

# Grounded in Grace

## LIVING IN BETWEEN HURT, HOPE AND HEALING PT 9 The Dwelling of the Incarnation

Usually when I get to December's issue, I try to have a Christmas-themed devotional. As I entered this last devotional on "Living In Between," I found myself pondering one question: how does this relate to Christmas? Does it? Do I forgo my traditional devotional or is there something in this text that points to Christmas? As I pondered, I looked amazed at this scripture and went WOW - this is all about the Christmas! Let's look at it.

39 *"Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."* 40 Then Jesus said, *"Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"* 41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, *"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."* 43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, *"Lazarus, come out!"* 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, *"Take off the grave clothes and let him go."* John 11:39-44 (NIV)

Let's recap for a minute. Jesus hears that his good friend Lazarus is sick. He delays getting to be with Mary and Martha whom he loves. When he gets to Bethany, Lazarus has been dead for four days. Jesus has a conversation with the women and then weeps with compassion over their loss.

Before we go any further, we must see something- everything that has just occurred is the living, breathing incarnation of God. The little baby in the manger, surrounded by the shepherds, animals, and Magi, is now surrounded by people in pain, doubters, sympathizers, and people who are friends and people who now believe. So let's look for Christmas here.

### **The Calling of the Incarnation**

In this story, Jesus gives two powerful commands. First, Jesus commands the stone to be rolled away. Martha objects to this request because it is beyond her comprehension. However, the power of the incarnation will roll away the odor of death and despair. Secondly, Jesus calls Lazarus by name. He doesn't just tell anyone to come forth but he personalizes the command. Jesus gives Lazarus the personal gift of being called by name. Mary, Martha and the whole community will experience a new beginning of life. The whole meaning and celebration of Christmas is personal, named, sacrificial, and centered on something other than on ourselves. It is a celebration beyond our comprehension.

## **The Glory of the Incarnation**

Jesus stated in verse four, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son can be revealed.” Sometimes God uses pain to reveal his glory. But out of pain and loss can come real beauty and intimacy. We can’t miss this. Right in the context of this story, “Emmanuel - God with Us” is here. Jesus dwells with Mary and Martha right in their circumstance. Through the tears, through the delay of coming, through the conversations - God is there with them. God’s glory has come and now it is going to be revealed. Mary and Martha see and experience the incarnation in a more powerful and intimate way than ever before. They experience his tears. They experience his calm conversations. They are now going to experience something beyond their comprehension and a preview of what is to come. What is your story line of impossible circumstances? Are you experiencing the intimacy and glory of the incarnation?

## **The Life of the Incarnation**

When Jesus commands Lazarus to come forth, he rises to life. He comes out of the tomb, beyond the odor of death and decay. Jesus will always provide and give life. In fact, Jesus’ very presence is an embodiment of life. The incarnate God calls us to enjoy the life that he has provided. He calls us to live beyond our comprehension and live with the powerful hope in the resurrected life. Wes King, a Christian songwriter, wrote these lyrics based upon this story. The song is called Lazarus:

Paralyzed by hopeless shame  
It's been a while since you've felt alive  
Wrapped in grave clothes and fine perfume  
But it can't hide the death you feel inside  
But Jesus calls out your name  
Calling you forth  
"Come out of that tomb of shame"

There's a little Lazarus in all of us  
Come on, let it rise, let it rise  
Can't you hear Him  
He is calling us to come outside  
Come outside

Just like he did with Mary and Lazarus, the incarnation calls you by name. He calls you to come outside of your hopelessness and your fear. He calls out to you to leave the odor of death and come outside of the tomb of shame. Jesus desires that you live a life with his resurrection and glory in view. The incarnation dwells in the middle of hurt and provides hope so that we can live a life that is healed and pointed toward eternity.

**Can you hear him calling you to come outside this Christmas season and rise to life?**

By Dr. Steve Benson

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