

TAKE AWAY THE STONE

John 11:39

John 11 records the raising of Lazarus. It was an occasion as the time for Jesus to be crucified was approaching. We are told in that account that Lazarus was sick and that his sisters (Mary and Martha) sent for Jesus to come and heal him. Jesus delays going to Bethany where they were. Lazarus dies. When Jesus finally arrives, he had been in the tomb for 4 days. Jesus meets with Mary and then Martha. Martha tells Jesus that if He had been there, Lazarus would not have died. Jesus assured her that he would live again. Martha assumed He was speaking of the resurrection at the last day. Jesus had other things in mind as He declared, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"* (John 11:25-26). Mary and Martha both meet with Jesus and they take Him to the tomb. Jesus weeps (11:35), while the crowds question about Him, "Couldn't he have kept him from dying?" But then Jesus gives a command, "Take away the stone". Martha is concerned because he had been dead for 4 days. But Jesus assures her that they would see the glory of God. The stone is removed, and Jesus lifts up his eyes and prays to the Father. Then He declares, "Lazarus, come forth!" Lazarus came out of the grave, bound in his graveclothes. Jesus again commands, "Loose him, and let him go." And thus we see Jesus raising the dead, giving credence to His declaration, "I am the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25)

I. "Take away the stone!"

- a. There are many lessons we can learn from this account, but I want to focus on the stone Jesus commanded they remove.
 - i. First, the fact that there was a stone in place meant that Lazarus was dead and all knew it.
 - ii. Second, that stone was a barrier that separated the dead from the living.
 - iii. Third, Jesus commanded others to remove the stone. Jesus would take care of what they could not do (raising Lazarus), BUT He expected them to do what they could do.
 - iv. Fourth, removing the stone at His direction indicated they had faith in Him.
 - v. Fifth, when the stone was finally removed, Jesus was ready to do what He intended to do – raise up Lazarus.
- b. Let us now make spiritual application to this process.
 - i. First, because of sin, we are "dead" – Romans 6:23 – wages of sin is death. Ephesians 2:1-3 reminds us that we were dead in our trespasses and sins, when we walked "according to the course of this world, etc.
 - ii. Second, when we are dead in sin, we are separated from God. Isaiah 59:2 – the guilt of Israel & Judah. Colossians 1:21 speaks of once being alienated – and in need of reconciliation. Ephesians 4:17-18 speaks of those in the world being alienated from the life of God.
 - iii. Third, for Jesus to do His work, we have to do our part. Hebrews 5:9, Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. Acts 2:37-40 – on Pentecost they were told to obey the gospel and "be saved from this perverse generation." We have to come to Him in obedience
 - iv. Fourth, we act because we believe Him. Ephesians 2:8 calls our part "faith", which we have noted involves everything we do because of that faith. Hebrews 11:6 – without faith, we cannot please Him. Cf. 1 Peter 3:21 – note WHY we are baptized, "(not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."
 - v. Fifth, when we submit to His will, He can save us. He can make us alive again – Ephesians 2:4-5; 1 Peter 3:18

