

Take Away the Stone

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn again for a little to the chapter we read in John chapter 11. And we can read that from verse 38 where it says, Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb.

It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, Take away the stone. Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, Lord, by this time there will be an odour, for he has been dead four days.

This is probably one of the best-known chapters in the New Testament, and I'm sure everybody has heard many a sermon on this because it is so full of instruction, so full of meaning.

It is really quite a remarkable chapter, and it highlights very much the care and the compassion of Christ, the authority, the power of Christ.

It highlights his humanness, highlights his godness. And the chapter is full of instructions for us.

[1 : 12] And we see the delay of Christ responding to the news that Lazarus was very ill, and this was a family that he loves.

And it teaches us that the delays of Christ in answering doesn't mean that he's not hearing us. You know, sometimes when we pray and it appears that the Lord isn't hearing, there's no answer to our prayer.

We're liable to think, God's not listening. God's not hearing. Well, this chapter shows us very clearly that the Lord was fully aware. The Lord was responding.

But what we've got to learn is that at the end of the day, God will always work things for his own glory. And that's a problem for us because we expect things to, when we bring a matter before the Lord, we have worked out in our own mind how we want it to work out.

And the Lord might have a completely different purpose and a different plan because his plan and his way is for his glory. And while we very glibly say that we want to live to the glory of God, doing that actually can be really challenging and really difficult.

[2 : 33] And that's where faith has to come into exercise. Because if we're suitably exercised by faith, and our faith is fixed constantly upon Christ, then we will be seeking the glory of God, and we will understand something of the delays and something of the cross providences that appear to come our way.

Also, it shows us here that we're not always ready for the way that the Lord will work because we find Martha in verse 22 saying, I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.

So that's Martha saying to Jesus, whatever. I know, Jesus, whatever you ask. But the thing is, Martha wasn't ready for the whatever.

Because when Jesus asks them to take away the stone, Martha's horrified. And Martha's basically saying, you can't do that. No, Lord, not that.

And I'm sure we've been there as well. Because there have been times we've said, maybe not audibly, but in our hearts, we're saying, Lord, what are you doing? Lord, not this.

[3 : 48] And that shows us that we're not alone. Here's this good woman. And she's saying, I know, whatever. But when Jesus begins to tell whatever means, she's saying, no, not that.

And again, we see that the sisters make the same mistake. Both Mary and Martha believe that if Jesus had been present, that Lazarus would not have died. They both think that.

And again, sometimes we make the mistake when losses and pains and difficulties come into our life, that it's a sign that the Lord isn't with us. That is not the case.

The Lord had a purpose in allowing Lazarus to die, as is very obvious here. But sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that the Lord isn't there.

Well, we've always got to remember that the way that God works is that he has to try us. You know what the Lord says of the trial of our faith?

[4 : 52] That it's more precious than gold. Now, we know how precious gold is. But in the Lord's sight, the trial of our faith is of far more importance and more value than gold.

And so it's inevitable, but the Lord is going to test his people. It makes it very clear it's a mark, indeed, of the Christian that they will be tested along the way.

But the thing is, often our eyes of faith are dimmed and we're not seeing in the way that we should. And Jesus says in verse 40, Jesus said, Did I not tell you if you believe that you will see the glory of God?

You know, unbelief is an incredible blight on our Christian life. Unbelief robs us of seeing so much. Unbelief is a hindrance to the work of Jesus.

It's not a sense of unworthiness that holds back the work of Jesus. It's not a sense of our sin that holds back the work of Jesus.

[5 : 59] It's unbelief. It tells us in Mark's gospel, He could do no mighty works there except lay hands on a few. And he marveled at their unbelief. So you see how unbelief hinders the work of Christ like little else.

And it's a challenging question to ourselves as well. Is unbelief hindering and holding back in our life the work of Jesus?

Because you see, unbelief clouds our sense of how the Lord is working. You could have two Christians looking at exactly the same situation. And one Christian could be saying, Oh, do you know, it's wonderful.

It's wonderful the way the Lord is working. I'm amazed at what the Lord is doing. And another Christian beside is saying, Oh, do you know, Lord's not with us at all.

Nothing happening today. Everything is dead. And the problem is of what's going on within the person's heart. One person has a vision to see.

[7 : 02] One person has a sensitive heart, a tender heart, a spiritual heart, a heart that is fixed by faith and the glory of God and is seeing God at work, sees God in everything.

