

Alive by Grace

LAZARUS' PROBLEM

We have one miracle left in this years' Gathering!

John 11:1-14

I can imagine the heaviness of their home as Lazarus' sickness progressed. I'm sure that Mary and Martha had done everything they could have done to care for their brother; sitting with him day and night, watching him go in and out of consciousness. And still, there had come a moment when Lazarus took a breath and didn't take another. His heart beat, and then it didn't beat again. And his body was lifeless. In a moment, Lazarus was dead. And Mary and Martha were left behind. There was nothing they could do to bring him back. Lazarus was gone, separated from Mary and Martha. And there was nothing he could do to bring himself back. They were powerless in the face of death.

Just like every other crippled person Jesus encountered, this physical struggle, the struggle of life and death, has a spiritual counterpart also. To understand it, we have to go back to the beginning of our story to learn how humanity without Jesus has the same problem; just like Lazarus, we're dead.

But we didn't start out that way.

OUR PROBLEM

1In the beginning **God** created the heavens and the earth. **2**Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the **Spirit of God** was hovering over the waters. **3**And God **said**, "Let there be **light**," and there was light.

Genesis 1:1-3

1In the beginning was the **Word**, and the Word was with God, and the **Word was God**. **2**He was with God in the beginning. **3****Through him all things were made**; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4**In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
John 1:1-5

In the first three verses of God's word, we learn that God is triune. There was God, the Spirit of God and the Word of God, which John clarifies for us in the Son of God, Jesus. All three were all present, unified, and had their part in the creation of the world and humanity.

I think in pictures. To conceptualize the triune image of God in a picture, I used the three primary colors. The yellow representing God the Father, the red representing God the Son and the blue representing God the Spirit. Three are present and unique, and they are blended, making it impossible to tell exactly where any one begins or ends. And at the crossroads, is the heart of God, pure and comprising all three parts.

At the end of God's creative week, He finished with the grand finale. Scripture says,

“Then God said, “Let **Us** make mankind in **Our** image, in **Our** likeness, ...So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God He created them.”

Genesis 1:26-27,

Then the Lord God formed a man from the **dust** of the ground and **breathed** into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a **living being**.

Genesis 2:7

We were created in the image of God. There is so much that comes with being created in Gods image. But, given what God has revealed about Himself already, we can be

confident that having been created His triune image, humanity was created with a triune image that is “like” our Creator.

Body, Soul, and spirit.

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” Genesis 1:31

When God creates something, it is good! It doesn’t need improvement, or tweaking and He doesn’t need help. God completed the creation of the world and the creation of human beings and it was fully good and whole. The pinnacle of creation was the amazing formation of a triune being that reflected triune God Himself. Wow!

Because humans were created in the image of God, Adam and Eve were capable engaging in a perfect and complete relationship with the triune God.

Genesis 3:8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day...

This was normal! Humanity was created in such a way that Adam and Eve could have a relationship with God in which they were fully exposed and fully exposed to God. Nothing was hidden or separated. Their existence was full of life and relationship.

Boundaries

In the context of this perfection there were boundaries.

Yes, perfection and freedom do not indicate an elimination of boundaries. And God told them,

Genesis 2:16-17...“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

God did not say, “you will begin to die” or, “you will slowly die” He said, “you will die.”

We all know what happened next. The crafty serpent came to Eve, and planted doubt in her thoughts about the truthfulness and goodness of God. Had God been holding out on them? Had He lied to them about what would happen if they crossed His boundary and ate the fruit? “You won’t die” he said to her.” “You’ll be like God.” The deceiver appealed to her through ...

I John 2:16 “The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.”

He tempted her. She chose to doubt rather than to trust God completely, and in the flesh she trespassed God’s righteous boundary. And in that moment her spirit, which was her righteous covering, took its last breath in her, and that part of her died. Then she shared it with Adam who also ate it and he also died. They were uncovered, exposed and vulnerable; and they knew it. Sin and shame pierced them. They were infected by the incurable disease of sin that would begin to take over their heart, mind and body and her soul. And having died in the spirit, she would begin the slow decline of final death in the flesh, then be separated from God.

Because, that’s what death does. It separates. Just like Lazarus was separated from Mary and Martha by death, humanity was separated from God by death. And we’re powerless against it.

Lazarus’ problem is our problem. Death

LAZARUS’ ONLY HOPE IS OUR ONLY HOPE.

John 11:15-42

Remember at the beginning of this story, John tells us that Mary and Martha sent for Jesus. There was only so much they could do for their brother. They weren’t going to be able to save him, but they knew that Jesus could. Lazarus’ needed a savior- He needed Jesus.

Jesus was their only hope.

We need a savior too. There is nothing we can do about our own condition. The infection of sin that, upon impact, completely decimated our spirit, can't be stopped. It spreads, slowly hardening us, body and soul, as though we were slowly turning into stone. It would take us completely, were it not for Jesus.

Ezekiel 36:25-29 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be **clean**; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. **26**I will give you a **new heart** and put a **new spirit** in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a **heart of flesh**. **27**And I will put **my Spirit in you** and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my ways.**29**I will save you ...

“I will save you”. That’s what Lazarus and Mary and Martha needed to hear. “I will save you”. It’s what we need to hear.

NICODEMUS

This was what Nicodemus needed to hear and understand too when he came to see Jesus.

Jesus said,

John 3:3-7 “...no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. ”

4“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “.. they can’t enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

5Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the **Spirit gives birth to spirit**. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’

Why?

