

## **Message: God Does The Impossible**

**By Pastor Melissa Ivey**

**August 2, 2020**

**John 11:38-44**

**Look Up Sermon Series**

Good morning friends. It is so good to be with you all once again. For those who don't know me I am Melissa Ivey, I am the Pastor of Young Adult Ministry here which means I get to create a space here for young adults in Tulsa and I love it.

I am excited to be continuing our sermon series called Look Up! This has been a wonderful time to remember to look to God. And today's topic is look up and know that God does the impossible. And the text is John 11, the story of Lazarus which is very fitting!

Let's start today with the Scripture reading, and I have asked Stefanie to do it. Stef you can go ahead and make your way up here and if you all would please open your Bibles to John 11:38-44 and then keep them opened there this morning.

Stefanie Renkema participates in our young adult ministry, and I have known her for a couple years. She is my older sister, and I have a good reason to be asking her. It's not favoritism, if it was I would have asked my little sister. Just kidding. When we were kids Stefanie used to tell me I wasn't funny all the time. I'm not the type to hold grudges but I have never let it go. One time when my little sister was a baby and Stef was probably 3-4ish, my mom was in a different room and Nicole started crying so Stef carried her to my mom by her throat. She got better at being a big sister as we got older.

I'm just kidding, we are sisters but also friends. Thanks for reading today, it's unfair because I have the mic. She has plenty of stories on me, too bad there's no time for those. So Stefanie please read John 11:38-44 for us, and please say nothing else.

This is a big crescendo in Scripture. This is a big moment. A man was dead, and now he is alive. Lazarus was dead for 4 days. In that day, Jewish superstition said that the soul stayed near the body for three days hoping for resurrection so 4 days meant all hope of resurrection was gone.

John in his gospel loves to talk about COSMIC SIGNIFICANCE.

- 7<sup>th</sup> miracle in book of John – 7 = perfection
- The next miracle of Jesus's is His own resurrection

This is a miracle. This is God doing the impossible. No doubt about it. I want to dive into today, what goes into God doing the impossible? What does it take to see God's impossible on earth? The whole of John 11 leads us to it and teaches us a lot.

As we look through John 11, we see various people and their faith. Jesus after receiving word from Mary and Martha tells the disciples he wants to go to Lazarus in Judea. And the disciples remind him they were JUST there and they were JUST trying to kill him and they did not understand why he wanted to go back. But Thomas is the first to show faith in this story. He says, if we die we die, but were going with him. This disciple, Thomas we know as doubting Thomas because he was the one who needed to see Jesus after the resurrection. But here he is showing great faith. He doesn't understand why, but he isn't letting Jesus go without him.

When Jesus gets to the region, we see that Martha and Mary both come to Jesus in their own time. Additional fun fact is that Mary and Martha call Jesus teacher. Which is really cool because at this time, rabbis wouldn't teach woman. We see something VERY DIFFERENT in Jesus's example. I think it is a cool thing to note in this passage. It also reminds us of the close relationship they have with one another.

So Martha rushes out to meet Jesus. Martha is the logical and practical type. She is the one who when Jesus was in their home was rushing around serving Him. Oh Martha, Martha. In her grief of her brother's death she is trying to logic her way through it. And as she goes to Jesus she says "if you had been here" because she is also trying to logic her way through what Jesus didn't do. Remember they know him well. She has seen him heal other people and knows his desire to save. And she doesn't understand his inaction because it is inconsistent with the Jesus she knows. As she talks to Jesus, trying to understand, Jesus asks her to move from logic to faith. He asks her to believe. He tells her he is the life and the resurrection, and then he goes on to SHOW HER.

And then Mary comes to him after he asked to see her. Mary, the one who sat at Jesus's feet listening to him speak, is now sitting in her grief of her brother's death. And she doesn't understand either. She says something similar to what Martha said, "if you had been here." We don't know how she said this but seems to me that some of her trust of him may have been broken because once again it looks like Jesus didn't come through, and that is not the Jesus she knows. She is stuck in her grief and the emotion of what has happened. Jesus isn't recorded as saying anything, but he does react. Martha is stuck in her logic, and Mary is stuck in her emotion, and Jesus needs to move both to faith.

I wonder if any of the Jews mourning with them made comments such as "if you had more faith, maybe your brother would have been healed". Actually, my entire family has been told this, because we could use a miracle. My sister, who read today, was diagnosed at age 16 with a tumor in her sacrum, it is benign, not cancerous, but it is plenty vicious. It messes up a lot of her body, and causes constant pain and she has been through a large variety of treatments for it, it is a very rare tumor and it has been trial and error to find the best treatment to help her body fight and heal. She has now had it for 10 years. That is 10 years that our family has been affected by it, each in different ways. And to our family it is a miracle that she was able to come and read Scripture with us today because we remember the times in those years where she wasn't even able to get out of bed. But every one of us have been told by well meaning people that if we had more faith her pain to be taken away – something we desperately prayed for, her illness would be gone, or may never have happened.