And the other person is hindered and hampered because of unbelief. And remember, unbelief is still there in the heart of the Christian. Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.

And you will find unbelief very much in the prejudiced heart and in the hard heart. And so we need to seek to have our hearts softened and our hearts molded by Christ so that there will be a seeing all that Jesus is doing.

And again, this chapter brings before us one of the most remarkable statements that Jesus ever made, where he says, I am the resurrection and the life.

where Jesus is stating that he is a personal guarantee that he will win victory over death and over the grave.

[8 : 07] And that because he will win victory over the death and the grave, so will all his people. And you know, that's a glorious hope. If you're a believer tonight, you know something, you have a wonderful hope in your heart.

Paul likens death to sleep. So does Jesus. And when you and I go to bed at night, two things happen. One is we have rest.

And another thing is we have renewal. You get up the next day and that's you ready for another day. And in a sense, that's what happens in the grave as well. Our bodies are laid in the grave to rest.

Till when? Till the resurrection. And at the resurrection, we find that everything is going to change. Because the return of Jesus is going to change things in a way that we cannot even begin to imagine.

You know, when Jesus returns, it's going to be so different to how he came. At this time of year, so many are thinking about the birth of Jesus. When Jesus came into this world, very, very few recognized him.

[9 : 16] as the Messiah, as the Son of God, as who he is, the second person of the Godhead, come in our nature. But you know, the day he returns, there won't be one solitary soul alive that will have the slightest doubt, but that this is the Son of God.

because we're told that when Jesus returns, it will be the most amazing spectacle. There'll be dazzling brilliance as he returns. He'll descend from heaven, and there'll be three great, as it were, phenomenon occurring at the same time.

the Lord will shout. It also tells us that there will be the voice of the archangel, and there will be the sound of the trumpet of God.

Now, we know that the trumpet was often used to signal the dawn of the day. the trumpet is often used to signal the arrival of royalty.

But here, the trumpet, yes, it's going to announce the arrival of royalty, but it's going to do more than that. It's announcing the resurrection. It's announcing the opening of the graves.

[10 : 30] The trumpet of God, with a moment that blows, the graves will open. Imagine if we're still alive at that time.

What a thought that would be. Paul tells us about that in Corinthians. He says, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall all be changed.

At that moment, the graves will open, and the graves of corruption will give way to incorruption, and we will be changed.

Our bodies will be changed to become beautiful, glorious, spiritual. We will resemble our saviour, our mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. We're told that. It's all a great mystery.

Now, Paul likens it to planting a seed in the ground. And he says, Our body is like that seed. And when you put that seed into the ground, whether it's going to be a flower or a plant, that seed will die.

[11 : 39] But from the seed will grow the plant or the flower. So in a sense, the flower or the plant is a seed. Although the seed has died, this is what has come from it.

And Paul says, that's what it's going to be like for us as well. The continuation there, so our body laid into the grave, the same body will rise just in the same way as you have to plant the seed in the ground, and from it this beautiful flower.

So it will be for the believer. And it's no wonder that there's this wonderful hope within our heart.

Now, this is what, although Jesus isn't saying all that to Martha at this particular moment, that is what it means when Jesus says that he is the resurrection and the life.

And I hope tonight that you have this hope in your heart, that you have this hope. If you're a Christian tonight, you have this hope. If you're believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, that's part of what you believe in.

You believe in the resurrection. Now, as I read on Wednesday night, there's going to be a resurrection for everybody, not just for the Christian.

[13 : 01] Remember, I read in Daniel, and it tells us, they are very, very solemn words. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake. Some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

That's how it's going to be. There's going to be a division in the resurrection. Some to everlasting life, some to everlasting shame and contempt.

And that's a serious thing to reject Jesus because Jesus is the only... This world has nothing for death. This world, there's nobody that can give you any hope for what happens in death apart from Jesus.

And that's why it is so important that we lay hold upon the truth. Jesus said, I am the way, I'm the truth, I'm the life. And it's the most wonderful privilege that you have tonight to be sitting where Jesus is present, who is the way, the truth, and the life.

And he's saying, ask me. Ask me to come into your heart. Receive me. Because without me, you do not have this hope in any shape or form.

[14 : 19] So the Christian is able to look at death and say, Oh death, where is your sting? To look at the grave and say, Oh grave, where is your victory? You'll often see in a tomb on a gravestone till the day breaks.