Ephesians 2:1-5. Because... “you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ... you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. **3**All of us [were] following the desires and thoughts of the flesh. Like [everyone else], we ...deserv[ed] wrath.

4But , God, because of his great love for us, who is rich in mercy,

5made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in

transgressions it is by grace you have been saved.

We must be born again, made Alive, by Grace.

GRACE

Here we need to pause and insert one final Kingdom foundation for this year - Grace.

...it is by grace you have been saved.

Romans 6:23 “The wages for sin is death, but the gracious gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our LORD”

Many translations use the term “free gift” or just “gift” which can be a little misleading, or at least incomplete. The greek work actually means “gift of grace”. Because in reality, grace is never free. Someone counts the cost and pays the price. But the cost isn’t paid by the recipient. It’s paid by the giver; that’s what makes it a gift. Jesus paid our price. **The cleansing power of forgiveness for our sin cost Jesus His life.**

Isaiah 53:4-6, 9 “...it was our weaknesses He carried;

it was our sorrows that weighed him down.

And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God,

a punishment for his own sins!

5But he was pierced for our rebellion,

crushed for our sins.

He was beaten so we could be whole.

He was whipped so we could be healed.

6All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.

We have left God's paths to follow our own.

Yet the LORD laid on him

the sins of us all...

He had done nothing wrong,... but He was buried, like a criminal.”

But it is the power of His resurrection that enables us to receive the **gracious gift** of new life.

Matthew 28:1-6 “...when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the tomb [of Jesus], they realized there had been an earthquake, for an angel of the LORD had come down from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat on it. ... And the angel said to the women, “ Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said,”

In His death He took our sin, our punishment; and paid our wages. In His resurrection He offers new life. As Jesus told Martha,

John 11:23,25 “Your brother will rise again.”

“I am the resurrection and the life.

Who has the power to create? Go back to the beginning and remember the words of John.

[Jesus] “was with God in the beginning. **Through him all things were made; ...In him was life,**”

The Creator, our Creator is alive; and He is still creating!

I Corinthians 15:20-22

“... death came through a man, the resurrection [the creation of life] of the dead also comes through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be **made alive**.

II Corinthians 5:17-18. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a **new creation**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.... Through Christ”

If you are in Christ you ARE a new creation. Not, ‘becoming’ or ‘will be eventually’ you ARE a new creation! And God does not create broken things.

If I am a new creation, why do I still struggle with sin? Because our bodies, and everything they comprise have yet to be restored. One day we will receive new bodies. Either we will physically die, leaving this body and its sinful nature behind, or we will be raised together when Jesus returns for us. In either case, we will receive new bodies.

Romans 8:10-11 **10**If Christ is in you, though the body is [as good as] dead because of sin, yet the **spirit is alive** because of righteousness. **11**But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Lazarus' only hope is our only hope. The resurrection power of Jesus
to make us alive again!

LAZARUS' RESPONSE NEEDS TO BE OUR RESPONSE

John 11:26 "Do you believe this?"

That is what Jesus asked Martha. It's what He is asking you. Do you believe He can
make you a new creation? Is the word of Jesus as powerful now as it was in the
beginning at creation of the world? Is He still creating? God asked Ezekiel,

Ezekiel 37:3-6 "...can these dry bones live?"

Do you believe this? And God told him to prophesy, speaking,

... 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! ..."I will make breath enter
you, and you will come to life....Then you will know that I am the
Lord.'

John 11:43-44

"Then Jesus spoke in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"
And the man who had died came out!"

Come out!

Melissa, come out!

Sienna, come out!

Stef, come out!

Karen, come out!

...

He calls to His creation, the ones He loves. Come out of your tomb and live.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever **believes** in him shall not perish but **have eternal life**. **17**For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

John 3:16-17

Do you believe?

"Believe on the LORD Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

Acts 16:31

"For by grace you have been saved through faith."

Ephesians 2:8

Are you persuaded? Perhaps this is the first time you have heard this good news and you need to take the first step of faith. Like Lazarus, you need to respond to Jesus' call and receive the gift of life. **Hear His call and believe.**

John 11:44 "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."

Perhaps you've received the salvation life of Jesus, but like Lazarus, you still have some bindings keeping you from fully living. Mary and Martha helped Lazarus remove what bound his body. We can help each other be free and live.

You've believed, you're alive, now come out and be set free!

"Choose life, so that you can live!"

Deuteronomy 30:19

John 10:10 “There is a thief. He comes to steal, kill and destroy. But there is a Good Shepherd. His name is Jesus and comes to give life, and He gives it abundantly!”

Are you living abundantly? Working, leaping, seeing, hearing, speaking, thinking clearly and in community? Or do you need to be set free?

"It was for freedom Christ set us free."

Galatians 5:1

Lazarus' response needs to be our response.

Believe. Come out. Be set free.

LAZARUS' STORY CAN BE YOUR STORY.

By his life, Lazarus' was a living, breathing, walking, working, hearing, speaking, seeing, thinking testimony of the good news that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the World who brings the dead back to life. Your life, born again, lived abundantly and freely is a testimony of the gospel to this age.

Jesus said, pray this way;
Our Father in Heaven, Your name is Holy.
Your Kingdom come, Your will be done
On earth as it is in Heaven.

Matthew 6: 9-10

His will is for you to receive forgiveness of your sins and be born again. It's a free gift.

Believe.

Receive the cleansing of forgiveness and new birth.

Come out!

Be set free.

Be fully alive, and live!