

Take Ye the Stone Away

Sermon #0931
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Study Given by W. D. Frazee—November 25,

Turn to John's Gospel the eleventh chapter, beginning with the thirty-ninth verse.

“Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?” John 11:39-40.

As you recognize, this is the story of the raising of Lazarus, the crowning miracle of Christ's ministry here on earth. You remember, He was some distance away when the messenger reached Him with the word that Lazarus was sick. Martha and Mary, Lazarus' sisters, knowing how much Jesus loved him, supposed that was all that was necessary just to let the Master know and Christ would come at once and heal Him. But Jesus deliberately tarried a season, and Lazarus fell asleep and was put in the grave.

How disappointed the sisters were! Things weren't going the way they had planned. They wondered why the Master had not come. So they wept. And mourned. And their friends, and relatives, and others came and mourned with them. And as the days of mourning went by, finally, Jesus appeared. And Martha met Him with the words, “Oh Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

But she said, “I know that even now whatever you ask of the Father, He will give You.”

Jesus said, Martha, I am the resurrection and the life. Jesus desired to fix her faith in Him as the Life-giver. Presently a similar conversation was repeated with Mary as she met the Master. Together they went toward the grave. Quite a multitude. As Jesus came near the grave and wept in sympathy with the sorrowing sisters, and with the other mourners, He was about ready to call Lazarus from the grave, but His human heart went out in love toward these who were in sorrow. And as He stood there with the multitude around Him, He spoke the words of our text, “Take Ye away the stone.”

Now we are told that the Lord could have spoken directly to the stone and it would have obeyed Him. All matter is at all times under His directions. Or He could have summoned angels. An invisible hand would have rolled that stone away.

But in our text we have an example of a divine principle. What man can do, God does not do directly. What natural means can accomplish, we must not expect supernatural means to do. This bears upon many questions. It bears upon the question of physical healing. Here is somebody that is sick. Shall we simply pray for them? If that is all that we can do, that is all we can do.

But that is seldom true, my friends. Usually there is something in the way like that stone. The Great Physician says to you and me, "Take ye away the stone." Take out of the way the obstacle to healing.

Now it is obvious that moving the stone would not in itself raise Lazarus. Lazarus was dead, for four days He had been lying there in the tomb. All the stone-rolling in the world wouldn't have given Him one minute of life. And yet, the removal of the stone was necessary in order that Jesus might accomplish His purpose of calling Him forth from the grave.

What a little thing it was! And yet, all heaven waited while human hands moved that stone. My friends, again, all heaven, all the universe is waiting for human hands to put out of the way, to move, the obstacles, the things that stand in the way between us and the mighty miracles of the loud cry. We too shall see the sick healed, blind eyes opened, lepers cleansed, the dead raised, for we are plainly told that all that was seen in the apostolic church is to be repeated on a wider scale today.

The same Jesus that stood by that tomb is standing by waiting and longing to perform His mighty miracles. In the healing of the sick, and in the conversion of souls by the hundreds and the thousands with a rapidity, we are told, that will surprise the church.

I wonder if any thing like that will ever happen here? I wonder if you and I will ever see anything like that? It just depends, friends, on whether we will catch the vision and take away the stone. It just depends on that.

Now I would like to have you notice Martha for a moment. Martha is a very interesting character. She was a good woman. She meant all right. She must have been a woman of great talent. She had ability. She had a mind. She wasn't just some household drudge. And on this occasion she steps up and says, "Master, surely you don't want that stone rolled away?"

It is a wonderful thing to be helpful, isn't it? If we know when and how to exercise that gift of helpfulness. Martha thought she was helping. I have no question about that. The last thing on earth she would have wanted to do would be to interfere with Christ's work. But she was afraid that Jesus had forgotten something, or overlooked something. And Martha was ready to stop the proceedings and leave things as they were. She was afraid that to change things would be to expose some undesirable, unpleasant things. And indeed I have no doubt that when the stone was removed, that the stink was terrible. I have no question about that.

But like everything else that Jesus was doing at that time, it was all a part of the plan. Jesus wanted the stone removed in the full sight of the whole multitude. He wanted them to have full evidence of the condition of Lazarus, and then, with that as a prelude and background, see mighty movings of God.

In the comment on this in this wonderful volume, *The Desire of Ages*, I read:

“When the Lord is about to do a work, Satan moves upon someone to object” *Desire of Ages*, page 535.

Could it be you? And notice this objection came not from some Pharisee or Sadducee, not from some Roman or publican, it came from a good woman, one of Jesus’ dearest friends. And she meant all right. But there were some things she didn’t understand. She would have showed her wisdom by doing what? Keeping still and letting the Lord handle His own works.

“When the Lord is about to do a work, Satan moves upon someone to object. “Take ye away the stone,” Christ said. As far as possible, prepare the way for My work. But Martha’s positive and ambitious nature asserted itself. She was unwilling that the decomposing body should be brought to view. The human heart is slow to understand Christ’s words, and Martha’s faith had not grasped the true meaning of His promise” *Ibid*.