It's a well-meaning statement, but shows a misunderstanding. Faith is a central thing, yes. Jesus often moves us to deeper faith, yes. But there's been a misunderstanding. It's like in John 9 when people are questioning Jesus about the man born blind. They ask, who sinned to make this man blind, him or his parents. And Jesus says, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."

Jesus is correcting our belief system here. Remember it is a broken world, things are not as they should be and unfortunately all will not be fully restored until the new heaven and new earth. So much is not as God intended and it has created a lot of our present realities.

I fully believe miracles happen today, and God has come through for my family in so many ways throughout the whole process. God HAS done things, modern medicine has helped heal my sister a lot and we see His fingerprints in all of our lives throughout the whole process. It has taught me so much about God and myself. It has taught me that faith is not in the miracles, but in the God of miracles. My faith is in God, that he is good, with us, and that he cares for us. It has shifted my focus from wanting a miracle so that God can just come fix it all, to instead wanting to see God glorified through it all.

Another story in scripture captures it well. Mark 9 a man with a demon afflicted son goes to Jesus wanting him to help his son. And he describes how his son has been suffering and then says “if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” And Jesus says, “If you can’t! All things are possible for one who believes.” The man responds amazingly, “I believe, help my unbelief.” This captures the dynamics of belief and faith. It is not one time or stale thing that we chose awhile ago. Belief and unbelief can exist together. Faith is something that is grown in our lives, a practice that puts us at the foot of the cross.

So, when you need the impossible, how should we approach God?

Mary and Martha were in the same predicament. They had to send word to Jesus to get him to come heal their brother. Jesus knows these people well. When Mary and Martha send word to Jesus, they say, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” WOW. Those words are powerful. Because notice what they didn’t say. They didn’t say Jesus, get here now, he’s dying and he needs you so come heal him. They didn’t say, hey your buddy Lazarus who does so much to help you is dying. Or, our brother who is qualified in this and good at that and here’s his resume is dying and he deserves to be saved.

They SIMPLY said. He whom you love is ill. They knew that Jesus desired them to be well. They knew he cared for them and that they didn’t need to convince him to come and act. They had seen His character and desire to save. They also knew that Lazarus’s true identity was in Christ, meaning it was not anything Lazarus could do, but rather Jesus’s LOVE that would motivate Jesus to action. Which is another reason why Lazarus NOT being healed was such a big thing that they didn’t understand. But they let the facts be the facts when they send word to

Jesus. They invited Jesus into the situation rather than telling him or convincing him how to act.

A posture of faith comes out of us knowing who God is, knowing that He wants to act, and knowing who we are because of Him. Faith reminds us that it's not anything we do, or our qualifiers, but it is God's goodness and love that moves him. Christ is enough.

A posture of faith doesn't tell God how to act or manipulate Him into doing what we think is best, but invites Him into the situation because you know He knows better. They wanted their brother healed, instead they saw something greater because it was God's timing and God's agenda.

A posture of faith is submission to God. Allowing Him access to each part of our lives and trusting Him enough to say "your will be done". Faith positions us to see God's glory, which is the purpose Jesus gives in the text for Lazarus's death. God has worked to make a name for Himself, so that everyone may see Him, know that He is good, see that He cares for them, and comes and follows Him.

God wants to act in our lives, He deeply care for us, and Jesus shows us that here in John 11. Jesus, even as He is moving people to faith and about to show God's glory, he weeps. He mourns with those who mourn. Some people will say that God is impersonal, doesn't care about us. And sometimes we may even believe the lie that He doesn't care about me. And here Jesus proves us all wrong. He cares DEEPLY. He knows He is going to raise Lazarus, and yet He still weeps with us and is deeply moved.

God wants to do the impossible for all of us, and He has! It is so fantastic and awe inspiring that He raised Lazarus, but he has done more.

God doing the impossible we often call miracles. And I would define the impossible and miracles as those things that cannot be explained by our earthly understanding or things that go against the rules of nature.

When I was in high school, I think my senior year, I went to an event were lots of different students shared stories of God at work in their lives with students from all over Tulsa. At this event, Deborah Ede shared her story. Deborah grew up here at Asbury and when she was 15 was in a gymnastics accident where she landed on her head and became paralyzed. She was told she would never walk again. Slowly,

her body did the impossible and healed. She began to get feeling back in her feet, slowly got strength back, and eventually learned how to walk again becoming wheelchair free about five months after the incident, something that she should not have been able to do. Amazing! Glory to God! After Deborah spoke, other people shared. At one point a guy gets up there and starts to share his story. He says that he really hasn't struggled with much yet in life, and he didn't think he had much to share, and then he remembered that Christ saved him from sin. That he was dead, and now is alive and he shared the gospel message.

