

Take Away the Stone

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith and the removal of unbelief and secret sin in order to experience the great things God wants to do in our lives.

Duration: 33:30

Scripture: Psalm 37:4, Matthew 6:33, Mark 9:23, John 11:23, John 11:35, 2 Corinthians 3:18, James 4:8

Topics: "Purification"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of confessing our sins to Jesus and removing the obstacles that hinder our relationship with Him. The story of Lazarus being raised from the dead is used as an example of how Jesus can bring life and overcome death. The speaker encourages the audience to have a personal relationship with Jesus and trust in Him for eternal life. The message of the gospel is highlighted as the central theme, emphasizing the hope and assurance of being together with Christ in eternity.

Transcript

I want to just leave you with one thought, and then I want to have a time of prayer here to end the service, to set the stage. This is from the book of John, chapter 11. You know, this is a story of Jesus going to the house of Lazarus, Mary and Martha.

Lord, Martha said to Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now, God will give you whatever you ask. And Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again.

Martha answered, I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. And Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies.

And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? Let's look at that verse. That's an important verse in the Bible, one of the I am's of Jesus, and found in the book of John.

Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. The person who believes in me will live even though he dies. When he dies, since his soul is saved and he has the gift of eternal life, his existence will not stop, but he will go to be with the Lord.

He will live, really live. Now we're living biological life, but then we're gonna have the full inheritance of those who have put their faith in Christ. So death ends nothing.

And whoever lives and believes in me will never die, even though they put his body in a grave, he'll be living. Do you believe this? Yes, Lord, she told him, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world. We know that Christ is the Greek counterpart for the Hebrew word Messiah.

So Christ, Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world. Then later on in the story, Jesus once more deeply moved, came to the tomb, and 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's a bad odor, for he's been in there four days. Then Jesus said, did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone, and then Jesus looked up and said, Father, I thank you that you've heard me. 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.

And when he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out! And the dead man came out, his hands and his 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. Now we know that this miracle was the last great miracle Jesus did before he was arrested, and his earthly ministry came to an end.

Although the greatest thing he ever did was healing no one or teaching no one as great as those things were, but when he died on the cross and rose again, provided salvation for all of us. And Martha and Mary and Lazarus, those were siblings, and Jesus went to their house, which was just a few miles outside of Jerusalem where he would be crucified. And this miracle pushed the envelope to the point where there was no return.

The leaders knew the whole world's gonna go after this man. We're gonna lose our power, our perks, our positions of authority. We've gotta get rid of him.

They had arranged already with Judas that Judas would betray him. This miracle also was so great that a contract was put out on Lazarus. Not many people noticed that little verse.

Lazarus became such a liability to the opponents of Jesus Christ that they said we gotta kill him too because everyone's walking around and go, oh, you're the guy that died and was in the tomb four days and Jesus called you out. Let's talk. And this brought everything to a crescendo and an end.

And we know how Jesus knew that Lazarus was sick, didn't go, then he knew he died. He still didn't go right away. The disciples couldn't understand it.

Jesus said he's just asleep. They thought he was just sleeping. He said, no, he died.

But this sickness, this whole thing is for the glory of God. And he went there, Martha greeted him first, ran out to him and said, you know, if you would've been here, our brother wouldn't have died. And Jesus said, as we read, he'll rise again and she said, yeah, I know that.

But that doesn't help us right now. He'll rise again at the resurrection and then Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. That's the most important thing for everyone.

Let me just stop here before I get to my point which is gonna be made to Christians mostly. You gotta know that you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ today because he is the resurrection and the

life. This week, got up early on Wednesday and flew down to New Orleans and went to Angola Prison, Louisiana State Penitentiary and spoke.

It maybe was the best meeting that I've ever had there in the sense of, I think, of God's presence and his blessing on the proceedings. And I was able to tell those guys there that when you have a relationship with Jesus Christ, you know where you're gonna be two billion years from now. You will be somewhere two billion years from now.

Unless Jesus is a total fraud and a liar, he taught us that he's coming back to judge the living and the dead and when you have a saving relationship, you've made him the center of your life, you've asked him to forgive you of your sins and you've put your trust in him, you then receive that gift. It's a gift of eternal life. You don't do anything, you just believe and receive.

It's a gift and believing is the hand that takes the gift. But without that hand, you don't receive the gift. Without faith, it's impossible to please God.

So once you know that, then you know whether I live 70 years, 90 years, 40 years. Life is a vapor, it's just over. But Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life.

Though you die, you're gonna live. How many are happy when you die, you're gonna live? Lift your hand up. And we're all gonna be together with Christ.

