

Problems and Solutions

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

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Text: John 11:17-27; 47-53

Focus: In life we encounter problems and we seek solutions. Jesus identified the solution to Lazarus' "sleep." The solution was Jesus Himself. We encounter problems in life where Jesus is our only source and solution.

As they wait for the bus, Mother tells little Johnny to say he's 4 years old if the driver asks, so he can ride for free.



As they get into the bus, the driver asks Johnny how old he is. "I am 4 years old," Johnny replied.

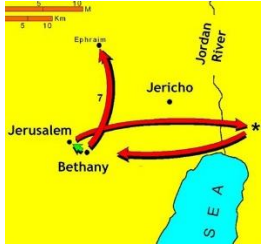
"And when will you be six years old?" asked the driver.

"When I get off the bus."¹

How many of you have problems? Problems like illness, or family stress, or marriage difficulties, or business difficulties, or school pressures of papers and exams. I am not immune to those problems either. People are so prone to problems in life that they will seek solutions in some of the strangest ways. We share our woes on Facebook with so many people seeking sympathy and comfort. We will read horoscopes in the newspaper to guide our day's



activities. We will visit a counselor or physician for solutions to our problems. We all have problems. Right?



I guess a better question would be how many of you have found the perfect solution to your problem? In today's lesson, we see that Mary and Martha had a problem that they only thought Jesus could solve. Jesus is approaching the end of his ministry on earth. His hour has not yet come, but it is certainly getting close. Almost one week before Jesus enters triumphantly into Jerusalem, He gets word from his friends in Bethany that Lazarus, a close friend, was gravely ill.

Your first thought would be that Jesus would rush over to Bethany and heal his friend. But Jesus decided to wait where He was for two days before He left. Why did He tarry? Why did Jesus wait? How many times have we asked the same question? Why did you allow this to happen to me God? Why did you not answer my prayer in the manner in which I needed? Why? Why? Why?

Yet Jesus knew the right window of opportunity to perform His will. How many of us know when the right time to do something is? How many of us know the perfect time? Farmers are making decisions about planting their crops this year. Decisions will have to be made when to plant those tender plants. If you plant too early, they may get frost bitten by a late frost. If you wait too late, the dry, hot summer sun may cause the plants to not grow properly. Yet a decision must be made with the available information at hand.



Jesus knew when the message came to him that Lazarus had already died. But He did not jump up and go see the family and grieve with them. He waited two days before venturing back out again.

Remember the Pharisees wanted to stone Jesus. They wanted Him gone. The disciples knew this and realized that a trip back into that region, about two miles from Jerusalem, would surely mean a death sentence. Thomas, the one we call the doubter, said, "Let us go with Jesus so that we may die with him." Bold talk for such a questioner.

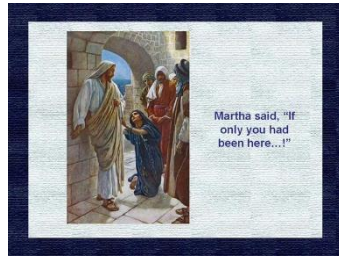
Jesus waited two more days then they left. Jesus knew if he left when He got the message, Lazarus would have only been in the grave for two days. The tradition of the day was that the spirit of a person hovered over a person's body for three days. After three days, their soul departed to heaven. It would have fit within their understanding of death for Lazarus to be raised from the dead during that time. By waiting, the window of opportunity had passed.



There are two other occasions recorded in scripture where Jesus had raised someone from the dead. A young girl after she died in her home and another time, Jesus revived a boy as the family were on their way to the cemetery to bury him. In the case of Lazarus, only the act of God could raise this man after he had been in the grave for four days!