Oh friends, God grant us the simple child-like faith of a little child. God grant us a quick response to the opening providences of God. What do you say?

“Christ reproved Martha, but His words were spoken with the utmost gentleness. “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” Why should you doubt in regard to My power? Why reason in opposition to My requirements? You have My word. If you will believe, you shall see the glory of God. Natural impossibilities cannot prevent the work of the Omnipotent One” *Ibid*.

Now my dear friends, I want to say something. This is very practical. That which we face is beyond the natural. To accomplish what you and I are involved in will take miracles as great as the raising of Lazarus from the dead. And we had just as well recognize it. And that means that we will not be able to figure out by human reason, and on the basis of past experience, how we are going to get it all done.

It also means that well meaning people can give logical reasons why this or that or the other cannot be accomplished.

I want to ask you something, friends. If there had been any scientists there, would they have agreed with Martha? Why, of course. Not only scientists, anybody with common sense would. Wouldn’t they? She had science and reason and common sense on her side, but she lacked what? She lacked faith. And the

question is whether the work that lies ahead of us individually, and as a group, and as a denomination, whether that is going to be accomplished by science and reason and on the basis of past experience, or whether it is going to be the result of the hand of God reaching down to do marvelous such as we have never seen in all our lives? That is the question.

Now if it is the former, we can go along in certain grooves and measure the future by the past, take all that we have learned through experience and project it and be here another hundred years, my friends. But if it is the later, we are dealing with a God who started with nothing and made this world and finished it in six days.

You and I are keeping the Sabbath today because we believe in that kind of power. In that kind of a Creator. And He it was who stood by the tomb of Lazarus that day.

And what were His words? "Take ye away the stone." How long did He stand there until they took the stone away? My friends, I see Him in my imagination this morning standing before another stone.

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in" Revelation 3:20.

What is inside the door? That which needs a miracle as much as Lazarus needed it in that silent grave. Laodicea needs to hear the call of the Life-giver—Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead. But between Him and the need which only the Life-giver can fill, there is a stone, a door.

Was not that stone at the sepulcher of Lazarus a door? And so this door, this stone, waits, and Jesus waits. Why doesn't He open the door? Why indeed? Why doesn't He speak to the door? Why doesn't He break down every barrier and sweep every thing before Him? Couldn't He do it? Sure He could. But oh my friends, what the human will can do, the divine will will never be substituted for.

May I read you a wonderful statement on this in this same *Desire of Ages*, page 466?

"In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve. In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself. True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan's control; but when we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God" *Desire of Ages*, page 466.

Do you know who is going to open that door, friends? If it is ever opened, you will open it. Do you know who is going to roll that stone away? If it is ever rolled away, you will roll it. Now it is true that you can't bring life to the death. Oh no! Only the Creator can do that. How little we can do! But how vital that little is, my friends.

Now let's be very practical. How many million people in the United States right this morning would like to quit tobacco? My friends, only the Master knows, but there are millions of them that would like to quit. Why don't they? Ah, habit has them in its grasp. Some of them are going to need a divine miracle to break the hold of that. You know there is more than one man that kneels down and every day prays that God will take that tobacco habit away from him, and he goes right on smoking.

And before we judge him too harshly, I want to ask you something, friends. Is there anything that you pray that God will take out of your life and then keep right on with it? Is there some secret impurity that has defeated you again and again? Is there some angry temper which has welled up and boiled over like a geyser again and again? Is there some spirit of criticism and bitterness which has embittered things in your heart and spilled over to others?

Is there some pride or worldliness that when your heart is touched by the Spirit of God you recognize is a dead body, a decaying carcass? Is it enough just to pray, Oh Lord, somehow, someday, someday, make me different? Is it? No, friends. "Take ye away the stone."

That must be an act of faith! And when we take away the stone, that means, watch the point, it means putting out of the way the thing that stands between us and God. It means getting it clear out of the picture. It means that the man with that cigarette craving takes his package of cigarettes and lays it down at the feet of Jesus and gives it up. Not just praying that somehow, someday, someday, something will happen and he won't smoke anymore. Today, this moment, he surrenders it to Christ in obedience to the command of God, Take away the stone.

So with the angry temper. So with the impurity of heart and action. So with the criticism and the jealousy, the pride, and the worldliness. So with every sin.

My dear friends, oh that Martha may not object! Let no one calm your conscience with the thought that you cannot expect very much. Let us expect great things, the mighty movings of Jesus in miracles equivalent to raising the dead. Let us begin with our own private lives, friends, our personal experience, and let Jesus take away the dead, stinking dispositions that have polluted within. And then as God begins His work, oh let us, I plead with you, not measure the future by the past. Let's expect that God will move in mighty ways in the finishing of the work.

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