

“Falling into the Arms of the Savior: spiritual death”

Scripture: John 11:1-45

Graphic: death, life, cloths, trust, falling

Key Verses: John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Theme: Physical death has no power over believers because our future is determined by faith in Jesus, not by our death. Our present is also determined by Jesus’ power for life, experienced as his gift of eternal life. Fall into the arms of the Savior who gives that life to you, live, and never die.

1) Introduction

- a) Most of the time, I wrap up a sermon series like this by going *back* over the different points of each sermon and giving us a *reminder* of where we’ve been...
- b) This is **not** one of those times.
- c) Because, instead of just remembering the people in the Bible with whom Jesus came in contact – people on whom he had this astronomical and life-altering impact – let me just say this: **I am that person – each one**. So this whole time I’ve been preaching, it’s about me, right?
- d) And if you’re so inclined, and have found some association with any of the people that we have heard about over the last 5 weeks, then maybe in your heart you’ll join me in claiming that:
 - i) I am the blindman...whose eyes are continuously being opened spiritually to the fact that Jesus is Lord, struggling to believe, and understand what that means.
 - ii) I am the woman at the well...who sometimes feels cut-off from God because of the stuff in my life, yet who, despite desperate isolation and rejection, has come to know the truth about Jesus and is living into the kingdom of God now.
 - iii) I am Nicodemus...who has doubts and wonders what it means to be a follower of Jesus – what it means to be born again every day.
 - iv) And even though I shutter to identify myself with the devil, I am sinful and do things that are counter to what Jesus is trying to do perfectly in my life for the sake of those who don’t yet know Him...
- e) And by the grace of God alone,

- i) We are given resolve in our temptations because of the Word of God living and active in our lives.
- ii) We are given hope in being born again by the Holy Spirit.
- iii) We are incorporated into the eternal realm of God Almighty because Jesus is our Savior.
- iv) Our eyes are opened for us to see who Jesus is fully and completely.
- v) And because Jesus accepted the punishment for our sin on the cross and rose again, death has no meaning for those who believe that, and life becomes that which we give away to Jesus.
- f) And if we put those pieces together, we are finally ready to Fall Into The Arms of The Savior, because it's all about Him and our relationship WITH Him and not about our condition today.
- g) And it comes down to a decision for each one of us: am I going to trust God fully or not? Am I going to allow the Holy Spirit to identify IN ME the things that I have held onto for SO LONG that I am blind, rejected, skeptical, and closed, or am I going to turn, repent, and offer my life to Jesus in NEW WAYS...
- h) ...not so I can be a better Christian...not so I can get more crowns in heaven...not so my friends or family will come to know Jesus...not so I can do or say or be anything...but (listen) **so GOD can be glorified and HIS work can be revealed in me.** There's nothing more attractive to a world that has obviously (say, "obviously") lost its way completely, churches that are struggling to survive, and people who are broken and don't know where to turn, (nothing more attractive) than a person or a church that has sold out to God and is glorifying God with everything we do. That's a challenge that starts with ME, and goes to every person here, and radiates out from there.
- i) And you're saying, Amen! Let's go home! Let's wrap this up...
- j) But hold on...there's one more person that Jesus encounters that we can identify with. There's one more life that gets transformed. There's one more condition that is a serious stumbling block to our faithful walk with Jesus in THIS life. Something that is ironically the most natural part of life. And that is DEATH.
- k) Show of hands: How many people here today are currently dead? I mean, physically dead. Just the fact that some of you raised your hands tells me

that you're not dead, you're just lying. Seeing no hands, I wonder if we misunderstand death.

- l) The sisters of Lazarus misunderstood death...the people of Israel misunderstood death...the disciples misunderstood death...
- m) The only One that has never and will never misunderstand death is Jesus...and so turn with me to John chapter 11 and let's finish strong...
- n) Let's pray...

2) Scripture

a) Read verses 1-6

- i) Jesus is somewhere else. In John chapter 10, verse 40, it says he was "across the Jordan River" – probably somewhere in Perea, east of Jericho, 30-40 miles away from Jerusalem and Bethany, which is a suburb, if you will, of Jerusalem.
- ii) Lazarus is sick...and he's not getting any better. And John's like, "you remember Lazarus, he's Mary and Martha's brother...the same Mary who poured perfume on Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair."
- iii) And they are sad...they don't know what to do...he's might die. And because Jesus is a friend of the family...they sent a message to Him. And it probably took some time to GET to him...
- iv) And when he got the message (and this is what I love about Jesus and wish I was more like), instead of getting sad and worrying and fretting like we often do, he's like, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's GLORY, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."
- v) What's he saying? He's saying, "Even though Lazarus will DIE, it's not about that...it's about God receiving GLORY because if it." Look, unless Jesus comes back (sing with me, "*Soon and very soon...*") we will all die...there's nothing I can say that is more 100% certain than the fact that **we will all die**. Jesus tells us that it's not about that FACT...but about the glory God will receive, and the glory Jesus gets, when someone dies who knows Christ as Lord and Savior...
- vi) And so Jesus, whose main goal is to glorify God, and who knows that Lazarus will die (someday, if not today), and because he has in mind a plan to give God glory THROUGH the death of Lazarus, Jesus hangs out

in Perea two more days before he leaves for Bethany (which would be another two days' journey). Verse 7...