The Problem

As they came near Bethany, Martha came to Him and stated her problem. ***“Jesus, if you only would have been here, Lazarus would not have died.”***



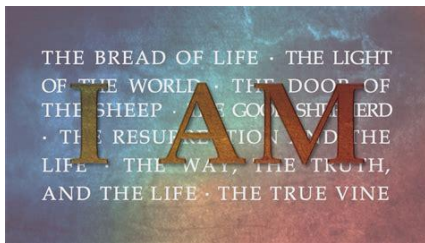
Jesus said, ***“Your brother will rise again.”***

Martha in full understanding and confidence in the resurrection said, ***“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”***

Jesus responds, ***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.”***

The great confession of Martha’s faith responds, ***“Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”***

Martha’s problem was the death of her brother Lazarus; Jesus provides the solution by proclaiming He is the resurrection and the life.



Jesus’ assertion stems from the truth that He is a part of the great “I AM.” Since we began our study on the Book of John, I have noticed there is a progression in the I AM statements in the Book of John. The first begins the process, and the last completes or seals the process.

I am the bread of life.

First you need to come and feed on Christ to receive life.

I am the vine.

Next you need to draw your nourishment from Christ.

I am the light.

You need the light to walk in this world.

I am the way, truth and the life.

You need to know which way to walk.

I am the good shepherd.

You need to listen for his voice as you walk in the way.

I am the door.

As you enter the door, you enter into eternal life.

I am the Resurrection and the life.

When we do die, we will be raised into newness of life.

Being in Christ involves being attached to the source of life, feeding on the word of God, walking everyday in the newness of life, and trusting Jesus for today and for eternity.

All of us at one time or another have discovered that we have a problem that we need to bring to Jesus. Each of us have experienced illness in our life or in our family’s life. Often in the midst of sickness, we seek a solution to our situation.

Three Kinds of Sickness

T.W. Hunt shares some good information about three kinds of sickness found in the bible. This quote is from the video Bible study ***“From Heaven’s View.”***² T.W. Hunt

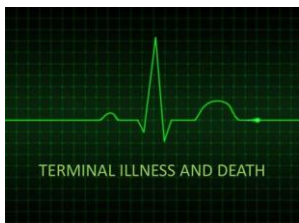


introduces his daughter Melina who has just gone through breast cancer surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. During the midst of her treatment, a pastor friend of theirs from Chicago wrote a note of encouragement to them. In the note he wrote,

“There are three kinds of sickness found in the Bible. The first one is a sickness unto *chastisement*. The second is a *sickness unto death*. And the third is a sickness for the *Glory of God*. You only need to worry about one of them. If it is the first one, the sickness unto chastisement, the Holy Spirit’s job is to tell you what you have done wrong. If it is the sickness unto death, it is the Holy Spirit’s job to take you home. The only thing you need to focus on is the Glory of God. Focus on the Glory of God.”

The first sickness that this pastor highlighted is sometimes called **chastisement**. Maybe we are not living as we know we should because there is a habit that is causing this illness to persist. It could be drinking, or smoking, or poor eating habits. Each of these could cause sickness that could be classified as chastisement. As Melina said, it is the Holy Spirit’s job to tell us if there is an area we are not being obedient in.

/ˈtʃæstɪzmənt/ - chas-tise-ment
chastisement
(1) (noun) verbal punishment; (2) (noun) a rebuke for making a mistake;



The second kind of sickness is a **sickness unto death**. Everyone of us will face this one day. Everyone of us will stand beside of the grave of one that we love. We may not know why

they died when they did, but we need to trust the Holy Spirit to do His job and take them home.

Hershel H. Hobbs wrote the January Bible Study in 1989 on the Book of John.³ In that study on chapter eleven, he relates the following personal story.

“Even if a believer dies, he/she still will live. And if one lives and believes in Jesus, that person will never die. Verse 26 is expressed in the strongest possible language. “And every single one of the ones living and believing in Me not never shall he die unto the age” or “unto eternity.” (Hobbs translation) “Unto” may also read “into.” Of course, Jesus spoke of spiritual death and life.

