

LOOSING LAZZARUS

LESSON 7

JESUS EMPOWERED,
SO I MUST EMPOWER!

SEVEN WAYS TO DECONSTRUCT PERSONAL AND STRUCTURAL RACISM FROM JOHN 11

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“And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.” John 11:44

I still remember the day when a retired police officer, who is a close friend and member of our church, corrected me. I was speaking somewhere and made a comment about the system in America being broken, and how it doesn't work for black people and minorities the same way it works for white people. This retired officer, who happens to be a white man, said to me, “Pastor, the system in America isn't broken. It's designed to work this way.”

The truth is, “We the people” was never meant to include, empower, or recognize Natives, women, enslaved Africans, Asians, and Latinos. America was built to give advantages to protestant, white males and disadvantages to everyone else. A simple definition of racism is that it is a system of advantages and disadvantages built on race. To go further, racism has also been defined as “prejudice plus power.” To be a racist, one must have access to systemic power, and that same person will use that institutional power to inflict harm and impede the social progress of other people groups based solely on race. This is why racism is a social construct and not just a matter of the heart.

Every institution in America has been contaminated with racism. Whether it's the structures of government, the military, education, banking, healthcare, business, the judiciary, law enforcement, social services, media, sports and entertainment, and especially religion, all of these structures have been influenced, infiltrated, and infested with the errant belief and practice that white people are superior to any and all other people groups.

Here's how racism works. Racists create the system because they have the numerical, militaristic, political, and economic power to do so. Racists invent the concept of race and a racial caste system that places them on the top and everyone else on the bottom. Racists formulate the narrative of racial difference and place stigmas on non-white people groups that become accepted as truth. Racists then use the system that was built on race to their personal advantage, while vilifying others who are not on their level. Racists control the media. Racists deny advantages, opportunities, and access to others outside

of their group based on skin color. Racists build laws into the system that allow them to maintain power, while others outside of their race have minimal power if any. Racists use God, religion, and the Bible to justify their evil deeds against humanity.

Racists benefit from the biased, racist system for hundreds of years, while denying how other races suffer tremendous systemic and personal deficits because of it. Racists oppose resistance and reform to their system, and will quickly use violence to maintain their power. And when gradual societal change does occur, it never happens because the hearts of racists finally see the light.

On the contrary, change occurs when the oppressed demand justice from the oppressor. Change occurs when the racially marginalized learn how to use the system that was never intended for them to their advantage. And as societal change slowly begins to take place, racists have the a historical audacity to deny that such a system exists or has present day ramifications. If people choose to deny this system, it can only mean that they are beneficiaries of the system and sophisticated 21st century racists.

A system was used to keep Lazarus bound. Literal bandages were wrapped around Lazarus' body, and they impeded his movement and hindered his freedom. Lazarus was newly alive, freshly reborn in a sense, but he was still restricted by his grave clothes that someone else put on him. Here's the question: What good is it to be alive, but remain bound and limited in what you can and cannot do? You're alive, but your hands are bound, which means you cannot work with them the way everyone else does in order to earn a living and a fair wage.

You're alive, but your feet are bound, which means you can't go wherever you want to go like everyone else.

You're alive, but your face is wrapped in a cloth, which means no one can see you or hear you. When you try to talk, your speech is inhibited because your jaw is held in position by a bandage under your chin.

If you can't work with your hands, you have no true power. If you can't walk around freely, you have no legitimate power. If you can't talk and be heard, you have no real power.

But thankfully Jesus was there. The One who came to set the captives free was there. The One who came to set at liberty those who are oppressed was there. The One who raised the dead was there, and He was accompanied by His disciples. At that particular time, His disciples did the things that He commanded them to do. I wish this was the case now with His church.

Jesus told His disciples to loose Lazarus and let him go (*John 11:44*). Lazarus needed to be empowered through the assistance of others because he couldn't unwrap his own grave clothes. We must see that Jesus empowered Lazarus with life and the church empowered him with freedom. Those of us surrounding Lazarus should help him, especially if we were instrumental in binding him systemically in the first place.

After being loosed Lazarus was given a seat at the table (*John 12:1 - 2*). Being at the table with Jesus and others is to be in a position of power and influence. If we are going to be like Jesus, we need to invite people like Lazarus to join us at the table of authority so that the table will be better balanced and more impactful.

At the core of the gospel is the willingness to empower the less powerful. We must consider what Paul wrote in II Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

Jesus intentionally empowered all of us who were poor in sin to made rich in His righteousness. Jesus empowered us so that we might empower others spiritually and holistically. How this plays out in the real world varies for each of us, but if we are not looking to find a way to see spiritually dead people made alive in Christ and systemically bound people freed, then we are not following Jesus' example.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 01.** Dr. Williamson began the message talking about how America operated with “Cheat codes” in the system. Do you agree with his assessment? He also said that it’s time once again for white people to join the black community in coming against these cheat codes. Why is it important for whites to join blacks in this just cause?
- 02.** Do you believe America was intentionally designed along racial lines to limit the life experiences of black people and to bind them? Do you believe those systemic challenges are still present today or have they gone away? Explain your answer.
- 03.** How can you unwrap the bandages of systemic oppression that bind certain segments of our society? What are some practical things that you can do to empower individuals and renovate institutions?
- 04.** A white person shouldn’t feel guilty about having certain privileges in a system that has historically benefited white people. Complete the sentence: However, a white person should feel guilty or convicted if...
- 05.** Why has assisting people who are bound by an unjust system become a bad thing in the eyes of the church?
- 06.** What black person or family can you specifically invest in long-term in order to see God’s racially diverse and unified kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven? What black person bound by an unjust system can you show up for, stand up for, and speak up for?

