

Outline #2 (Chapter Two of *The Lazarus Life*)

#2 - *When he heard Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.*

One of the mysteries of the spiritual life is that sometimes Jesus doesn't come when we need him most.

- A. The old hymn sings like this: *Just when I need him, Jesus is there...Just when I need him most.* But how many of us could tell of the times when those lyrics didn't sing true?
- B. This is a good place for a personal example; you're not trying to air your laundry necessarily, but by personally placing yourself in the story, you are giving the people permission to do the same.

Waiting for Jesus to arrive is part of the transformation process.

- A. Many of us are concerned about the rise of militant atheism via the pen of writers such as Dawkins in his book *God is Not Great*. But what if militant atheism is not the greatest threat? What is the more ominous question is, "how many of us are functional atheists?"
- B. Author Parker Palmer writes that functional atheism is at work when we say "pious words about God's presence in our lives but believe, on the contrary, that nothing good is going to happen unless we make it happen." (p. 27)

Transformation involves working through our disappointments and disillusionments in life.

- A. John 11.21 - "Lord, if only You had been here..."
- B. Other scriptural "if onlys"

We have hope in our transformation when we realize that we see today and God sees eternity.

- A. Hebrews 11.1ff - Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen...
- B. Song: *I'm just an old chunk of coal...but I'ma gonna' be a diamond someday.*

Outline # 3 (Chapter 3 of *The Lazarus Life*)

#3 - On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days...

The tombs of our lives - the dark places of failure and pain - are where transformation begins.

- A. Show clip from the film (or explain it via words) *It's a Wonderful Life* where George Bailey is at the bar - "I'm not a praying man..."
- B. Here's an opportunity for you to invite someone in your congregation to share their "George Bailey" moment; not Paul Harvey, but George Bailey.

People often fail to recognize the reality of tombs.

- A. Read Fantine's song (p. 43) to the congregation. If you can find a copy of the recording, that would be even better.
- B. Talk of tombs, both literal and figurative. Tombs are confining, dark, scary, cold, stony, removed from the flow of life, etc.

Entering our own tomb helps us face our need for God.

- A. Invite the people to look at 2 Corinthians 1.1-11. Focus on verses 8-9. Read from several different translations.

God uses the tombs of our lives to reveal his true identity.

- A. Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" It was a question of identity. Only the person who knows of the tombs can really answer that question.

Outline #5 (Chapter 5 of *The Lazarus Life*)

#5 - *By this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days...*

Sometimes, transformation stinks. Many people don't know this and so they knowingly or unknowingly reject the person in the midst of transformation.

- A. Some of the best leadership books adhere to the principle that a good leader always keeps reality in front of the people. The reality here is that yes, sometimes, transformation stinks.
- B. And if you and I are in a continual process of transformation or sanctification, becoming more and more like Christ, or whatever you want to call it, then on some level, there will always be a smell in the room.

True transformation happens when we expose the stench of our sins and shames to God.

- A. To be or not to be, that is the question (see p. 100 on the difference between *becoming* a Christian and *to be* a Christian).
- B. Question: How many of you enjoyed puberty? Right, not many. It's a time of voice changes and bodily smells and haywire emotions and sudden embarrassment and awkward movements. And it's quite possibly a lot like what it feels like *to be* a Christian.

Even when others turn away, Jesus stays with us.

- A. Jesus is a safe place to fall. Read John 5.1-9. Notice in particular the setting: (v.3) - "In these lay a multitude of those who were *sick, blind, lame, and withered...*" Can you imagine the smell in this place? A multitude, laying around, not being attended to, but rather waiting for an angel to stir the waters in this pool. And if the waters weren't stirred, it would indicate a certain stagnant aspect to this pool; add that to the smell and you've got a place where anyone would even a sliver of sense would avoid. Yet, Jesus was right in the middle of things.
- B. Have the congregation bow their heads and close their eyes. Play Fernando Ortega's *Give Me Jesus*. Based on the nature of your congregation, invite physical responses to this song (standing, kneeling, coming forward to an altar area, uplifted

hands). The invitation is to bring the stench of our sin and shame to the One who “wishes us to get well.”

Outline #7 (Chapter 7 of *The Lazarus Life*)

#7 - *The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face...*

When we emerge from the tomb, we still wear the outer reality of what is left to be transformed.

A. Start with a reading of this verse and it's strange nature: The dead man came out (dead men don't usually come out) and when he came out, he still had some "dead" on him (linen, cloth).

B. That's how transformation goes. We love the testimonies of the alcoholic who, after receiving Christ, never takes another drink or the prostitute who, after praying the prostitute's prayer, never allows herself to be degraded by another man. But those are the "exceptional" testimonies, right? For the rest of us, we're still walking around with some "dead" on us. And if the exceptions are honest, they probably still are too.

Naming what is holding us back from Jesus will help us take steps toward him.

A. *Naming* gives us an ability to understand, associate, and relate to our world around us. (p. 135). We usually have no problem naming our many blessings, but how about naming our many grave clothes? Or maybe not all, but just a few? How about five?

B. Five common grave clothes: (elaborate on all of these via stories from the book or personal examples or testimonies from your congregation. You could even pause here and preach for five Sundays on these five grave clothes)

1. Self-rejection
2. Fear
3. Guilt
4. Shame and blame
5. Disappointment

Many Christians struggle with self-rejection, fear, guilt, blame and shame, and disappointment. Only God can help us lighten the load of those grave clothes.

A. As you begin taking off the “dead,” what do you replace it with? How about “life”? Read Colossians 3.12-16. These verses reveal the fashions of the living.

B. This list “fits” the twice-born child of God, but it does take some time to grow into them. Why not choose one from Paul’s list, or pray and ask God to emphasize one to you, and try it on for size today or this week or this month? They may seem to stiff or scratchy at first, but begin living into compassion or kindness or humility or gentleness or patience or endurance or forgiveness or love or peace and pretty soon, you’ll have that lived-in look. (**Note:** you might preach in faded jeans or a favorite old shirt or comfy shoes).

Outline #10 (Chapter 10 of *The Lazarus Life*)

#10 - Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

Experiencing transformation for a lifetime.

A. The **TRUTH** of the theme of John 10.10:

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

(NIV)

“My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.” (NLT)

“I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows). (Amplified)

“I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.” (The Message)

B. The **QUESTION** related to the theme of John 10.10:

“Do you believe this?” Please note that this is not the universal “you” but the particular “you” sitting in that particular seat on this particular day: yes, **YOU!**

C. The faded bumper-sticker said it this way: The Bible says it, I believe it, that settles it. The faded grave clothes say it this way: Jesus said it, I believe Him, and I’m living it.