Hershel Hobbs wrote, “When my wife and I had been married fifty-seven- and one-half years she learned she was terminally ill. At that time, she asked me the most difficult question I have ever tried to answer. She asked, “Am I dying?” I said, “Yes, darling.” “Why?” she asked. I told her I did not know. Then I said, “All I can tell you is that I will hold your hand as long as I can, and when I can go no farther, Jesus’ hand will take hold and lead you through.”

“She never asked again. She never complained. Her only concern was for those left behind. On her gravestone are the words “Absent from the body ... Present with the Lord.” (2 Cor. 5:8, KJV). No in-between!

I find great comfort in knowing that there are no in-betweens! To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

The Solution

In Lazarus' situation, God had a special plan to glorify God. Through Jesus Christ, Lazarus' death and resurrection from the dead brought glory to God.

As T. W. Hunt said earlier, the various sicknesses we have in life could be a result of chastisement from the Lord. Our sickness could result in our death. Or through it, it may result in giving glory to God.



I will admit, the longer I live, I have fewer and fewer answers as to why some people become sick and die. I do not understand the randomness of cancer, disease, and death. I do not understand why people die in automobile accidents, tornados, or through the senseless act of murder. I do not understand why a plane crashes and many people die. My head and heart do not understand these kinds of problems, but in the midst of it all, I have come to trust God, no matter what. Many of you have expressed to me over the years that it was the presence of the Lord and other peoples love that got them through their grief, loss, and surgeries. God is present with us; we are not alone.

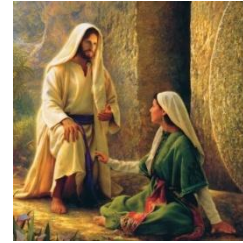
Lazarus' Problem and Jesus' Solution

The passage of scripture that I read this morning, illustrates that Jesus had a particular plan for the life and death of Lazarus. Martha told Mary that Jesus was there and she came running to see Jesus. She cried out, ***“Jesus, if you had only been here, then my brother would not have***



died.” Her broken heart touched the heart of Jesus. It touched Jesus so much that the shortest verse in the bible is recorded in verse 35. ***“Jesus wept.”***

Jesus knew He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. He knew that the grave would be empty. But was broken hearted at the grief of Mary and their family and friends.



Jesus said, ***“Roll back the stone.”***

Martha said, ***“No way, by now he is beginning to smell. It has been four days since he died.”***

Jesus rebuked her with these words, ***“Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”*** They obeyed, and rolled away the stone.

Jesus prayed, thanking His father for hearing His prayer. In a loud voice, He cried, ***“Lazarus, come forth.”*** One minister said that Jesus called him by name so as not to call the entire graveyard alive.

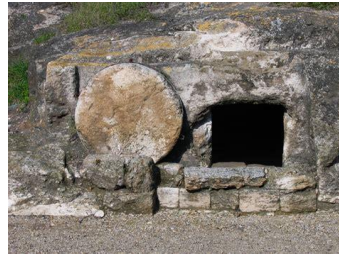


Lazarus came walking out, bound by the grave clothes.

Notice that those at the grave site of Lazarus moved the stone, not Jesus. They did what they could, while Jesus did what only He could do.

All of us at one time or another has had a stone block our path. Maybe today there are stones in your life that you need to move before God can do a work in your life.

Stones of unbelief.
 Stones of pride.
 Stones of selfishness.
 Stones of revenge.
 Stones of bitterness.
 Stones of unforgiveness.
 Stones of envy.
 Stones of unfaithfulness.
 Stones of disobedience.



You need to take a step towards God and remove them.
 Then come and ask and let Jesus call the dead parts of you
 out and make them alive.

Change unbelief to belief.
 Change pride into humility.
 Change selfishness to generosity.
 Change revenge into service.
 Change bitterness into blessing.
 Change unforgiveness into forgiveness.
 Change envy into love.
 Change unfaithfulness into faithfulness.
 Change disobedience into obedience.

