

**Text: John 11:32-45**

**Title: “When Life Stinks ... Jesus Changes Everything”**

Let's open our Bibles to John 11:25. One of the most amazing miracles Jesus performed was raising his good friend Lazarus from the dead. It's also one of the most carefully documented miracles that Jesus performed because it is a sign pointing to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah who has come to take away our sins and give eternal life to those who trust in Him.

**PHOTO ILLUSTRATION** – The raising of Lazarus is also the subject of at least one great work of art. If you visit the world-renowned Kimbell Art Museum here in Fort Worth you will find displayed there a very famous work of art called “The Raising of Lazarus” by the Italian artist Duccio (*Ducho*). It was painted back in the 1300s and it shows the moment when Jesus called Lazarus forth from the tomb. Notice the guy holding his nose. Lazarus had been in the grave for four days when Jesus commanded for the stone to be removed from over Lazarus' grave. Remember Lazarus' sister protested that there would be a bad odor. In the KJV it says, “Behold he stinketh.”

The title of this series is “When Life Stinks” and sometimes it does. And when life stinks Jesus cares for us, He is working and He is speaking to us through the trials of life. But when life stinks you need to know that Jesus can make a difference; He has the power to change things.

Before I move ahead let me just remind you of where we've been. This miracle involves a family that was very dear to Jesus ... Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus. Jesus was a frequent guest in their home in the village of Bethany. Lazarus suddenly became seriously ill and no one could help him. So the sisters sent word to Jesus who was about a two-day journey away. “Lord, the one you love is sick.” But Jesus sovereignly made the decision to delay two days before going to Bethany, a fact that is very confusing to the disciples and to Martha and Mary. Why wouldn't Jesus go immediately? During that span of time Lazarus died. So the family endures a very sudden, probably painful illness followed by an untimely death.

On this Mother's Day let me just point out that here is a home, a family, that has experienced great trauma, but a family that will become a stage on which God's glory will be displayed. It is a family that truly cares for each other ... brothers and sisters are close. It's a family surrounded by a community of friends. Most importantly it is a family that is intimate with Jesus. And yet they still had

problems. There are no perfect families. Rather God uses imperfect families to display His glory through people who simply believe. Their rotten situation was used by God to bring glory to Himself. And mothers, you have the opportunity to set the stage for that to happen in your home.

Now when Martha learned that Jesus had arrived on the outskirts of the village she ran out to meet him. And she immediately erupts in grief and confusion. She says, “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.” Reading between the lines she’s pouring out her disappointment that Jesus didn’t act on their timetable. Then Jesus assures Martha that Lazarus will rise again, and then He makes one of the most important statements about His own identity:

**John 11:25-26 - Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”**

And Martha confesses...

**John 11:27 - “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”**

One reason this miracle is recorded in such intricate detail is that John intends to paint us a picture of Jesus. He is Lord, the Christ, the Son of God who has come into the world. And as we walk with Jesus into this rotten situation we see several amazing attributes of Jesus on display. John’s intent here is to make much of Jesus so we will trust in Him. So let’s allow the story to unfold a little more.

Jesus has been engaged in a conversation with Martha, but what about the other sister, Mary? She’s still sitting back in their home quietly grieving. Jesus sends Martha back to say to Mary, “The Teacher is asking for you.” So Mary got up and ran to Jesus and we see what happens in...

**John 11:32 - When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”**

Just a couple of things to note about Mary: She fell at Jesus’ feet. That’s the place where Mary is often found ... at the feet of Jesus. Luke in his Gospel records another visit that Jesus made to their home. When Jesus came into the house Mary sat at His feet listening to what He had to say. Martha was busy preparing a meal,

but Mary is at the feet of Jesus. Wives and moms, you have to do both. Take care of your family, but also take care of your own soul; pay attention to Jesus. And in John 12 we're told that sometime after Jesus raised Lazarus He was in their home again and Mary poured perfume on the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. She is always found at the feet of Jesus, worshipping, adoring and being attentive to Him. Ladies, what a tremendous example!

Notice that Mary speaks to Jesus with the very same words that Martha used when she first met Jesus: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." It's like Martha and Mary had already discussed their disappointments that Jesus had taken so long to get there. As you might well imagine the emotions of grief were really raw.

But in this rotten situation we see the glory of Christ on display in a number of ways. First we see His glory on display in...

## **1. HIS COMPLETE CONTROL**

Mary and Martha weren't sure of that. Why didn't He show up sooner? But in the words of the old Gospel song, "Jesus was four days late ... but right on time." Mary and Martha probably felt everything was swirling out of control, but they didn't realize that Jesus was carefully orchestrating every detail of this tragedy for His glory and for their ultimate good. When life stinks, you need to know that.

**John 11:33 - When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.**

That single word "weeping" paints the picture of bitter anguish and loud cries coming from the sisters and everyone else there. And it touches the heart of Jesus. He cares! When it says that Jesus was deeply moved and troubled it's the picture of someone intensely and visibly concerned and distressed. So here again we see the glory of Christ on display in...

## **2. HIS TENDER MERCY**

As the Son of Almighty God, Jesus was "deeply moved." He was righteously angry about the ravages of sin and death upon His creatures and His creation. He's grieved at the scars of sin upon a broken world.

**ILLUSTRATION** – I sat in a home a few weeks ago where a family had been shaken to its very core. The wife learned that her husband had not paid the rent for several months and the landlord was about to evict them. The husband revealed to his wife that he was addicted to pain pills and had been spending the rent money on his addiction. Now this wife and mother didn't know if their family would be out on the street without a roof over their heads. Thankfully it didn't come to that, but as I sat listening to their story I saw a graphic picture of what sin can do to a family in a broken world. And it grieves the heart of God.

