

**Christianityworks  
Personality GPS –  
Living Life to the Full by Knowing Who I Am  
062-3  
*The Lazarus Phenomenon***

God looks on our hearts; on the stuff going on on the inside and do you know something? If He isn't in the business of fixing those things in us, then what's the point?

**Life for Today**

Can I ask you something? Are you really living life to the full – I mean REALLY? So many people are struggling to discover their destiny; where they fit. Ok, maybe life's kind of chugging along okay, but we all have this sense of somehow, 'I have a destiny – a life I'm supposed to live – a 'me' I'm meant to be.'

And I don't apologise for the fact that over the last few weeks we have been unpacking that from God's perspective. I just passionately believe that He so wants each one of us to discover that when we have a relationship with Him - a real relationship, you know – that all of a sudden we can be the person He meant us to be.

And today we are in the third programme of a series that I've called "Living Life to the Full by Knowing Who I Am." I'd like to look at the story of Lazarus because, in a sense, if we are going to talk about 'living life to the full', well we have to die to the old 'me' and rise to the new 'me'. And I love how Jesus tackled that when His good friend Lazarus up and died on Him. It's a powerful story – it's about a real man who died and who Jesus brought back to life again.

I always love to see what Jesus did and then ask 'What does that tell me about God?' And you see an attitude in Jesus that tells us that He means for us, here and now, to have life today. The Lazarus story had a powerful impact on my life, so let's have a look at it. We'll go and have a look at the first part of the story in John chapter 11, verses 1 to 15.

*"A man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus was sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus – they said, "Lord, the one you love is sick."*

*When he heard this, he said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.*

*Then he said to his disciples, "Okay, now let us go back to Judea."*

*"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"*

*And Jesus answered them, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."*

*After he said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."*

*And his disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.*

*So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But come on, let us go to him."*

Interesting story – Lazarus is dying; it turns out that Lazarus is a really good friend of Jesus and Jesus could have prevented his death, yet He didn't! Jesus knew two days before and He decided not to go; He decided to wait where He was and then go a couple of days later.

Now what was God doing? I think God was trying to make a point.....a point at a couple of levels. Remember Jesus said, "For your sake, I'm glad I didn't go so that you may believe." The first point is the power of Jesus because as we'll see later on in the programme, ultimately He brings Lazarus back to life again. But I think there's another point – that God is in the business of bringing the dead back to life.

Over these last few weeks we have dealt with an issue that so many of us don't want to deal with, head on – sin. I mean, I think in our society today 'sin' is a four letter word. There's stuff in our lives that we know is wrong and it robs us of life itself. As I look back on my life as a wealthy, apparently successful businessman on the outside

– what people saw, they envied. I seemed to have it all together – I seemed to have it all.

But on the inside I was dead; I was empty; I was hollow; I was a shell. I truly describe myself as a dead man walking. You know something? It doesn't matter how much we deny it; how much we try to put a respectful veneer over or sell it as a feature of our freedom to do whatever we want – that's all of us at some point – dead inside. And that's how God sees us before we meet Jesus; that's how we are until we encounter Jesus Christ.

At this point some people might be saying, 'Come on, Berni, bit old fashioned point of view isn't it?' If you're in that camp can I encourage you to do something? Take a good hard look at the way you're living your life – ask yourself, 'Am I living my life to the full?' God lets us go through that - to be a dead man walking - for a reason. It's the same as with Lazarus – Jesus waited for him to die before bringing him back to life because God wanted to make a point. God's in the 'new life' business and it's a miracle and He needed to make that point because we just don't get it sometimes. I didn't, and nor did Lazarus's family. Let's have a look:

*"On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already died and he'd been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. And when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.*

*"Lord," Martha said, "if you had been here; if only you'd been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that now God will give you whatever you ask." And Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."*

*And Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection on that last day."*

*And Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

*"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world."*

*And after she said this, she went back and called her sister Mary and said. "The Teacher is here, Jesus is here and he's asking for you." When Mary heard this, she quickly got up and*

*went to Jesus. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews, who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.*

*When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died." Comes from John chapter 11, verses 17 to 32.*

Ultimately, as we will see later, Jesus did bring Lazarus back to life but no one could believe that Jesus would do that, here and now. They'd all seen Him do miracles; they had all seen Him heal people but they couldn't imagine how He could actually bring Lazarus back to life.

But Jesus had another plan; a new life, here and now. The question is: Do you believe?

### **All Wrapped up**

You know, I reckon, if there is a God; if God is God then He is going to want us to live life to the full. I mean, outrageously, abundantly, to the full – not a two out of ten, not a seven out of ten, a minimum of a ten out of ten and then some. That doesn't mean there won't be ups and downs; of course, there always will but I don't know, my hunch is, He'd want us to live a life of outrageous joy right through the ups and downs. But I know so many people ... people who believe in Jesus and people who don't – who seem to be living a two or a five or a seven out of ten kind of life. Always this nagging sense of destiny; there's something more for them but never really getting close to that. Me, I want to live my life to the full. How about you?