We're all gonna be together with Christ. That's the message of the gospel that Carol was entreating us to spread one by one. It's the gospel.

It's not just the name of Jesus or the blood of Jesus or the cross. It's all summarized by the word that's used most often in the New Testament, which is the gospel. How many know what gospel means? Good news, that's the good news.

The good news is though we're sinners, God loved us so much, he sent his son to die for us. And that through faith in him, our lives can be changed and we gain entrance into heaven. So everyone here today, just be sure of this.

Well, you know that because your conscience tells you that Hitler and Mother Teresa are gonna have a different end. The predator, there's a guy who killed nine people. I think he is demon possessed.

He's a serial killer. He killed nine they know about, but there's four or five that they're pretty sure the warden is down in Louisiana that he put in the ground also. And the last person he killed was a Christian woman, broke in her trailer, and he's in death row.

He's working through all his appeals. And I find it difficult to engage his gaze in a relaxed way, and he complains now whenever I get on that tier, what's he gotta be here for? And the warden said, hush, he's my friend, he's visiting people. And even he's locked up 23 hours a day, the one hour he comes out just to shower and to exercise, they have him shackled.

That's how dangerous he is. Well, someone who kills nine people and remains unrepentant, well, obviously, they're gonna be in a different place than a person who's put their faith in Christ a million years from now. Because if not, then eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die and it doesn't much matter, does it? If you wanna take evolution to its extreme, survival of the fittest, then that's what Hitler believed in,

that's what all these terrible 20th century dictators believe in.

Survival of the fittest, might makes right, that's how it is in the jungle. If the lion is stronger than another animal, he kills him and eats that animal. So that's where evolution takes us.

If we're all just animal in nature, it's survival of the fittest. But Jesus came that we might have not only morality in our lives, but the gift by God's grace of eternal life. I am the resurrection and the life.

I am gonna see my father. I am gonna see my mother-in-law and father-in-law. We're gonna see the Apostle Paul, Peter, James, and John.

How many are looking forward to going home, huh? Come on, put your hands together with me. You wanna go home, wanna go home. I would love it right now if Jesus came right in this meeting, right while I was talking.

There's nothing here that's holding me. Are you with me on that? So that's the story in Jesus went and raised Lazarus from the dead. There's just one sentence that I wanna leave with you and then we'll pray about it.

Just came to me this week. I never saw this before, this metaphor that we can use. When Jesus saw the crying, he wept.

The shortest verse in the Bible is in this John 11, which is Jesus wept. You wanna memorize a verse with me? Say it with me. Jesus wept.

He saw Mary, he saw all the mourners, and he wept. Because he knew that this was when God created, heavens and the earth, and put first people on the earth. This wasn't what God had in mind.

Mourning, crying, death, disease, sickness. So now he's about to do something. And here's my only thing I wanna share with you.

He's about to do something great. He's about to raise Lazarus from the dead. And he says four words that I want you to remember.

Take away the stone. Lazarus was in there, buried in a tomb, and there was a huge stone like later Jesus had over his tomb. You remember that, right? And for the manifestation of what God was gonna do to glorify his son, and what Jesus was about to do to show who he was, that he was greater than death, for it to be manifest, and for the whole thing to come together, he said, take away the stone.

He's gonna call Lazarus out. He's gonna show himself as the resurrection and life greater than death. But he needed them to do something for the manifestation to be seen.

Take away the stone. You know, there are stones in our lives that block the manifestation of what God wants to do. You know, God was ready to do something great, but for it to be fulfilled and manifest, the stone had to be taken away.

It was a hindrance. There was a hindrance to the manifestation of the glory of God. God wants to do something great, but for it to happen was get the stone out.

The stone's a hindrance to what I'm about to do. And I believe God laid this on my heart. To say to all of you here, what is the stone that's blocking the manifestation of what God wants to do in your life beyond what you could ask or think? They were screaming when Lazarus came out of there.

Are you kidding? That's spread everywhere. And God wants to do something great in our lives. Didn't he say that we would go from glory to glory and from faith to faith? Do you know the best days of Alvin's ministry are not behind him? They're in front of him, because God always saves the best for last.

There's no thing in the Bible that says you go up this way and then you go down like that. No, from glory to glory, faith to faith, God wants to do a new great thing in your life. Every member of the church, everybody visiting.

God wants to take us to a new place of effectiveness so his name will be glorified. I'm not talking about the foolishness of a bigger car and driving a Mercedes and all that junk you see on Christian television. I'm not talking about that foolishness.

I'm talking about God doing something great. We become more like Christ. That we're a greater blessing to the world.

God's not collecting cars. He gives cars and money to people who curse him. How could that be a measurement of anything? People of the most money curse God the most.