And honestly, I scoffed and thought in comparison to Deborah's story, that's not much. But what a hard hearted and misinformed view. Yes, miracles are miraculous, but He has done more, greater works, for example –

Creation. Our very existence. Out of nothing, God created. And everything fits together beautifully. The more I learn about just the human body and how it works, the more I am just in awe of what God did.

The Holy Spirit. God's presence on earth. That the Spirit of God is in this room, and in you, and in me. Right. now. You can't tell me that's not God doing the impossible.

And HS in us because of the incarnation. God became man. God became man, Jesus, God Himself, walked this earth. AND NOT JUST THAT

The cross and resurrection, which saved us. Saved our souls for eternity with God. That is God doing the impossible. The only just judge who judges perfection shows mercy to undeserving sinners. That doesn't make sense.

And you know what really really doesn't make sense. Grace. Grace is the complete opposite of the way this world works. God has done and continues to do the impossible by giving us grace.

This world is a this for that reality. You do this, you get that result. You plant this type of seed, you get that plant. You go to work, you get a paycheck. You take these classes you get this degree. The world demands qualifications and reasons for you to get things - you must earn. The first covenants God made with people operated in this way as well. You be my people, and I will be your God. And even when, before Jesus, we messed up, God stayed true when we failed. He continued to move us to the cross, and the cross and resurrection shows us God's

grace in an impossible way. Nothing else is like God's grace. That he would give us prevenient grace, BEFORE WE KNOW HIM, He is giving us grace and calling us to Him. That He would save us through justifying grace when we accept Him as savior and let the blood of Jesus cover us. AND IT DOESN'T STOP THERE because He carries us through life with sanctifying grace. Working with us as we develop into his people. *Do not let your familiarity with these things take away the significance of them!*

God does the impossible, daily. Salvation should not be taken as just that familiar church word. It is God saving souls from damnation. Grace is a miracle that shows up every single day of your life. God's presence is here in this room with us and God's creation is all around us.

The news won't show you God's handiwork throughout the world right now. You can find His fingerprints everywhere, but you can't look at what the world says or what the news says. You must look up to Him.

Did you know that kids through VBS are giving their lives to Christ and learning how to walk with Him from early on in their lives? That's what Jesus died to do. Every week here on Monday nights at CR people are learning to break free from hurts habits and hang-ups to be better able to live with Jesus. Tonight is confirmation service where students will be choosing to step forward and join the church, becoming the next generation to do God's work on this earth in a long line that started with Abraham and just one family. How does that happen without God?

There are stories of healings happening today. There are stories of softened hearts coming to Christ. People learning their identity in Christ. Stories of God's grace and mercy. Stories of divine meetings, where someone meets the right person at the right time to get them where they need to go in life. Or someone giving someone they run into in life a dollar amount that is the exact amount they needed to pay rent that day or to put food on the table. I see stories like this and they aren't "coincidence". The likelihood for these to happen on their own with any sort of regularity is NOT POSSIBLE. But God is moving on this earth. Did you know that in the middle east people who have never heard of Jesus are having dreams of a man in white, revealing Himself to them and calling people to Him.

God does the impossible, but you have to look up to Him to see it, not at the world.

Jesus IS the resurrection and the life and He shows us this time and time again. He has done and will continue to do the impossible. So, what is the impossible you need in your life?

What are you needing, how are you hurting, where are you looking for God to come through for you? What is the impossible you need in your life, and how are you approaching God with it.

Maybe you are like Martha, trying to logic your way through it. Staying in your head and being a busy body and doing all that you can think to do in the meantime. Or are you like Mary, stuck in it. Only feeling the emotions from it all and not even know what to do next.

You don't have to have it all figured out or have all the emotions worked through before you turn to God. Here is where we can learn from Thomas, that even when we don't yet understand we look to Jesus and say "Jesus, I'm coming with you." Don't tell Him what he should do, instead invite Him in. Allow him to move you to a posture of faith.

God cares for you, deeply. As we move into a time of response, take this opportunity this morning to figure out what the impossible is that you need and bring it to Him today. Take a time out from this weary world and look up to God for His impossible.

Benediction: Friends, look up and know that God does the impossible. God longs for you and has done everything He can to remove all barriers between you and Him. He calls you to join Him deeper in relationship and to help those in your sphere of influence to see His impossible too. Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Go in peace.