And you know, there's an amazing portrait of that kind of half life; a not really complete life, in the Bible. We've just been looking at the story of Lazarus – about how Lazarus died and was a good friend of Jesus. They come and tell Jesus that Lazarus is about to kick the bucket and yet He still waits a few days before He goes. And you know what everyone says when He gets there? 'How come You didn't get here sooner – You could have healed him?'

Bit like us! 'God, how come You dished up this life that I living right now? How come You couldn't get here sooner? You could have made it better back then.' But Jesus tells them, "You know

something? I'm glad I didn't get here because God is about to make a point....about to do something that you don't expect."

Everyone wanted Jesus to have fixed the problems before Lazarus died but Jesus said to His disciples, "*Lazarus is dead and for your sake I'm glad I wasn't there so that you may believe, but let's get going to him now.*" So no one can see it. Yet Jesus says to Martha, his sister, "*Your brother will rise again.*" And Martha says, "*I know one day he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*" She didn't get it either – she was happy to believe in 'the pie in the sky when you die' but not in 'steak on the plate while you wait'.

Let's pick up the story in John chapter 11, verse 38:

*"Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to Lazarus' tomb – it was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said.*

*"But Lord, said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been dead for four days."*

*Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you would see the glory of God?"*

*So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you would always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."*

*When he said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, Lazarus, come out!" And the dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.*

*And Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."*

Jesus was deeply moved – Lazarus was a good friend. He cared for Lazarus – Jesus wept for Lazarus. This isn't some stunt – it's a tender encounter and everyone else was thinking, 'Jesus can't do this! I mean, this Lazarus guy has been dead for four days - he's on the nose.' I reckon we have to be careful about telling God what He can't do ... about putting Him in a little box, imagining somehow, He could never really bring Lazarus back to life ... or us back to life, you and me.

See, all these people – Martha and Mary, the disciples, all the other Jews that were around – they'd seen Jesus doing amazing miracles; they knew Him, yet they didn't believe that He could bring a man back to life. But He did!

Look at the picture of Lazarus though, as he walks out of the tomb. *"The dead man came out. His hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face."* He was dressed in grave clothes. Can I tell you something? He looks a lot like many of the people I know - this picture of Lazarus in his grave clothes, living a half life; bound up in their grave clothes; bound up in the things of the past. Jesus has breathed new life into them. He'd breathed new life into Lazarus. Under those grave clothes, Lazarus' cheeks were pink; Lazarus was breathing, yet he was bound up in his grave clothes.

Isn't that something we do sometimes? We accept Jesus as our Saviour and yet we have one foot in the past life; that dead half life that didn't work and one foot in the new 'Jesus' life. Kind of hoping that things will work out and they never quite do. There's a reason for that – you can't live your life wrapped in grave clothes!

If you believe in Jesus, like Lazarus, there's life in you - fresh pink cheeks; LIFE! Jesus sets us free but then people want to hang onto the past – it just doesn't work. What sort of life do you think it would have been if Lazarus had stayed in those grave clothes? And in any case, it wasn't Jesus' plan. Look what He said: *"Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."* Don't you like that? Jesus commanded that the grave clothes be taken off and he be let go; that he be set free. 'Let him be with Me as he was meant to be.'

Being the person God meant us to be; living life to the full, is a 'boots and all' thing for you and me. 'Aw, but I still want to hang onto the things and ... this or that, or that attitude or this compromise. I still want to cheat and lie and be tight with money and not serve other people because you know, none of those things are particularly convenient.'

Great! Great, stay in your grave clothes then but don't expect to live your life to the full. You can't do it!

The alternative is to set our hearts like flint: I'm following Jesus! I'm living out the life that He's given us no matter what the cost. For a heroin addict to give up heroin there's a cost. For an alcoholic to give up alcohol there's a cost. The first step is admitting where we are and who we are and the second step is deciding, here and now:

'you know something – this guy on the radio has a point. I have to do something; I have to get those grave clothes off me. I have to ditch some things and get on with this new life that Jesus has given me.'

### **Time to Walk on Glass**

Today and over the last few weeks we have been talking about knowing who we are and living our lives out to the full. We all want that; we all want somehow to grow into who we were meant to be, to realise our destiny. And maybe over the last few weeks you have been tuning in and something inside you has been shouting, 'Yes! That's exactly what I want but ... (there's always a 'but') but surely God would never do this for me? Nothing's ever going to change in my life. Okay, He raised Lazarus from the dead that was two thousand years ago. Okay, He raised Jesus from the dead. Okay, God can do anything He wants, but you know something, I just don't believe He would do it for me.'