I'm sure if you walk around a cemetery, you'll often see that till the day breaks. What day? It's the day, the resurrection dawn. That moment when the trumpet will sound and the graves will open.

And then we see in this chapter Jesus' reaction to death. And we see, of course, that he weeps. It's a tiny version. It's a verse that's full of meaning and significance.

We see that, that Jesus, people will say it's the smallest version of the Bible and so it is. Jesus wept. And it shows us something of just who Jesus is.

It shows us his care, his love, his concern. He enters into our, where we are. Maybe tonight you have pain in your heart. Maybe, maybe nobody's listening to you.

[15:27] Well, Jesus will. That's the beauty of it. You might not be able to tell anybody how you feel. There might be things going on in your life nobody else knows about. You might be able to hide it from others.

Your face doesn't display it, but my word, it's going on deep in there. Jesus is able. Jesus is the one. He is the shoulder to cry on.

He is the one who is there and we're to go to him and to bring all our cares, our anxieties, our burdens, our pains, our sorrows because he understands. He's been there.

But he is also able to help us in a way that no human is able to help. But there's more to the fact that Jesus wept because it tells us in verse 33 when Jesus saw our weeping and the Jews also had come with our weeping, it tells us he was deeply moved in his spirit.

And then again in verse 38 it tells us that he was deeply moved. And that word actually translated means really there's an outburst of indignation or anger.

[16:39] Now we often don't associate that with Jesus. But that's at that moment that's what Jesus gives us and within him there's this outburst of anger within him.

Not just weeping but there's this anger at what death has done, what sin has brought into this world. The havoc, the pain, the destruction, the tears, the sorrows, all because of sin.

And Jesus is angry. In fact, it's, it has been said that that as he went to the B.B. Warfield who says Jesus approached the grave of Lazarus in a state not of uncontrollable grief but inexpressible anger.

That's who he was. He was so angry with what sin has caused and the havoc and the pain and the destruction and the death. And so Jesus is angry with death.

But the wonderful thing is Jesus has come to confront death and to confront the devil who's behind it and he's come to confront what nobody else could. And as Jesus came to the grave weeping and angry he commands take away the stone.

[18:00] And of course this is where the protest comes from Martha. Why? Because behind the stone there's corruption and nobody wants to see corruption.

And you know spiritually that's who we are in our natural state corrupt. And there's stones layers of stones over us that hide from ourselves what we're really like.

And we don't want to see what we're really like. why do you think people want the Bible removed? Why do people say whatever book you look at don't look at the Bible?

Because the Bible is the only book that will shift the stones. The Bible is the only book that reveals to us how we really are.

And so people don't want to know. When Jesus came into this world he declared I am the light of the world. And people didn't want the light. Jesus said that.

[19:06] Men love darkness rather than light. They prefer it. Leave me alone. You know there's so many people don't want to hear the gospel.

They don't want to come to church because they'll be disturbed. That's the bottom line. They don't want to hear about sin. They don't want to hear about their accountability before God.

They don't want to hear that inside here there's all kind of corruption and sin. And so people don't want to hear these things. But Jesus says take away the stone.

And you know that's the greatest thing that could happen to you tonight. If tonight you're still not a Christian. That the stones that is covering your own eyes from your own heart would be shifted in order that you would see.

And if you're a Christian you look back in your life and you thank the Lord that came a day when he removed that stone. That was hiding what was in there from yourself.

[20:12] Oh it wasn't a nice thing to begin with. It was a terrible discovery. But it was the most wonderful discovery because that discovery brought you to seek the Lord.

To seek his forgiveness. To seek his mercy. to seek his pardon. To seek his renewal. And so this is what Jesus has done. And you know the wonderful thing is that Jesus is the one who has power over death and over the grave.

He demonstrated in his own death. Because remember the ladies they came to anoint the body of Jesus. And as they were coming to the grave there was a problem and they were saying who is going to shift the stone?

Because they knew that they hadn't the strength to shift the stone. Who's going to shift the stone? But when they got there they saw the stone was gone. Because you see Jesus he no stone no

grave could hold him.

He had power over it. And so Jesus is the one who has conquered death. And so Jesus approaches the grave miracles.

[21 : 24] And he comes distressed and angry and weeping and he commands take away the stone. Now some people will say why did Jesus ask them to take away the stone?

