

Title: “The Ultimate Complete (Personal) Savior”

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John 11:41-44

3/23/2022

Service Readings: Ezekiel 37:1-14, John 11:1-44

Jesus is our true God, our suitable mediator, our perfect redeemer. He is our defender, our intercessor, and our “ultimate, complete, perfect Savior.”

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

The celebration of Christ’s resurrection can never be overstated. What Jesus did on the cross for all mankind is overwhelming and, at least for me, breathtaking. The sins of *every* person to *ever* walk on earth and *who will ever* walk on earth were atoned for, paid for, by a single sacrifice – a sacrifice from the creator, himself. How could anyone cease to be awestruck by it? John summarizes it in a way that rolls off the tongues of Christians with hardly a second thought:

¹⁶“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Jesus is our true God, our suitable mediator, our perfect redeemer. He is our defender, intercessor, and, as a leader of the early Lutheran church once said, our “ultimate complete Savior.” How could anyone ever take him for granted? I posit that one reason is because when we view Jesus from such a wide angled lens his work becomes less personal to us. Jesus saved *all* of mankind, but *I* don’t know all of mankind, *I* don’t have a relationship with all of mankind, so the majesty of this act is lost on me. I need something more personal, something much smaller that I can wrap my mind around. And this is what I love about tonight’s gospel passage. It reduces the entirety of God’s almighty power into the human form of a single man, Jesus. And it reduces the entirety of Jesus’ work into one single action for one single sinful man, Lazarus. One act. Two men. This is something I can comprehend. And so the task becomes understanding this event in the light of my own life, and seeing it as a microcosm of the totality of Jesus’ work for all of mankind.

So, then, what does Lazarus have to do with me? We start with the last portion of the passage:

³⁸Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.”

Lazarus lay dead, unable to move. And not only that, he had begun to decompose – he was wasting away and there was nothing he could do to change his situation. He couldn’t even *think* about the reality of his situation – dead people don’t think. So there he lay unaware of his situation and ignorant of its implications. Martha was spot on when she predicted that there would be an odor –

dead men stink, but even the smell would not have phased Lazarus. He was, as I mentioned, dead. Were we not exactly like Lazarus? Dead in our sins? Unaware of our situation and ignorant of its implications? And yet, Jesus doesn't wait for us to figure it out, to find a way to raise ourselves from death and seek him. He travels to us – all the way to us. Not a single step he expects us to take. Jesus, our defender. Our defender against death, even when we didn't realize we needed one. Continuing on with verse 41:

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me."

How comforting his words are. While Lazarus was dead Jesus came to him, and while Lazarus was dead, Jesus interceded for him. "Father," he says, "I thank you that you have heard me." And he does the same for us. "Father," he will later say,

the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

This is Jesus, our mediator. Our advocate, our intercessor. He comes to us while we were dead and intercedes on our behalf. By his authority he secures for us our own resurrection and new life. But he doesn't just secure it, he is the one who actually accomplishes it:

⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." ⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Jesus is true God. For what human can raise the dead? This power, this authority has been given to no one; its use has been reserved for God, alone. And this God, Jesus, has traveled to death, stood at the foot of the grave, interceded, and commanded the dead to life. He has done this for Lazarus and he has done this for you. *Your* death has been defeated. *Your* life has been restored. He calls you and only then can you respond and move towards him. Only then can you make your way out of the grave where you laid. But he brings more than life – for what kind of life would you live if you remained bound? Is life constrained any kind of life at all? And so Jesus frees you. "Unbind him, and let him go," he commands of Lazarus, and he commands of you. Now alive, you are freed from the constraints of sin and dressings of death.

But here's the thing. Jesus didn't just walk to us while we were dead. That's what he did for Lazarus, but that's not what he does for us – and it is not even what he ultimately did for Lazarus, either! He is a much more personal God than that. He didn't stand outside our tomb and call us by name! No! And when on the cross he gave up his life, he rolled away *our* stone, and walked into *our* grave, and died *for* us! He took *our* place in *our* death - the *death* that justly belonged to us! And in his resurrection he raises *our* bodies, gives *us* new life! Can there be anything more personal than this?

This is who Jesus is; this is what Jesus does. He is our true God, our suitable mediator, our perfect redeemer. He is our defender, our intercessor, and our "ultimate, complete, perfect Savior." He

gave up his life for you. He gave up his life for me. And through his resurrection he brings us new life and raises us from the dead. This is what he offers us. This is what he promises us. This is what he died to give us. How can we *not* be awestruck by it?

Jesus may have come to save the world. He may have come to offer life everlasting to all mankind. But I can't grasp that. What I can grasp is that Jesus came to earth so that when he returns, he will come to my grave, call out my name, and I will live forever in the new life that he promised me in my baptism.

This is my true God, my suitable mediator, my perfect redeemer. This is my defender, my intercessor. Jesus is who I call my ultimate, complete, and perfect Savior.

What do you call him?

Please pray with me.

My great Savior. Your power divine.
I a poor sinner. In death am confined.
The cross you accepted. The grave you broke free.
Resurrected in glory. You give life to me.
In your name we pray.
Amen.