

“ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN #4:
ALL WRAPPED UP”

(John 11:32-45)

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[PROPS NEEDED: "Chains" to wrap myself up in; “What’s Your Wrap” bulletin insert for each congregant; BASKET on altar table]

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 3-19-23]

--I--

1. Read Text: John 11:32-45. Pray.
2. You know, as we go through life, there are a lot of things that we all tend to get wrapped up in mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and sometimes even physically.

A--It could be things like **[PUT NEW "CHAIN" ON FOR EACH ONE]**... worry... stress... fear... guilt... addiction... sickness... burnout... grief... and a whole host of other things.

B--Like the ghost Marley from Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," these things are like chains that bind us up, hinder us in our work, keep us up at night, and generally just keep us from being and doing what God would want us to be and do.

C--Well, as we continue our sermon series from the gospel of John, today we come to the story from John 11 of Jesus experiencing the death of his friend Lazarus, and the subsequent encounter of his sister Mary with Jesus related to this.

[9am ONLY... Listen to its words from Verses 32-45: *"32 When Mary arrived where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died." 33 When Jesus saw her crying and the Jews who had come with her crying also, he was deeply disturbed and troubled. 34 He asked, "Where have you laid him?" They replied, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus began to cry. 36 The Jews said, "See how much he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "He healed the eyes of the man born blind. Couldn't he have kept Lazarus from dying?" Jesus at Lazarus' tomb 38 Jesus was deeply disturbed again when he came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone covered the entrance. 39 Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said, "Lord, the smell will be awful! He's been dead four days." 40 Jesus replied, "Didn't I tell you that if you believe, you will see God's glory?" 41 So they removed the stone. Jesus looked up and said, "Father, thank you for hearing me. 42 I know you always hear me. I say this for the benefit of the crowd standing here so that they will believe that you sent me." 43 Having said this, Jesus shouted with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his feet bound and his hands tied, and his face covered with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go." 45 Therefore, many of the Jews who came with Mary and saw what Jesus did believed in him."]*

3. Now, in this story, I think we find a guide for how you and I can find new life & freedom from the various things that "wrap us up." (and, by the way, some of the advice I give here will sound very similar to what I shared several weeks ago, because even though its a different story, it doesn't hurt for us to hear the same advice from Jesus again!)

--II--

4. For one, this story teaches us that the first step to finding freedom from the things that "wrap us up" is to **ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT OUR "WRAP" (PROBLEM) IS.**

A--Verses 33-34 tells us that "*When Jesus saw [Mary] crying, and the Jews who came with her crying also, he was greatly disturbed and troubled. He asked, 'Where have you laid him' [meaning Lazarus]? They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.'*"

B--In other words, "*Jesus, let us take you TO and SHOW you our problem.*"

1--They didn't try to hide their anguish, or try to be "strong for the family."

2--They simply acknowledged that Lazarus' death was huge blow to their spirits, and that they were, *in fact*, bound / wrapped up by GRIEF.

C--You know, there's a tendency to think that Christians aren't *supposed* to have problems -- as if they just magically disappear when we begin to follow Christ.

1--But anyone who's followed Jesus for any length of time knows that that's just not the case -- being a Christian doesn't EXEMPT us from life's problems.

2--Sure, it gives us a *source* for healing and victory that we wouldn't have had otherwise, but it *never* promises that we won't *experience* them.¹

D--So, in this story, we're reminded that to find freedom from the things that "bind" and "wrap us up", we need first to acknowledge (both to ourselves and to God) that we ARE, indeed, "wrapped up" in the *first* place, and to identify WHAT those things *are*.

6. The second thing this story invites us to do is to **TRUST GOD TO WORK IN THAT PROBLEM** – to believe and have faith that Jesus CAN and WILL set us free from whatever it is that we feel "wrapped up" by.

A--After Jesus asked that they take away the stone from Lazarus' tomb, Verse 39 says that Martha replied, "*Lord, the smell will be awful! He's been dead four days.*"

1--Well, Martha here is revealing her own *doubt* as to whether or not Jesus can *actually* bring about hope in this situation.

2--But notice in Verses 41-44 that it says "*they removed the stone*" anyway, and that Jesus *then* works a miracle and brings Lazarus back to life.

B--You know, there've been times in my own life when I've been exactly like Martha:

1--I've had habits or attitudes I knew were inconsistent with God's will, but because they were so deeply ingrained in my life, I had difficulty believing that God could provide victory over them (at least at first).

2--Yet, amazingly, when I finally did what Martha did by trusting and giving those things to Jesus *anyway*, He did what he did for *her* by giving *me* hope and victory over them, as well!

C--And it can be the same for each of us today -- when we're faced with a problem or difficulty that seems to hard to overcome or get through,... give it to Jesus and then trust that HE will work to bring about a miracle.

7. The final thing I think this story teaches us is to **REMEMBER OUR NEED FOR OTHERS** – that *Jesus'* miracle for *US* may actually require *other people* to help us for us to be able to experience it.

A--After Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, notice what Verse 39 says that Jesus said, "*Remove the stone.*" And in Verse 44, he goes on to say "*Untie him and let him go.*"

1--In both of these texts, the Greek wording uses the *plural* form of the word "YOU" -- as if Jesus is saying NOT to Lazarus, but to Mary, Martha and the other disciples: "*You all* remove the stone..., *You all* untie him & let him go..."

