

### **1. Do you ever feel like you're dead?**

You know that you're physically alive, but you just feel dead inside. Lethargic, depressed...spiritually dead.

There are plenty of reasons why we might find ourselves feeling this way. You're not alone if you feel like this or ever-have felt this way.

#### ***“Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.”***

This was the cry of Israel in our OT text this morning after God sent them into exile.

They were at a drastic low point in their lives. They felt like they were dead!

God sent them into exile because they had made His name a joke amongst their neighbors. While they bowed down and worshipped false gods and their idols, the people around them began seeing the God of the universe as a laughing stock. God's own people and their witness to Him on a daily basis showed that God was meaningless to them...

Meanwhile God's people were also spilling blood through their words and actions (which equals murder) and were entering into all kinds of sexual impurity.

It's not surprising they felt like death...

The bible tells us that the Israelites thought they were living the good life, but it led them into *exile, hopelessness, death and spiritual death.*

They cut themselves off from God – **the source of life** – through their willful disobedience and sin.

**Lazarus was dead and buried in the tomb in our gospel reading.** He wasn't yet a pile of dried up bones, but he was well and truly dead by the time Jesus arrived. Even though Mary and Martha had sent word to Jesus saying, ***“Lord, he whom you love is ill”*** Jesus hadn't come straight away as they'd expected him to. Now Lazarus was dead; his body wrapped up in cloth, and the rock rolled over the opening of the tomb to keep the smell away and keep the animals out.

### **2. As we approach the valley of dry bones and the scene of Lazarus' death today, we're confronted with deep biblical truth that cuts through the layers.**

Like the Israelites, we can feel cut off, like our bones are wasting away. We can feel depressed and spiritually dead inside. And yes, there will come a day when we will die like Lazarus. Every single one of us will die. Now some of you may not have given much thought to your own death. Others think about death on the odd occasion. Some of you think about dying all the time; and a few of you worry about it constantly. That's just how it is with people.

Today the Word of God tells us that **there are worse things than death and dying.**

We talk and behave like dying is as bad as it gets – but there are worse things.

- Worse than cancer or heart troubles or any terminal illness you can think of which leads to physical death.
- Worse than the things that cause you the deepest angst and worry in your life or keep you up at night.
- Worse than relationship troubles

- and worse than any financial struggles or the health of the world’s economy – regardless of what our politicians say.

**3. Today Jesus tells us straight: The unfolding story of Lazarus has a deeper underlying truth.**

He says, ***“Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there*** [and here is that underlying truth that underpins this whole story] ***so that you may believe.”***

*According to Jesus, not believing is much worse than simply being dead!*

Not believing in Jesus is much worse than the sum of the things that create angst and worry in our lives. *That’s pretty confronting living in a world surrounded by death and disaster at the moment. Jesus says that unbelief is worse...* He places it right before our very eyes today.

We heard it in Ezekiel’s vision too didn’t we? Dry, lifeless, dead bones. God paraded Ezekiel through the bone yard to show him precisely what the consequences were of the people’s actions – which were actions of unbelief and faithlessness.

**4. Now, as Jesus arrives on the scene, he’s faced with a grieving Mary and Martha.**

***<sup>21</sup> “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” <sup>24</sup> Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”***

It’s subtle – but it’s there. Martha pays Jesus lip service. She pays lip service in that she calls him “Lord” and speaks about how God will do whatever he asks...but she actually doesn’t believe what she’s saying. It’s just lip service! As far as Martha and Mary are concerned, their brother is DEAD. It doesn’t matter that Jesus declares that Lazarus will rise again. It doesn’t matter that Martha said with her lips, *“But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”* They were just words! For Martha, Jesus is too late and her brother is dead.

We take hits in our relationships, our marriages, our health, our hip pocket, work, family – all over the place don’t we? We give Jesus some ‘acknowledgement / lip service’ saying things like, *“God will see us through.”* But do we really believe that God will come through for us? Or does God become our fallback position with comments like, *“All we can do now is pray.”* Talk like that can only mean one thing – our real help, whatever that might be (medicine, surgery, science, people power or counseling) can’t do anything else for us...all we can do now is pray – in other words, “we’re dead, finished, our hope is cut off.” We respond just like Martha did.