b) Read verses 7-16

- i) I sometimes think that being a disciple with Jesus would be SO frustrating, wouldn't it?
- ii) I mean, here I am with Jesus, who just told us that Lazarus' illness wouldn't lead to death, but so that God would be glorified. Ok, that's cool. And then we wait around for two days. And then, Jesus tells us that it's time to go to Judea.
- iii) Whoa! We were just IN Judea with Jesus and it turned out, umm...how should I say this...very badly. John 8:59 says, "So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the Temple." The religious leaders were NOT happy with Jesus, because he said that before Abraham, I AM. And we were there in the line of fire! Big stones! And now, you want to go back!?!?
- iv) And then, Jesus talks about day and night...and being able to see during the day and not stumble, but stumbling at night because there is no light. I sort of get that...right? Jesus is the light and we can walk in His light without doubting, giving into temptation, being isolated or blind.
- v) And then he tells us Lazarus has fallen asleep. So? So? He'll be fine...just get some rest, right? I fell asleep last night and I'm pretty sure there wasn't an extra measure of glory given to God because of it. (Especially not with THOSE weird dreams I had, right?)
- vi) And you can just see the defeated look on Jesus' face...
- vii) Now, to be fair, this term *koimaomai*, has a double-meaning that can mean, "fallen asleep", but also was used to mean physical death. Kind of like when we say 'passed away' I guess. So, the confusion here is warranted, but Jesus is hoping for more understanding...
- viii) So he finally says, "Look, Lazarus is dead, OK? We have to go now. This is for your own good." Sometimes Jesus sounds a lot like your parents did...right? "Look, we're done...let's go! You'll thank me later."
- ix) And then Thomas...yep, the same Thomas who would need to see the nail holes in Jesus' hands after the resurrection... "OK, we'll go too and

die with him.” I don’t think Thomas fully understood what he was saying. Just like sometimes I don’t think we fully comprehend the meaning of death and the role Jesus plays in defeating it...

x) So they make the journey...verse 17...

c) Read verses 17-27

- i) Jewish tradition believed that when a person dies, the soul hovered over the body for three days, waiting to reunite with it and keep living. And after three days, the soul took a look at the face of the body it formerly inhabited, and because it turned gray and pale, the soul, like, moves on.
- ii) When Jesus and the disciples arrive in Bethany, Lazarus has been dead for FOUR days...one day longer than the time it was believed that the soul hung out, waiting to reunite with the body.
- iii) Jesus basically wanted the disciples, and Mary and Martha, and all the people that were gathered there to understand that LAZARUS was dead dead. I mean, he wasn’t coming back...he was expired for good. He wasn’t just sleeping or in a coma...he was DEAD as a doornail, as my Mom says.
- iv) And Martha, who has faith just oozing out of her, goes to Jesus and just says what’s on her heart, “Jesus, if you’d have been here, Lazarus wouldn’t have died. But, even now, God will give you what you ask.”
- v) What is she asking? She wants her brother back, right? Jesus did it before...he can do it again.
- vi) And even though Martha is skeptical, saying, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection”, Jesus is ready for the main point...
- vii) He says, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, (that’s resurrection) and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. (that’s the life)”
- viii) The most radical thing about DEATH, for those who believe in Jesus, is the fact that it’s the ONLY way to life. And the most radical thing about LIFE, for those who believe in Jesus, is that fact that it’s about death.
- ix) Physical death has no power over believers because our future is determined by faith in Jesus, not by our death.

- x) AND...AND...your present life is also determined by Jesus' power for life, experienced as his gift of eternal life.
- xi) Physical death leads to life. Life leads to death, which leads back to eternal life. All because Jesus died FOR US, and when we believe in HIM, LIVES with and for us for eternity.
- xii) Do you believe this? That's Jesus' question to YOU today? Martha said yes. I say yes. How about you? Shout it out if you say yes...
- xiii) That's not all...

d) Read verse 28-37

- i) Mary, Martha's sister, now, comes to meet Jesus and say the same thing her sister said, "If only you had been here...Lazarus wouldn't have died."
- ii) Same thing Martha said...except the fact that Mary doesn't express the HOPE that Martha did. Martha said, "But even now..." That's HOPE!
- iii) What's Mary do? Look at verse 33...Jesus saw her weeping...and all the other people that were mourning with her were weeping.
- iv) And, it says, "...he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved."
- v) Now, some scholars think Jesus is showing great empathy here...that he is sad about the fact that Mary and the people are weeping...that he is grieving because Lazarus has died. He even wept.
- vi) Let me challenge us a little this morning...if Jesus knew that he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, which is clearly his intention, why would he be grieving? Why would he be sad? In just a few minutes, he was planning to call Lazarus out of the grave...you'd think he'd be pumped. God's GLORY is going to be REVEALED!
- vii) How about this...when John writes that Jesus was disturbed in spirit and deeply moved – that he wept - think about a teacher in your life standing in front of a class, and having all the students fail a test that took a semester to teach about. Or a parent, who after giving everything they had, has a child who rejects them and goes down a wrong path.
- viii) Sadness...sure. Empathy...maybe. Anger...more likely. Surely indignation. I think John is trying to tell us that Jesus was disappointed, angry, and indignant because of the lack of faith that Mary and the others

are showing, even AFTER she confessed that if Jesus was there, Lazarus wouldn't have died.