2--In other words, even though *Jesus* raised Lazarus from the dead, he used Mary, Martha and the disciples to help bring that miracle into *actual* existence.

B--How unfortunate it is in today's world, though, that too many of us often think that we have to handle all our problems *alone* -- all by ourselves!

1--Oh, maybe we're embarrassed by our problem, or afraid somebody won't accept us because of it/them, so we keep it/them to ourselves.

2--Over the years, I've had many church members do this: they're in financial trouble, or having marital difficulties, or they're dealing with an unhealthy addiction,... but they're so embarrassed or proud that they won't tell anyone about it (not even their preacher or spouse).

C--Well, unfortunately (like Lazarus), the symbolic "chains" that you and I wear (like these on me now) are often so heavy and attached that they can't be removed by ourselves *alone* -- we have to have the help of *others* to remove them. **[HAVE SOME CHURCH FRIENDS HELP ME REMOVE MY CHAINS...]**

D--Now, this is one reason I believe that being part of a small group of Christians is so vital if we're to reach full maturity as Christians -- whether it's a Sunday School class, a Bible study group, choir, praise team, women's or men's group, an AA, SA, NA, or Celebrate Recovery group, Walk to Emmaus Reunion group, or something else.

1--Every Friday for the past 20 years, I've participated in a Pastor's Covenant tele-group, and it's been a source of hope and healing for me whenever I've struggled and been challenged by life and ministry these last 20 years.

2--In it, I find a small, intimate group that helps me to find hope, healing, and even loving challenge to get me through life, & I wouldn't trade it for anything

E--So, what small group are YOU in to help "unwrap" the "chains" from YOUR life? You're only fooling yourself if you think you can do it alone/by yourself -- you need *others* to help "unwrap you and let you go."

--III--

8. In today's encounter with Jesus in the gospel of John, you see, we're invited to consider the things that "wrap us up" and cause us -- like Lazarus -- to experience spiritual, mental, & emotional "death," & then to consider how God wants to set us *free* from these.

A--So, as we conclude, I want to invite you to take out your "What's Your Wrap?" sheet, and use it first to think about, then circle/mark the thing/things that've got you most wrapped up today (*Ushers* have pencils if needed; Write "Other" & what it is in blank space; *Don't* write your name).

B--Then, after you've finished, as soft background music plays, bring your sheet forward to the basket on the altar table to leave it there as an outward sign of your willingness to let Christ set you free from those things.

C--[**9am ONLY...** For those of you online, I want to invite you to go to my blog at www.pastorbriang.blogspot.com (**LINK ON SCREEN**) and find these same items there. You can either print out the post or separately write down the one(s) you feel wrap you up. Then, sometime later, take the paper outside and burn it as a way of giving these things up to God.]

9. [PRAY: "*Lord Jesus, we confess to you that too often we've allowed the things of life and of this world to bind and wrap us up, keeping us from being the people you created us to be. Today, enable us to acknowledge what these things are in our lives, to give them up to you, and to ask others to help us get and stay free from our 'wraps.'* We ask this in the name of Jesus, the one who is able to raise even the dead to new life, Amen."]
10. [Congregants bring "What's Your Wrap?" Sheet to God at altar as "*I Surrender All*" is played softly in background...]
11. [SUGGESTED 11AM closing HYMN: UMH#370, "Victory In Jesus"]

“WHAT’S YOUR WRAP?”

What are the things that “wrap” you up today? ...which are keeping you from being the person that God wants you to be?

- ☹ ***Stress and Worry?*** ...About your job, family, marriage, children, finances, friendships, etc.
- ☹ ***Fear?*** ...Of failure, illness, success, loneliness, the unknown, the future, the present, the past
- ☹ ***Memories?*** ...Painful memories of tragedies, personal mistakes, or hurt caused by others
- ☹ ***Harmful, Unhealthy Attitudes?*** ...Such as anger, bitterness, apathy, unforgiveness, un-dealt-with grief, etc.
- ☹ ***Illness or sickness?*** ...Is it a chronic illness or medical issue that is preventing you from reaching your potential for God?
- ☹ ***Grief?*** ...Is grief over the loss of a loved one, friend, job, marriage, or even a pet hindering your walk with God?
- ☹ ***Destructive, Unhealthy Behaviors?*** ...Bad habits and/or addictions to things like smoking, abusive drinking of alcohol, drugs, pornography / sexual addiction, gambling, overeating
- ☹ ***Selfishness?*** ...Which can include pride/arrogance (*too high a view of ourselves = a refusal to allow God to keep us humble*), low self-esteem (*too low a view of ourselves = a refusal to see ourselves as God’s sees us, as His child*), materialism (*too attached to “things”*) and perfectionism (*setting standards for ourselves or others too high*)
- ☹ ***Smugness/comfortableness ?*** The mentality “it’s the way I’ve always done things” and “it’s just the way I am” can sometimes reveal that our own comfort is more important than the doing of God’s will and God’s way
- ☹ ***Prejudice and/or Jealousy?*** ...Towards people or persons who look, dress, act, or think differently than you. If followed to their ultimate end, these can lead to hate and violence
- ☹ ***Other?*** _____

ENDNOTES:

¹ Read Romans, Chapters 6-8 to hear about Paul’s own wrestling with problems and sin, even after becoming a follower of Jesus.