the wails of our loved ones over us.

A death that even silences the voice of God as it speaks so clearly in our experience. Friends, I am of course speaking of the solemnity of spiritual death.

A death when those who are out of Christ are unable to enter into what it is to be a covenant child of God. Now by the time Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days.

[7 : 50] And according to Martha in verse 39, Lazarus has been dead for long enough for the process of decay to have taken place in his body.

And so when Jesus suggests that the stone should be moved, you can imagine the horror on Martha's face.

She objects. Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead for four days.

How like Martha this is. Yet again she's concerning herself with practical things and she's not really realising who it is that's with her here, the Son of God himself.

She's forgetting that here in front of her is Jesus and he replies, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?

[8 : 56] What a rebuke for Martha. He had previously promised her that she would see the glory of God, that her brother would be raised, but here she is questioning his request.

I wonder if we believe that tonight we can see the glory of God as he has promised us in his word, especially in times of grief and in sorrow and in trials and tribulations.

Perhaps it's true that we too can have the same spirit as Martha. We too can question God's wisdom, question God's word, question why something has happened in our life or even question why it is that we're yet to see a particular promise being fulfilled.

Let's think about this. Here we have the Son of God. Here we have Jesus himself telling them to roll away this stone and Martha objects.

How like us this is. You know it's often the real test of our faith when we find ourselves in situations such as Martha's.

[10 : 19] It's easy enough to be strong in our faith in good times. It's easy enough to trust in God when all is going well, but the real test comes when things become that little bit more difficult, when the unexpected happens.

You know friends I think we should pray daily each and every morning that our faith would be just as strong in the days of adversity as it is in the days of prosperity.

You know Martha's concerns here about Lazarus I think they so graphically describe what it's like to be out of Christ.

Is it not true that you too are decaying? Is it not true that if you're yet to know the perfume of your Savior that you're carrying around that order of sin wherever you go.

Lazarus wasn't aware of the state that he was in because death had blinded him to it. And the chances are that if you're here and you're spiritually dead tonight you won't be completely aware of the fearful state that you're in.

[11 : 49] Throughout the New Testament we see Jesus raising three different people from the dead. In Luke 8 Jesus raised the daughter of Jerus.

Just as she had died no doubt she would still have had colour in her cheeks we see Jesus passing by and raising her.

And he also raised the widow of Nain's son in Luke chapter 7. He had been dead for several hours. His body had already grown cold and the effects of death were beginning to show.

And now here we have Lazarus. When Jesus arrived at the tomb he had been dead for four days and decay would no doubt have started to set in.

Now contrary to how these three people may have appeared, Jerus's daughter would still have appeared to have had life in her cheeks when she was raised by Christ.

[12 : 55] The son of the widow of Nain would not perhaps have been as decayed as Lazarus but the fact is that they were all dead.

And this is such a picture for us here tonight friends. If we are dead in trespasses and sins no matter what we look like on the outside we're dead.

There are no degrees of deadness if you like. And just as if you are like that white washed sepulchre that we read in Scripture that's all white on the outside.

But inside you don't know Christ you are just as dead as that person who lives next door to you whose life as far as you can see is a complete and utter mess.

Isn't that solemn? Now all this talk of death friends is perhaps depressing you tonight.

[14 : 02] This is my last sermon here but you know I hope it does depress. And I hope it does depress I'll tell you why because the reality is that a life without Christ is one of the most desperately depressing situations that you will ever find yourself in that is the reality.

But along with that reality there comes hope because we don't come here into this church before a god who just leaves people in the grave.

No. We come tonight to a god who is able to provide that way of escape who is able to provide for you a new and a living way.

You see Lazarus wasn't left in the tomb as a dead man. We read in verse 41 so they took away the stone.

So they took away the stone and this leads us on to our second point the call of Lazarus. Now as Jesus began this process if you like, we want a better phrase of raising Lazarus from the dead.

[15 : 29] He asked others to take the stone away from the tomb. This would have been a similar stone to the one we mentioned when we were talking about Mary at the grave of Jesus and it would have been there no doubt to keep out grave robbers and animals.

The point is here that Jesus used people. You know as I stand here as I preach the gospel Jesus is here using me.

He's using me to by the workings of his spirit remove that stone that is in front of the tomb that you are trapped in tonight if you don't know Christ.