That's the crunch isn't it? It's amazing you know: people can believe a whole bunch of things – they can believe that God can forgive them, that Jesus rose from the dead, that we have eternal life. In a sense, those things are easy to believe because they're a long way off. But when you look at the problems of life, believing that God can intervene and make things better, believing that He will - that's just a bit harder. Believing He can deal with those yucky, ugly bits inside us, that's even harder still.

I mean, I was an incredibly tough self-centred businessman; I used to eat wimps for breakfast, you know. So, when I came to believing all those other things about God and Jesus and stuff, I knew straight away there were going to be some tough things to deal with in me. And on top of it all, I was going through a tough time personally. 'Surely not, Berni?' Absolutely! That's when I came to faith in Jesus Christ – a decade and a half ago – when things were really tough in my life.

I was listening to another really high profile businessman lately about his life. He took a company from nine million to half a billion in just a few years. And everyone looked at him during that time and thought, 'Man, what a superstar! What a corporate genius and hero! But the secret was he had his head down over the toilet bowl coughing up blood because that was what was going on inside him. He almost lost his marriage – he was sick with worry.

The crazy thing we do is we look on the outward sides of success but God looks on our hearts – on the stuff going on on the inside.

And do you know something? If He isn't in the business of fixing those things in us, whatever they are – yours are bound to be different from mine, of course they are – then what's the point? I mean if it doesn't work, what's the point? And do you know something? When we are in the middle of those things it's so hard ... so incredibly hard to believe that He would ever come alongside us and give us a new life, like He did with Lazarus.

You know what I mean, or is it just me? The Apostle Paul writing to the Ephesian church was busting to help them with exactly that. This is what he wrote, almost two thousand years ago. He said:

*"I pray that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened so that you may know the hope to which he has called you – the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and the incomparably great power for those who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him up from the dead and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly realms, far above rule or authority and power and dominion; every title that can be given, not only in the present age but in the one to come."*

See, Paul's saying that the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is the very same power that's at work in you and me, and Paul's saying, 'I just wish you knew the hope and the riches and the power that's at work in you.'

A few years back, I went to Toronto in Canada and I went to visit the CN Tower. At the time it was the tallest, manmade, freestanding structure in the world and part way up – three hundred and forty two metres up there's an observation deck that you can go to, the trick is, it has a glass floor. Now they tell you that the glass floor is five times stronger than the concrete floor. Is that a help? No! I was petrified!

It took me a long time to walk out on this glass floor. It was an awful feeling. You could look down between your feet and you could see birds flying what seemed miles below – these little specks. And I wasn't the only one – everybody seemed scared to walk out onto this glass floor.

But here is it – if I want to be the person God made me to be; if I want to live my life to the full, you have to step out on the glass floor; you have to put your faith in the promises of God. Okay, it's an uncomfortable feeling sometimes, but there it is. And sometimes when we step out; when we have been living our lives saying, 'You know, nothing's ever going to change in my life, my relationships,

my problems, my this, that and the other are never going to change,' – when we read God's promises; when we read what Paul says in Ephesians chapter 1: "I wish you knew the riches and the inheritance and the glory and the power that you have."

When we walk out onto those promises, all of a sudden, God does something in us – hope and riches and power – we need to live this new life that Jesus died and rose again to give us. Galatians chapter 2, verse 20 says:

*"I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I that live but Christ who lives in me." Now, that's a fairly well known passage but listen to the next bit: "The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."*

Can we honestly say that the life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me? Jesus died on that cross so that my sins and yours will be forgiven. He rose again to give us certain hope and a certain promise of eternal life and His plan is for that eternal life to begin now!

I know you have problems in your life. Get a revelation: we all do! We all have things and issues and problems in our lives that we would rather not have but in the middle of those ... in the middle of those, God's plan is for you to be the person He made you to be. It's for you to live your life out to the full and taking hold of that life; being the person God made you to be, living the life God gave you is a step of faith.

We accept our salvation from God by faith; we have to accept our new life by faith too. We have to believe it before we can see it. It's God plan and it's a great plan and He wants you and me to live our lives to the full and know who we are in Christ - to live with an active faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus went and took Lazarus out of the grave when no one expected He could do that. No one believed that He could do that. Jesus was making a point – 'I am in the 'new life' business.' Here was Jesus saying, "I am the resurrection, the truth. I'm in the business of giving people a fresh, new life.' And sometimes He gives us that and we still want to wander round in the old grave clothes. Take OFF the grave clothes and He will set you free.

When we take that step out, He steps in and does things we could never do. He deals with the things we could never deal with and the

reason is: so that we can never boast that it was 'me' - 'I did it!' I didn't! He did!!