So in His divinity Jesus is righteously angry at the effects of sin and unbelief that are seen all around Him that day. And yet in His humanity Jesus is troubled and agitated for His beloved friends. And in v.35, “Jesus wept.” There you have the shortest verse in the Bible, but also a graphic picture of the tender mercies of the Lord. This word “wept” is found nowhere else in the Bible. It is reserved solely for the weeping of Jesus. Literally He burst into tears. You see, Jesus isn't like a Jedi warrior who has no emotion. His heart ached for how His friends hurt.

**Hebrews 4:15a,16 - For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses ... Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.**

The other funeral attenders noticed how much Jesus cared. In v.36 the Jews said, “See how he loved him.” Jesus' affection for his friends was evident. So we walk deeper into the story.

**John 11:38a - Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb.**

As Jesus approaches the grave of Lazarus He is once again moved to righteous wrath at the ravages of sin and death. There's a stone over the opening of the tomb and ...

**John 11:39 - “Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”**

Now I'm not sure what Martha is thinking here. Did she think that Jesus just wanted to take a look at the body? She doesn't seem to expect that Jesus could or would change anything. Martha and Mary were helpless. Lazarus was helpless. They all were powerless to change things. But Jesus shows up; and a cave filled

with darkness and death is about to explode with light and life. And here again we see the glory of Christ in...

### **3. HIS FREE GRACE**

Grace is simply when God acts in our behalf. And Jesus is about to act ... and everything will change.

**ILLUSTRATION** – When I was in college serving as a student minister at a church I took some kids on a mission trip to Colorado. We had borrowed a pickup truck to haul a trailer loaded with our supplies. When got into Colorado and started up into the mountains to get to our destination the pickup just didn't have enough power to pull the trailer up the steep grade. So here we were stranded on the side of the road. This was before the day of cell phones so we were helpless and powerless. Before long a guy in a pickup pulled over to see if he could help. He had one of those pickups that mountain people own with like six-wheel drive. He latched on to our pickup and pulled it and the trailer straight up that mountain. In fact he was going so fast I was pushing on the brakes of the pickup to slow him down. That's the grace of God that acts for us when we are powerless and helpless. God enables us to do what we can't do on our own. But we have to trust Him and take our foot off of the brakes. That's what Jesus told Martha.

**John 11:40 - Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”**

Remember that this is the point of this whole episode ... to display the glory of Christ so that people will believe in Him. Over and over we see that the key that unlocks everything is belief and faith in God. When Jesus spoke to Martha about her questions and doubts in vv.25-26 He said, “He who *believes* in me will live, even though he dies; whoever lives and *believes* in me will never die. Martha, do you *believe* this?” And in v.27 Martha said, “Yes, Lord, I *believe*...” And when Martha protests at Jesus' command for them to remove the stone from over the grave, Jesus said, “Martha, didn't I tell you that if you *believed*, you would see the glory of God? Take your foot off the breaks.”

Now we come to the climactic moment. They had taken Jesus to the cave in the side of a hill where Lazarus had been buried. Jesus is standing before a dark, rotten-smelling cave. Remember Jesus had already called His shot. He told His disciples earlier that this sickness would not end in death. He told Martha that her brother would rise again. And in...

**John 11:43b - Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”**

On display yet again is the glory of Christ seen in...

#### **4. HIS OVERWHELMING POWER**

**John 11:43b - Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”**

In v.43 Jesus cried out in a loud voice. Why? Perhaps it was so He could be heard over all the loud wailing that was going on around the tomb. But more likely I think it was to display His overwhelming power. Literally Jesus shouted, “Lazarus! Here! Outside!” Preachers have been fond of saying that if Jesus hadn’t specified Lazarus that every dead person in the cemetery would have come out.

Now theologians like to say that the call of God is “effectual.” By that they mean that Jesus didn’t just *audibly call* Lazarus out; by His overwhelming power He *actually caused* Lazarus to come out. Lazarus could do nothing for himself. He was dead. But the power of Jesus changed everything.

What a tremendous picture of what happens in our salvation. We are dead in our trespasses and sins, yet God calls us to Himself and quickens us to new life when we trust in Him.

**John 11:44 - The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”**

Notice “the dead man came out.” He was plum dead. Decomposition had already begun. People would have been shocked to see this. Many may have fled in sheer terror as Lazarus stumbled and staggered out into the daylight like a zombie. Can you see Lazarus trying to walk wrapped from head to toe in burial linens?

Jesus said, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go. Release him from all that’s holding him back. Release him from what’s binding him so he can begin to live.” Again, what a picture of the power of Jesus to impart eternal life and a new life.

So Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, and it is clearly intended to point to the fact Jesus Himself would be raised from the dead after He was crucified for our sins. You see there’s a difference between Lazarus being raised and Jesus being raised.

Lazarus was raised from the dead, but sometime later he would die again and perhaps they would put him back into the same grave from which Jesus raised Him. But Jesus' resurrection was different. He would come forth from the grave with a new, eternal body that would never die again. And the Bible says that Jesus was resurrected as the first step in God's redemptive purpose of making all things new. His resurrection is the promise that Jesus has forever defeated sin and death. And when we trust in Him, when we die we have the assurance that one day Christ will raise us again with new resurrection bodies with which we will inhabit the new heaven and the new earth.

**John 11:45 - Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.**

Jesus' purpose was fulfilled. Many put their trust in Jesus as a result of the miracle He performed.

God intends to glorify Himself not just through our words but through a changed life. From that day on, when people saw Lazarus walking down the street they knew he was a changed man ... a miracle man. And that's the life He calls us to.