He's using me to share the word of God with you in order to help remove any stumbling blocks between you and the Lord whatever they may be.

Are you in that tomb? I wonder tonight if it will be the night that you are set free.

[16 : 38] And not only is he using me friends but he's using each and every single Christian in this church tonight. Each and every one who knows the Lord as their savior they are all a piece of that jigsaw of his divine plan.

You know when we look at a wall we see big stones and small stones and each stone is just as needful as the other. They all come together to ensure that this stone wall stands and so it is with the church.

You might think today as you sit here that I don't do anything to help try and remove the stone away from someone's heart in order to set them free but you know what friends the best place that you can do this it's not always where people can see you doing but isn't it through that the best place for you to try and move that stone is by going to the only one who can move it the Lord Jesus Christ.

That you would come to a throne of grace each and every day pleading absolutely pleading with your savior that he would call your friends and your family and your neighbors from death to life and that's what Jesus did here.

Jesus knew what was about to happen and so we see him here outside the tomb lifting his eyes to praise the heavenly Father for what was about to happen.

[18 : 21] He was showing the people the communion that he was having with his Lord and the narrative has at this point been building up steadily up and up and up to this point and you can just imagine the tension round the tomb as Mary and Martha and the others they see Christ praying to God they sense that something is going to happen something big.

Then it did happen. Jesus uttered those beautiful personal life giving words Lazarus come out.

Here we have this man lying dead in a tomb being called by his name by the word of God to come out.

This is the nature of the effectual call of grace. We've touched on this in our previous encounters but this call is so personal Christ came to this specific tomb at this specific time asking these specific people to help so that he could raise this specific man Lazarus.

Friends the Gospel tonight it's not a general call it's not a call that only applies maybe to your mother or your father this is a personal call this is a call to individuals it's a call that is tailor made for you.

[20 : 08] Yes there are differences in each and every conversion if you were to ask people in here tonight how they were converted you would see certainly many similarities but yet there are so many differences just like the tops of our fingers the fingerprints that we have on our fingers let me look at them they all look the same but yet each and every one is different and so it is with the way that Christ deals with those who he calls to himself.

It's also a precise call it's a personal call but it's a precise call because this call at the tomb it was so clear Lazarus come out he told Lazarus exactly what he was to do and that's what happens when God calls you when his voice comes calling in our lives there's no doubt as to what he wants you to do he wants you to by faith come out of the darkness of this tomb.

You may be hearing his voice this very night but yet you may be holding back hesitating halting between two opinions sitting on the fence as it were you may even be fighting against this call in your life I don't want it not just yet but friends this is a fight that you will never win this is a fight that you will never win because God's call is a powerful call you can try and run away all you like but if Christ is calling you you will come I wonder is he calling anyone in here tonight we read in verse 44 the man who had died had come out.

Lazarus who had been dead in the grave for four days is now making his way out of the tomb the impossible has by the power of God been made possible and you know that's not the power of God then I don't know what is but you say Christ does not raise people from the dead today that was just for those times that is true in that sense he doesn't physically raise people from the dead but yet here we have such an encouragement because if you are dead and Christ passes in sins if you have been in the grave of your own sin the hovels of your own ambition for 20, 40, 60 maybe 80 years God has the power to call you out isn't that amazing he has that power to penetrate your blindness and your deadness and to awaken you to your need of Christ then don't you want to hear that call in your life well if you do if you truly want that call do not rest easy until you hear it you plead with the Lord plead with them each and every day of your life plead that he might awaken you from this sin induced coma that you find yourself in because in doing so he will heal you and that decay and deadness will be healed and replaced with life and life everlasting as Lazarus came out of the tomb alive raised from the dead we truly see and this is our third and final point we can so clearly see the change in Lazarus he's been brought to life and now by the power of God he's able to embrace his loved ones once again he's able to have fellowship with those whom he loves can you imagine the faces of Mary and