So obviously, money and big houses are not where it's at. But God wants to do something great in our life. But maybe there's a stone.

And what the Lord is saying to us today is take the stone away. Let me just give you two. And they're broad categories.

Don't you think the stone for some of us in this choir and in front of me is you've hit a plateau. You're not moving where God wants you to move. And one of the stones that's blocking you is unbelief.

Because that's what it was in Mary. Lord, take away the stone. He's been in there four days.

He'll stink. You don't know what you're doing. Unbelief, she doesn't trust Jesus to do what he wants to do.

And he says to her, Mary, didn't I tell you that if you would only believe, you would see the glory of God? It's amazing how we can go to church. I'm speaking for myself. You can grow up in church, be in church, and have unbelief riddling your life.

You can't believe anything other than what is. You can't see the what could be that God could do. Because unbelief settles you into a little two by four existence.

Some of us are living here and we're saved and the Lord lives in our life, but we're living in a world just exactly like this carpet. That's it. This is the borders of our life.

And God's got a big world of all kinds of things he wants us to be doing, but we can only go this far and we stop. I can't go beyond that. I can't do that.

I can't say that. I can't move in that realm. I can't pray for people.

I can't be bold. I can't be used in the gifts of this prayer. I can't do that.

I can go here. Look, I'm moving around, I'm praising God, but I can't go past there. And God's saying, no.

There are no limitations with me. I'll do beyond what you could ask or think if you'll only believe. Anybody here with me? Say amen by clapping your hand.

Traveling around the world, in Japan, in Korea, in Africa, all over South America, I've noticed that even with pastors. Pastors are bound by unbelief. This is all church can ever be.

This is all a service could ever be. And they were brought up in unbelief. The seminary they went to was full of unbelief.

The Bible is telling us all kinds of promises from God and all we can think about is I can't, it won't work. The Bible gives us all these promises of what God will do. And a lot of us just read them and we file them away and there's no faith.

But God is saying to us, I wanna do beyond. Look, I just got this letter. This is perfect timing.

Dear pastor, I live in North Carolina. I was diagnosed with throat cancer. I spoke to my sisters about it.

One of them is a member of your church. They prayed with me and we stood in faith. A couple of Tuesday nights ago, my sister told me that two men from North Carolina came to your prayer service asking for prayer for cancer, okay? So a woman's in North Carolina, she has cancer.

Her sister comes here and her sister tells her, yeah, there's a Tuesday night, Pastor Symbol wasn't there and there's two men here that had cancer. Pastor Tim Delina asked if anyone in the tabernacle knew anyone with cancer. So my sister stood up in proxy for me.

Several people laid their hands on her and they prayed for me. I went back to the doctor and found out that there are no traces anymore of cancer in my throat or my body. God is awesome.

It is infinite wisdom and mercy. These are all capitalized. All praises to the God of my salvation.

May God continue to bless you and your family and the Brooklyn Tabernacle. So how'd the man know to say anybody here have cancer? Know someone has cancer, you stand in proxy. How'd he know to do that? And I mean, how could a person not even in the service be healed by the prayer of someone else in proxy? Maybe you didn't grow up seeing that, but it doesn't matter how you grew up or how I grew up.

Come on, let's give God a hand clap. God is awesome. That stone of unbelief.

And the choir can have a stone of unbelief. And I close now. You can have a stone of unbelief that's blocking what God wants to do for you.

And this stone of unbelief is powerful. If you've been brought up with this thinking, God is sovereign and he's on the throne and he's gonna do whatever he's gonna do and we have no say in it. That is absolutely false.

Jesus went to his own hometown and the Bible says he could not do many miracles or miraculous things around them. Why? Because of their unbelief. The hands of almighty God, Jesus Christ, were tied behind them by the unbelief of the people.

It's not that God said, I don't wanna help anybody here. You think Jesus didn't wanna help people? We just see him weeping in this. Of course he'd wanna do something.

But according to your faith, so be it unto you. Little faith, little power. Little miracles, little of everything in life.

Great faith, then great things God will do. You say, well, I don't understand that. It's not for us to understand.

God is sovereign, but somehow he gave us free will and we can believe or reject. Why do you think he cried over Jerusalem? Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how many times I would've gathered you? But you didn't believe, you didn't come to me. And now your house is left to you desolate.

Not because I didn't wanna help you. He's weeping over them. What do you think, he was an actor? He loved them, he cared about them.

They're the ones that sent him away. And our unbelief can send him away. Of course it can.

God's a gentleman. He's not gonna force anything on anyone. He's looking for faith.