II. Are there “stones” in your life?

- a. We need to be concerned about anything that stands between us and the salvation of Jesus. Sadly, there are many who have placed barriers that need to be taken away.
- b. **The barrier of ignorance** –
 - i. Ignorance keeps many from coming to Jesus. And there are many different forms of this ignorance. Some simply choose to remain ignorant by not searching; Some are influenced by the teachings of men; Some think they are ok even though they believe and teach what is contrary to the truth of God’s word.
 - ii. Ephesians 5:17 - do not be unwise, but to understand what the will of the Lord is. Acts 17:30-31 – God now commands all men everywhere to repent.
 - iii. Jesus was certainly not ignorant, and He came to dispel ignorance. By the age of 12, He had an incredible amount of understanding about Himself and God’s will – Luke 2:41, 46-50. He pleaded with man to overcome their ignorance – John 10:37-38. He also came to reveal the father to man – John 6:44-45, 8:31-32, 14:9, etc.
- c. **The barrier of pride** –
 - i. Often man lets his own pride stand in the way. He thinks more highly of himself than he ought to. He reasons that he doesn’t need God. Or, he is satisfied where he is at and is too prideful to admit he might be wrong.
 - ii. The Bible warns that pride is a dangerous thing – Proverbs 16:18 warns, *Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.* 1 Corinthians 10:12 warns, “Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.”
 - iii. It requires genuine humility to surrender to God and Jesus. Recall Matthew 5:3 – the very first words of the sermon on the mount – Blessed are the poor in spirit. Romans 12:3 warns us to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. James 4:10 – humbles yourselves in the sight of the Lord...
 - iv. Philippians 2:5-8 - Jesus humbled Himself and left heaven. He humbled Himself before Pilate and others by remaining silent.
- d. **The barrier of stubbornness** –
 - i. Often pride breeds stubbornness. The idea is one who is unwilling to yield. While that can be complimentary if because of convictions. But often it is simply hard heartedness and even a rebellious spirit.
 - ii. 1 Samuel 15:22-23 – King Saul was rejected because he kept acting contrary to God’s will. After refusing to completely fulfill the LORD’s command concerning the Amalekites, Samuel condemned Saul describing his actions as stubbornness and rebellion. Luke 15:28 – the other brother, Jesus demonstrated a willingness to submit to the father rather than His own will
 - iii. James 3:17 describes the wisdom from above as being willing to yield.
 - iv. Jesus (again) demonstrates the life that is willing to yield - Matthew 26:39. BUT, He never compromised!
- e. **The barrier of indifference** –
 - i. A major concern in our society today is indifference. Far too many are apathetic to real change. And they do not care what happens. Much of that may be the result of so much brokenness around us, that people just don’t want to deal with it. And that is tragic. But when applied spiritually, it is of greater concern.
 - ii. When it comes to our salvation, we cannot afford to be indifferent. We have to care and our eternity depends on it.
 - iii. Jesus cared about others. It was seen in the various works He did, His compassion for the downtrodden and hurting, etc. He grieved at the condition of all mankind, even His enemies.
- f. The barrier of bitterness –

- i. It is no secret life is hard and often unfair. Many have experienced traumatic events or they are living in misery. Many more have been hurt and mistreated by others, perhaps even brethren. It is easy to become bitter and if not controlled, it can build a wall that is nearly impossible to penetrate and keeps many from letting Jesus do His work.
 - ii. The Bible warns against being bitter. Hebrews 12:14-15 calls for us to pursue peace lest a root of bitterness springs up. Ephesians 4:31 describes bitterness and its companions. James 3:14-15 notes that it is the wisdom of this world.
 - iii. We cannot let bitterness keep us from turning to God and Jesus.
 - iv. Consider Jesus. He had reason to be bitter considering what He did and how He was treated, but He gladly accepted His plight because we needed it. Hebrews 12:2-3 - speaks of how with joy Jesus endured the cross. He restored Peter and the rest, etc.
- g. ***The barrier of unforgiveness –***
- i. The Bible is clear that if we are unwilling to forgive others, we will not be forgiven – Mark 11:25-26. James 2:13 warns that judgment will be without mercy to the one who shows no mercy. Thus, if one refuses to forgive others, there is a barrier between him and God. Matthew 5:23-25 – Jesus even instructed that if you know your brother has something against you, take care of it BEFORE you offer your gifts to God.
 - ii. AND, Jesus is the ultimate example of forgiveness. It was for this purpose that he came – so that we might be forgiven. Jesus came to forgive us. Ephesians 1:7 reminds us that in Him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. AND, He demonstrated that throughout His life and even as He was being crucified – He prayed, “Father forgive them...” (Luke 23:34)
- h. ***The barrier of procrastination –***
- i. In Acts 24:25 we find Paul reasoning with Felix about righteousness, self-control and judgment to come. We read that Felix put off responding to what Paul taught. He procrastination stood as a barrier between him and salvation. And unless that barrier was removed, he remained in a lost condition.
 - ii. Many today hear the truth of God’s word and know what they need to do, but they put off their obedience to a later time. Perhaps it is about becoming a Christian, or maybe it is about making correction in one’s life as a Christian. We put off change because it is difficult and often unpleasant. But whatever it is may be a serious barrier to relationship with Him. Do not let it be. 2 Corinthians 6:2 tells us that today is the day of salvation. Recall what Ananias said to Paul when he saw him at Damascus - Acts 22:16 – why are you waiting?
 - iii. While Jesus taught that rest is good, there comes a time when we need to get up and go – Mark 1:38. Jesus did not put off what He knew needed to be done, including dying for us on that cross.

This year and last, we have been studying our need to draw closer to God. Lately we have listed some challenges to that quest. These points of this lesson could be added to that list, along with others.

As we can see, Jesus is not only the solution to giving us life, but the example of removing the “stones” that stand in our way. As in all things, let us “look to Him” and act to ensure that NOTHING hinders us from having our sins forgiven – Hebrews 12:1-2.