All of us need a renewal and a clear word from God. In Mary and Martha's case Jesus turned death into life. Some commentators say this was the last of the seven signs that are recorded in the Book of John. I think the book closes with the supreme sign – which was Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Jesus began His public ministry at His baptism by John the Baptist and it ended here with the resurrection of Lazarus.

In the four gospels, (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) there are 89 chapters. Only four cover the first 30 years of Jesus' life. The remaining 85 chapters cover the last three years of His life. Out of those 85 chapters, 27 deal with the last 8 days of Jesus' life. That is about one-third of the Gospels that deal with the death and resurrection of Jesus.⁴




After Lazarus is raised from the dead, the mood clearly changes. The Pharisees got word quickly. Many people there saw the power of God, and what He had done that day, and believed in Jesus. The Pharisees knew their power was dwindling. Here was a man that turned water into wine, healed a lame man, fed 5000 with 5 loaves of bread and two fish, made a mud patch for a blind man, and now He is raising the dead! There is a revolution in the making. They were about to lose their status as leaders. The Roman army may enter and take away their autonomy. They felt that something must be done. They had a problem, and to them, eliminating Jesus was the solution and, at whatever cost, it was worth it. The bounty was posted.

Caiaphas made the most prophetic statement anyone could have ever made. In verse 50 he says, ***“You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient (or necessary) for us that one man (Jesus) should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.”*** John adds in verse 52 that ***“not only for the nation, but also that He would gather together in***

The High Priest in Jesus' day was Caiaphas – 18 to 37 AD

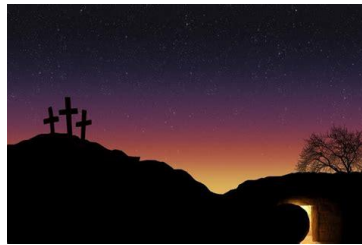
- He is mentioned in connection with John the Baptist's ministry
- Luke 3:1-2 NLT It was now the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, the Roman emperor. Pilate was governor over Judea; ... (2) Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. At this time a message from God came to John son of Zechariah, who was living out in the wilderness.



one the children of God who were scattered abroad.” From that day forward, they plotted to put Him (Jesus) to death. All of life is composed of problems. Many times, we seek a solution before we fully understand the problem. Mankind’s greatest problem is sin. The good that I want to do, I don’t do. I do the things I ought not to do even though I know I should not do them.

Sin has separated us from God. Jesus knew that the solution to sin was our greatest need. That is why He came. That is why God sent His Son to a manger in Bethlehem. That is why He came. He paid the price, laid down His life, and endured the cross to provide the necessary substitutionary atonement we needed. In every other religion in the world, the answer to this sin problem is not solved. It is only solved through the blood of Jesus Christ.

God is a gentleman; He does not force anyone to accept Him. He stands at the door and knocks. If anyone hears His voice, and opens the door, He will enter in. He will dine with you today, if you let him.



Our problem	is solved by	His cross
Our need	is satisfied by	His loss
Our sin	is atoned for by	His blood

When God created the world, it did not cost Him anything. He spoke and the world was made. He molded and breathed and man was created. But when His creation rebelled, it was costly to redeem His creation - it cost Him the life of his Son.

Maybe God has spoken to you today. You have an opportunity to respond as God leads you. He is knocking, please open the door of your heart to Him today.

LET US PRAY

Notes:

- ¹ Mikey’s Funnies, A Bus Funny, June 1, 2026
- ² T.W Hunt’s Video Bible Study, “From Heaven’s View,” tape 1, within the first 10 minutes.
- ³ Herschel H. Hobbs, “The Gospel of John: Invitation to Life” Adult January Bible Study, Convention Press, Nashville Tenn. 1988, page 70.
- ⁴ Thru the Bible, J. Vernon McGee, Vol. 4 page 441.