One last stone that needs to be cast out today, and that's the stone of any kind of secret sin or besetting sin that we haven't dealt with. I love you, that's why I'm gonna tell you the truth. If you got some relationship or something going on with someone that you know is wrong, and you know, maybe somebody here, you already know God is not happy with something going on in your life.

That's the stone that has to be removed for God to show the great things he's gonna do. In Isaiah 59, it says, is God's arm short that he can't do it? No, it's your sins that have separated you from God. You're blocking, that's the stone.

That secret thing that you look at that you know you shouldn't be looking at. Or those talk, that gossip, that slander, and you do it, and God's told you about it, but you still do it. I was just in Colorado Springs, and I got through preaching at this conference two weeks ago, last week, whenever it was last week, and I come down, and people are praying all over, and this woman comes to me, a young woman, and with her boyfriend, with her husband, I don't know, they come to me, and she's crying, and she says, oh, I'm so glad.

I always wanted to meet you and visit your church. I live in Long Island, I never had the chance, and now I just moved here, and help us to pray, and now I meet you in Colorado Springs. So I go, okay, okay.

I moved here now, and he's not saying much, and so I go, okay, what do you want me to do? I want you to pray that God will help me get the job, and help us, and bless us. So I say, come on, let's pray. Everyone's praying, so I put my arms around them.

The minute I put my arms around them, I feel uncomfortable. So I start to pray, and I stop praying, and I go, you pray, sir. No word comes out of his mouth.

And her, she's the one who solicited my prayers. You pray, ma'am. Not a word.

I draw back for them, I say, wait a minute. Something's wrong here. You two living together? Well, this is just great.

You want God to do all this great stuff, and you're living together. Ma'am, you're crying when you come approach me. Don't you know that's wrong? Well, then what do you want me to do? What do you think, I'm a wizard? What do you want me to do? God is not pleased with what you're doing.

How's he gonna bless you? But that's the spirit that's going through America, and a lot of Christian television just feeds it. You don't have to get right with God. Just confess the word, and you'll get the job, you'll get the money, you'll get, you'll get nothing.

You gotta get right with God. Come on, you gotta get right. You gotta get the stone out of the way.

Come on, am I right or wrong? You gotta get the stone out of the way. There's a guy that I put my arms around in the prison, right, he wants God, but his battle is, and I've let him know, listen, you can't be, you can't have sex with men, you can't be homosexual and have the blessing of God. That's a stone that will block everything.

And the same with heterosexual, the same with unforgiveness, the same with stealing on the job, that's the stone. What's the sense if somebody comes and prays for you, there's no magic? You gotta get the stone, that's what Jesus said. Take away the stone.

Watch what I'm gonna do. But take away the stone. Unforgiveness because someone hurt you.

And that rancor, that bitterness is in you, that's the stone. You're not gonna see what God can do. You can talk all you want, say all you want, sing all you want, lift your hands all you want, it's not gonna happen until you take away the stone.

But here's what I wanna end with, the great thing about God, you say, Pastor Simba, that's so basic, this little message of yours, it's pitiful, I knew that. But my problem is, I can't move the stone. And I empathize with you.

That's the point, we know it's wrong, but how do you stop? Here's the beautiful thing about Jesus, and our metaphor ends here, the picture from John 11. He said take away the stone, he just watched him because it was a physical stone. But if you and I will confess our stone to him today, our laziness, you watch TV for how many hours, and then how much do you read the Bible a week? And then you're wondering, where's God? I don't sense his presence.

Well, I mean, just lazy, we get lazy. Come on, here, anybody ever get lazy in their spiritual life? Come on, come on, fess up. How many ever get lazy? Wave your hand if you ever got lazy.

No time for God, no time for his word, no time to be alone with him. And then other things creep in, besetting sins, all kinds of compromising situations. And Jesus is saying, you wanna see the glory of God? Move the stone, but he'll lift it for you.

Here's the beautiful thing about Jesus, he'll move it. All you have to do is confess it and humble yourself and say, that area in my life is not right, that area. And brothers and sisters, I'm gonna stop because even though I prayed and asked God, God, give me application for this message, give me a prophetic application so I would know the kind of things I should say, what the Lord assured me is, don't say anything, don't try to be specific, because I've already told the people, they know what the stone is.

You already know your stone. I've known the stones in my life. And all we have to do is say, Jesus, I am sick and tired of being sick and tired.

I want that thing taken away, lifted away from me so I can see a great manifestation of your power and glory in my life. Close your eyes. This is a little more confrontational as some of you are used to.

But what do you want me to do, lie to you? What do you want me to tell you? I'm okay, you're okay, God's on this throne and everything's gonna be great. History tells us, the Bible tells us, doesn't work out good for everybody because they won't name the stone and ask God to help them get rid of it. Some Christians never grow.