Martha outside that tomb they saw their brother coming out alive and you know that is the way how it is for the Christian when when we see someone coming from death to life that is nothing that warms my heart more and no doubt warms the hearts of all the Lord's people here and seeing someone coming and saying my beloved is mine and I am his there's nothing like seeing your loved ones being being released from this tomb of death and being enabled by the grace of God to to now live life through the blessed eyes of faith what joy that brings what joy it would bring tonight if you too would come forth from the grave so that you could embrace all your brothers and sisters in Christ not only did the call of God bring life to Lazarus but it also brought him liberty because we read that when Lazarus came out of the tomb he's still bound in his grave clothes his hands and his feet are bound we read with linen strips here then Lazarus has the the remains of the the stinking clothes of a dead man and it's so interesting and important I think to note that the very first words of Jesus after calling Lazarus out of the grave was to unbind him to let him go you see Lazarus couldn't experience freedom until his death clothes were removed Lazarus was no longer a dead man and he was no longer to look or act like a dead man any sign of the fact that he was dead that that he had been lying in the grave were to be removed straight away and you know I believe there's such a lesson here for us even as Christians because we too have had the grave clothes of our past taken from us but yet we we must be so careful that we we don't start putting them back on one by one that we don't start going back to those sinful things of our unconverted past can you imagine what a horrible disturbing sight it is for our precious Lord and Savior to see his children desiring to put on those filthy sinful grave clothes on top of that coat of his righteousness that he is so lovingly adorned us with when we come to Christ we are made into new creations I cannot say that enough it's so important we put off the old in order for us to embrace the new other Christians may help you as they did with Lazarus they helped Lazarus to untie his linen strips that have have bound his his feet and hands and other Christians might help you to to advise you let them let them direct you wisely as what it is that is good for you so that you too can begin making progress in the family of God this change in Lazarus as well as

[29 : 09] taking him from death to life also took him from darkness to light we read that his face was wrapped with a cloth this was part of his grave clothes and because of that covering when he came out Lazarus was in darkness but the Lord commanded that all the clothes would be removed which allowed the light to flood in and it wasn't until this very point when that that mask over his face was removed that he was able to see Christ for himself there in front of his eyes again such a vivid picture of what happens to to us when we come from darkness into his own most marvelous light I remember when I was a wee boy my mother telling me that when she became a Christian she began to see everything so differently the grass was so green and the sky was so blue now I as a little boy in my innocence I thought that up until that point she must have seen everything in black and white but you know in a sense I was right and it wasn't until maybe 20 years later that that I would discover this for myself when my own eyes were opened by Christ that I was able to see things so differently you know friends when this happens we are no longer blinded by darkness as Lazarus was through the eyes of faith we can see life differently you begin to see why it is you're alive I touched on this this morning all of a sudden everything isn't easy I'm not saying it's easy but all of a sudden everything makes sense don't you want to make sense of your life in this world it's true that that the beauty of creation is definitely enhanced when you know the Creator the sky is blue and the grass is greener in a sense but the most important thing is that not only do you get a better view of creation but you're able to see the beauty of the Lord the Creator for yourself Jesus was standing before Lazarus as he stood outside the tomb and so it is with us when we obey the call of God we too will be able to behold the beauty of the King would you not like to see him tonight and over the last few weeks we've seen many different encounters with Christ yet you'll notice that a lot of these encounters had many similarities and it's it's true to say that one of the most striking things in all of these encounters is that God is willing tonight as I part from you here in Carloway it's been a blessing to be with you here but you know what I would love more than anything for each and every one of you here is that you if you still have not yet had this that you would have your own personal encounter

with Christ it's okay hearing about Mary and Zacchaeus and Lazarus and all the others but what about you I wonder if perhaps Jesus is at the tomb of your life tonight calling you to come to him I can tell you he is he's calling you tonight as he has done every single other night you've been under the gospel but is it so that you are trapped that you're closed in that you're bound that you cannot move friends if it is rest assure that that Christ is the one who died on the third day and and rose sorry died and and rose on the third day and he he conquered the grave oh grave where is thy death oh death where is thy sting oh grave where is thy victory and if you find yourself in that grave tonight the Lord is able to conquer that grave my friends you you come to him you come to him earnestly as if your life depended on it because it does you come to him and you you ask him you plead with him you say yes I've been pleading for a year after a year after you will keep pleading because those who seek will find you know I close with this when he answers your prayer you will be free because when the Son has set you free you will be free indeed pray that even one soul would know that freedom tonight amen and we pray that the Lord would bless these few thoughts to us