ix) Now, I don't like to think of the fact that Jesus is disappointed, angry, or indignant with me or you, but I can't help but think of ALL those times when I fail to trust in Him. Daily! When I fall into something OTHER than His arms for rescue. When I get impatient or even mad at God because He's not answering my prayers the way I think He should.

x) And then there are the people around us, who are not believers, who see our weak and weary witness, filled with a lack of trust and sad attempts at discipleship, and they wonder about the Savior we claim to be at the center of our lives. We do this...I do this...

xi) What does Jesus do...

xii) Verse 38...

e) Read verses 38-44

i) In a final act of power and so that God's glory could be revealed to EVERYONE standing there weeping and doubting and isolated and blind and tempted and afraid, Jesus LOOKED UPWARD, prayed, and commanded that dead Lazarus...smelly, pale, Lazarus...come out of the grave to LIFE.

ii) And even though Martha – the one who had the hope and confession about Jesus being the Messiah – had a warning about the stench, proving that she, too, still had some hang-ups, Jesus resolutely called down power from the Father, raised Lazarus from the dead, and then told the very same people who had doubted, rejected, scoffed, and wept to (listen), (boldly) “Unbind him, and let him go.”

iii) (boldly) “Unbind him, and let him go.”

3) Application

i) If ever there were a metaphor for salvation in Jesus Christ, it would be Lazarus, coming out of the grave after having been dead for so long, and having Jesus speak those words into our lives, “Unbind her, and let her go.”

- ii) I'm going to venture to say that probably none of us will rise from the grave after we die, unless it's when Jesus comes back. I'm not saying it's impossible, I'm just saying...
- iii) But, there's something related to physical death, that we struggle with everyday, and that's spiritual death.
- iv) Spiritual death is the condition that occurs when we get spiritually ill, the people around us see it, but we decide we are powerless to do anything about it. And we die inside.
- v) Illness comes when life throws a boulder on us...or some temptation in our lives turns to sin and we don't allow Jesus to take it. Illness comes when we get so wrapped up in doing life that we fail to stop and spend time at the feet of Jesus.
- vi) Illness comes when we get afraid of what people might think...or what they say. We become people-pleasers and we get caught up in the opinions of others.
- vii) We get separated from God's power in our lives because of the choices we make. We stop listening to the Holy Spirit – and we do that for lots of reasons.
- viii) We walk away from the body of Christ. We lose sight of the resurrection of Jesus. We get angry and frustrated and mad that someone DID something to me and I can't go back there to face them.
- ix) Maybe you're sitting here today feeling absolutely dead in your faith. You may have even asked yourself, "Why am I here? This is stupid and has no real bearing in my life." Or you're going through the motions because of some external expectation that you are trying to uphold for those around you. And even admitting to someone that you have doubts, or that "the church thing" doesn't DO anything for you, is unthinkable, and would make you a coward or a fake.
- x) We all experience spiritual death from time to time and, I'll admit, it's a lonely place. It's a confusing place that we try to climb out of by DOING more for others, and BEING better Christians, and TRYING harder, and LEARNING new things in order to feel fulfilled. As a pastor, the most difficult, growth times in my ministry are times when I'm spiritually dead...just going through the motions.

- xi) See, It's not about DOING, BEING, TRYING, or LEARNING...it's about listening for the voice of Jesus.
- xii) This may seem corny, but close your eyes and picture yourself as Lazarus behind the stone, in the tomb. You're dead, spiritually ...physically...tired and cold. Listen. (pause) Jesus' voice is calling your name.
- xiii) Come out! On the count of three, I want you to say your own name...1...2...3...Steven, COME OUT!
- xiv) And all of a sudden, you rise, walk toward the light. Jesus is waiting for you at the mouth of the tomb you are in, and you Fall Into The Arms of the Savior...Jesus! (open your eyes)

4) Conclusion

- a) Each day is a gift from God to us. His grace is ours if we accept it.
- b) Because you are tempted, fearful, doubtful, isolated, lonely, blind and even dead in your faith and life, Jesus is waiting to call your name today – he wants to unbind you!
- c) Your future is determined by faith in Jesus, not your condition in life, and not your death. And your condition in life is determined by Jesus' power for life, for eternity, by His death and resurrection.
- d) God's Word is sufficient...His salvation is eternal...and His love is unconditional. Fall into the arms of the Savior and live...
- e) If you want to come and kneel with me as I pray and as we sing this song, then I would love to kneel beside you this morning. If you are hearing Jesus' voice from inside the tomb...come. If you are ready to response to His grace and offer of salvation...come. If you are filled with gratitude, like I am, that God gives us as many chances and corrections as we need...come. For any reason you have...come. For all of us...
- f) (kneel) Let's pray...