Some churches don't go ahead. They're shouting glory and pounding the pulpit and they're going nowhere because they don't confront the spiritual reality of God. Change what has to be changed.

Move the stone away so that we can see a manifestation of what you want. That's not a downer, that's not negative, that's positive. That's like a doctor saying, you know what? If you don't cut the cancer out, it's gonna kill you.

And he comes and cuts it out. God wants to just lift some stones out of the way here. Lord, you do the application.

I can't even imagine all the stones that the enemy tries to use to block what you want to do in our lives. Greed, covetousness, all these things, Lord. Temper tantrums, filthy language that we know are wrong and Lord, we keep using it.

Grieve your Holy Spirit every time and stop what you want to do in our lives because we won't deal with what you're already making real to us but we deal with it today by your grace because you love us, you don't want to hurt us. You want to lift the stone out. If you're in the balcony or here downstairs and you just want to pray quietly for two or three minutes with me, we want to see those four words.

Jesus, take away the stone. Give me victory in that area where I've been blocked. If you're here in the balcony or downstairs, you got a stone, you want God, you're owning up to it and you want God to help you.

Now listen, they're gonna dim the lights, no one's gonna look at you. Are you kidding? Look down at you, judge you? Who are we that we would judge you? We gotta mind our own business and check our stones. Balcony or downstairs, come on up out of your seat and just stand here.

If you're not a born again Christian, if you've never taken the stone of unbelief away that Christ is the Savior of the world and God's talking to you today, just come. He knows every secret thing, He knows every hidden thing. The worst thing you could do right now is say, no, no one will ever know about that.

No, listen, He loves you. He's crying over you like He did Jerusalem. Take away the stone.

Take away that which in my life is blocking my growth, that manifestation of your glory and power in my life. I humble myself, I confess it. I'm not blaming anyone for what's wrong in me.

I'm not using psychology to blame somebody else, my mother, my father, how I was raised. Pastor Simba, I was raised in the hood. You don't understand that.

I was raised black, I was raised white, I was raised Asian. You don't understand that. No, listen, get rid of that stone right now.

Just say, God, take away all the excuses that I use. I humble myself because whoever humbles himself, God will lift up. Father God, we stand on your word that if we confess our sins, you are faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God, for myself, for all of us, we don't want superficial Christianity. We don't wanna go to church, shout on Sunday, and then have all kinds of stones blocking what you wanna do. How are we gonna witness to others if we're not living in a place of victory ourselves? Although we're never gonna be perfect, we know that, God, we wanna be free.

We wanna live out whom the Son sets free. It's free indeed. And God, people are coming forward with stones that they've identified.

And that stone is blocking the manifestation of your power and your glory in our lives. We humble ourselves. And we ask you to have mercy on us today.

Remove the stone. Take away the stone. Take away the stone.

Everybody here in the front that came forward, lift your hands and tell God right now, take away the stone. You don't have to name it, just keep saying it to him. Take away the stone, Lord.

Remove this thing from my life, the thing that's blocking what you wanna do in my life. This stronghold that the enemy is trying to use to hold me back. And we don't have to go into a lot of words with you.

We don't have to be religious. We can just talk from our heart. Take away the stone.

In the name of Christ, take away the stone, God. We humble ourselves. We own up, we confess it, we admit it.

When we leave today, we're gonna be lighter by a thousand pounds because this stone is not gonna be in our lives anymore. And we know it's true because your word says, if we ask, we shall receive. Blessed be your name.

Now let there be a manifestation now of your power and your glory in our lives as the stone is taken away. And help us every day to trust you to keep it away. You're the one who gives us victory.

It's not my self-effort. It's your power, Lord. And we praise you for it.

Let's give God a hand clap of praise for removing hundreds of stone. Take away the stone. Take away the stone.

Everybody, say it out loud. Take away the stone. Take away that stone, Lord.

Take away that stone, Lord. Lord, I thank you so much for the body of Christ and I thank you for your word from John 11. You're not only the resurrection and the life, you're the one who takes away the stone, the spiritual stones that the enemy uses to try to block the great things you're gonna do in our lives.

Let everybody leave with uplifted spirit, praising you. Nobody grumpy, nobody depressed. For the joy of the Lord is our strength.

Today's the first day of the rest of my life and it's gonna be lived different because we've prayed and you've heard and you're acting on our behalf. Break down every denominational racial barrier that the enemy could ever try to throw up and help us to love one another. For we ask this all in Jesus' name.

And everyone said.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/24/SID24081.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jim-cymbala/take-away-the-stone/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net