**5. Jesus didn’t arrive on Mary and Martha’s schedule. He doesn’t always arrive on our schedule either...But He was always going to arrive! Jesus’ work happens in His time.** Certainly, God works through means such as medicine, science, community or counseling – but he also reserves the right to surprise us and open unexpected doorways according to His plan, purpose and especially His timing. God is full of surprises!

Jesus not only arrives – but He cares deeply about your circumstances. When Jesus arrived at Mary and Martha’s place the bible tells us that he was deeply moved and wept. But it’s also deeper than you might think...

***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. And again in v38, 38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb.***

Jesus is deeply moved – He’s angry! This is a rare occasion where English isn’t able to translate Greek very well. He’s not angry at Mary or Martha or Lazarus. He’s angry that Lazarus is dead. He’s angry because he is standing face to face with the realm of Satan – which is death! It was never meant to be this way! We were created and designed for life in complete communion with God and each other. We were never created for death. Jesus hates seeing His people suffering under these circumstances. He hates to see dry dead bones and he hates to see people suffering death – be it physical and especially spiritual death!

**6. And so Jesus calls out with a loud voice: “Lazarus, come out!”** This same life-giving, creative word had the dead bones rattling in Ezekiel’s vision and covered the bones with sinews, flesh and skin. This was God breathing life into people who were dead in their sins. Breathing His ruach (His breath, His Spirit) and ***re-animating people to Real life***. This same life giving breath/ Spirit comes from the mouth of Jesus as he speaks and summons Lazarus to walk out of the tomb. He was alive! That same creative word of Jesus is yours today. ***It’s what re-animates your life in the Kingdom!*** I hope you heard it in the reading today:

***10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.***

God breathed life into dry bones, into Lazarus and he pours His spirit into you. It’s cause for us to sing God’s praises and glorify Him for His amazing gift of eternal life. Life now and future life in His eternal kingdom.

Instead of glorifying God, the chief priests and the Pharisees plot to kill Jesus. Little do they know that God will not have His glory taken from Him or given to another. Even Caiaphas the chief priest gives glory to God (unwittingly) saying to the enemies of Jesus,

***50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”***

***51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.***

Caiaphas didn’t understand God sent His Son into the World to save it...but

**7. Jesus knows that His mission is to overcome death once and for all. And the welcome surprise is that He’s right on schedule! God’s schedule. *6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly...***

- Only the death of Jesus has the power to re-animate our spiritually dry bones.
- Only Jesus can rescue us from our sins that are rooted in unbelief and re-direct us to His life-giving power.
- Only Jesus can overcome death for all those who believe in Him and look to Him for real and authentic life in His kingdom.

Jesus gives life that can see beyond cancer and terminal illness; beyond anxiety and worry, beyond financial burdens and world economies. Christians living in these promises of Jesus ***glorify Him and give him a great reputation among their peers.*** Jesus said to Mary & Martha and says to each of us today,

***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”***

Only Jesus can smash every layer of death to pieces. Both Spiritual and physical death. Jesus is the resurrection and the life – your life and my life. It’s the life we share in now, not just when we die. Eternal life for the people of God begins at the baptismal font and goes on for eternity. It’s not something that only kicks in after you die! There is physical death that takes place. But just as death couldn’t hold Jesus in the tomb – it can’t hold those united to him in baptism and faith. ***That glorifies the Father. It magnifies Jesus. It gives honor and praise to the Holy Spirit.***

- God is glorified through the death and resurrection of Jesus for His people.
- He’s glorified in His victory over Satan and death.
- He’s glorified when we live like He matters the most and make much of Him in every area of our lives.
- He’s glorified as we live in him and as we die in Him – because even though we die – we will live.

***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”*** Do you believe this? How will you glorify God in your life this week? Amen.

May the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds safe in **Christ Jesus – the resurrection and the Life – for you. Amen.**