If Jesus has power over death if Jesus is able to perform so many miracles why didn't he just take the stone away himself through his own power?

Well I don't believe that Jesus is going to use miraculous power to do something that is quite simple for other people to do. Nobody could bring a person to life but Jesus but plenty of people around could shift the stone.

I think it's as simple as that. And so Jesus very simply says take away the stone. And I'm sure that there are many stones tonight that are covering your heart.

If you're still not a Christian it is because of the stone that is over you so that you're not seeing. If you're a Christian you will look back over your life and you will remember so many different people.

[22 : 34] You will remember people who said things to you. You will remember people and it was their life that spoke to you. They were Christians and they loved the Lord and their life spoke the way that they lived their life the way they reacted in situations.

There was something about them that spoke to you. It was one of the stones. Maybe by their lifestyle. Maybe it was what they said to you. But these were what they were beginning to move the stones in your life so that you were beginning to get a glimpse of who you were and who you needed.

And if you're here tonight without Jesus Christ you need the stone moved so that you too will discover your need and discover that there's only one who can meet that need and that's Jesus. There are so many stones. There's the stone of unbelief. You know it's possible to come to church week in, week out, month in, month out and still not believe. There's a stone of carelessness, of apathy.

Again you can come to church week in, week out, month in, month out and it doesn't really bother you. You hear the gospel, you read it.

[24 : 02] In fact you could tell people if somebody said to you, you know what do you do to become a Christian? Oh you could quote oh you just believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved. But it doesn't really mean anything to you.

Well let me assure you there's a huge stone over your heart that sure needs to be moved. For some people it's stones of doubt. Other people it might be stones of fear.

You know there might be people here tonight and they're saying I would like to be a Christian but I'm afraid I'm afraid of how it will affect my life.

What will people say? What will people say in school if I become a Christian? You know when you get older maybe it doesn't matter but when we're young I remember it myself the whole thing of peer pressure.

What will other people think? That sometimes holds us back. Well we need that stone removed. It doesn't matter what people think. It doesn't matter what people say.

[25 : 00] It matters what the Lord says. And so you ask tonight Lord whatever stones are there that are blocking me from accepting you.

Take them away in order that I may discover my need and discover the saviour who can meet that need. Because nobody else can except the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember Jesus says I am the resurrection and the life. Let's pray. Oh Lord our God we give thanks for the tremendous statement that you made by a grave.

When it all seemed so bleak so empty there was so much distress and sorrow and sadness and yet you made the most wonderful statement that that has been made in the face of death saying I am life and I am the life that rises again.

We give thanks for the hope that is in our heart tonight and that we are able to look at death when it will approach us and to say oh death where is your sting?

[26 : 14] Oh grave where is your victory? We pray for that faith oh Lord. We pray if there are any here tonight who are still outside Christ that they won't linger any longer because our days are running away.

The return of Jesus Christ is coming ever closer. and we read there of what will happen on that day and that some to everlasting shame and contempt some to outer darkness.

It tells us that men love darkness rather than light and if we choose that darkness then it ends in outer darkness which is a fearful thought.

And so we pray that the light of Jesus may enter into our hearts and into our lives tonight and that we may discover what it is to have Jesus as our Lord and our Saviour as the resurrection and life in our life.

Bless us all we pray grant us your grace and take us all home safely we ask in Jesus name. Amen.

We're going to conclude our service singing to God's praise in Psalm 16 from Sing Psalms.

[27 : 33] Psalm 16 from Sing Psalms. And the tune is Golden Hill.

Verse 8 Before me constantly I set the Lord alone because he is in my right hand I'll not be overthrown therefore my heart is glad my tongue with joy will sing my body too will rest secure in hope unwavering for you will not allow my soul and death to stay nor will you leave your Holy One to see the tombs decay you have made known to me the path of life divine bliss shall I know at your right hand joy from your face will shine these verses verses 8 to the end of Psalm 16 before me constantly before me constantly I said the Lord the Lord because he is at my right hand I'll not be over up my my my!

my For you will not allow my soul and death to stay.

Nor will you leave your only heart to see the tomb decay.

[30 : 18] You have been known to me. The path of life divine.

Where shall I know? So at your right hand, For if all your face will shine.

I'll go to the door on my right. Now may the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.

Hello. Hello. Thank you.