

SERMON
Behind The Ugliness of Ministry
John 11:1-8, 17, 21, 38-39, 41-44

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1. I don't know if anyone in here knows how to bake a pound cake from scratch. I'm not talking about using the ingredients from Betty Crocker, but I am talking about using flour, eggs, water, sugar, butter, 7up, and other ingredients to make a pound cake. Now speaking of myself, I may not be the one who knows how to make a pound cake from scratch, but I do know about the work that it requires to make one and I know that I am not the smartest man in the world, but I do know what a pound cake from scratch look like. Well, let me be more specific. I can tell the difference from a **GOOD** homemade pound cake and a pound cake made by Entenmann's. Now even though it's nothing wrong with buying a pound cake made by Entenmann's, but Marvin Gaye said it best, "Ain't nothing like the real thing." I know that making a pound cake from scratch will leave your sink with dirty bowls, aching feet from standing up for a long period of time, aching hands from mixing everything together with a spoon, and maybe even feeling tired from dealing with the heat from the oven, but once that pound cake has finished baking, it was all worth. If the pound cake is made right, you could have a slice of the pound cake with a piece of Fried Chicken and a Pepsi on the side. Now I know that this may not be the most healthiest meal, but after all you been through during your week and the work that you had to put into making the pound cake it's just feels good to kick your feet up and enjoy the simple pleasures of life. See saints of God, in these 35 years of my life, I learned that life is not always pretty, but behind the scenes even at the hardest moments where we think all is lost and behind the scenes where people don't see, God is working things out for our favor. You may have to go through some hard times, but count it all joy because God is using you for a miracle and for his glory. So my brothers and sisters even when life hits you with the hardest attacks, go and make yourself a pound cake or whatever your favorite dessert is, and leave your problems with the Lord because through your trust in him he is going to bring out the greatest ministry opportunities in your life for all the world to see.

2. How do I know that this is true because look at our scripture text for today. We see that ministry is tough, but we also see that ministry is also rewarding. And if you read the rest of this chapter you will see that ministry has residual consequences. In other words residual consequences meaning that whatever you do no matter how good it goes or how good your intentions are people will never be satisfied with what you do and will always have something negative to say. Sometimes these same people will plot to destroy what you are trying to do in your ministry because they don't understand what God is doing in your ministry. Instead of believing in God, praying, and having faith they just want to mutter and create a hostile environment in and out the church. Saints, sometimes the best thing that can happen in a church is when people get off the vine. In other words, the book of John talks about God will

prune off the fruit that's not growing in order for the good fruit to grow. See there are some people who need to leave the ministry in order for a ministry to grow. People who are mean and nasty hinder a church's growth because people will not want to join a ministry with mean and nasty people in it. When people in the church don't get their way and they threaten to leave, let them leave. Trust God to know that, in due time if you keep on doing right by him, you will reap a new harvest of disciples.

3. A great lesson that I learned in ministry was that I can't help people who don't want to be helped. These same people would complain to me about the direction of their life, but these same people refused to recognize Jesus as the director of their life. I have seen God supply all of my needs every time, and it seems as though when one person leaves the ministry, 2 more join or at least participates in the ministry. See saints everyone in this sanctuary has a ministry inside of them from the youngest to the oldest and it's important to know that ministry is ugly, but rewarding. I get happy when I see someone give their life to Christ. I get happy when I see people improving their financial or ministry status. Saints behind the ugliness of ministry is hard work. Behind the ugliness of ministry is being able to deal with criticisms. Behind the ugliness of ministry is tiredness because of the hard work you put into something. Behind the ugliness of ministry may be jealous folks. **But the part I love is that after you get through the ugliness of ministry** you find joy, you find love, you learn patience, and you find the everlasting peace that passes all understanding because Jesus Christ knows that you love him and you trust him and that you followed his commandments.

4. If you look at this text today, we find that this was going to be the last public ministry of Jesus. We see that Jesus' true friend that he loved is sick. We know his name to be Lazarus. This was the brother of Mary and Martha. You remember this Mary because she was the one that anointed Jesus' feet with oil and wiped his feet with her hair. Well Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus that they needed him because their brother was sick. When Jesus received the news he said, in the 4th verse that "This sickness is not unto death, but for the Glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified today." **See Jesus did not mean that Lazarus would not die, but that death would not be the final outcome of this sickness.** Saints I don't know about you, but that's good news. Why? Because any trial or tribulation that a child of God faces can ultimately bring glory to God because God can produce good out of any bad situation. Don't believe me go back to Genesis and ask Joseph how he became a Jewish man of high authority in a foreign land after being left in a cave for dead and after being jailed for being lied on. Don't believe me go to the book of Esther and learn how Queen Esther still had to bow down to her husband, but saved the Jewish nation from destruction due to lies and deceit from one of the King's right hand man. **Church, God can produce good out of any bad situation.**

5. See saints in the 4th verse of this text we know that Lazarus would die, but we also knew that he would be raised again from the dead. The real purpose of the sickness was to the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it. Saints it's a reason for everything that goes on in my life and your life. God allowed this situation to happen so that Jesus could come and raise Lazarus from the dead, and to show the world that he is the True Messiah. Saints just a little word of encouragement just like Lazarus' sickness all because you go through something

or you get sick it doesn't mean that you committed a special sin or that God is displeased with us. Romans 8:1 says, "there is therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." God is producing a miracle within you for all the world to see. My mother said she had went to heaven twice since she was in the hospital, but God let her know that he isn't through with her yet on this side of Zion. The doctors said a few months ago that she gave them a scare during the surgery, but saints I don't know about you, but God has the final say on everything and she is back home today living her life. **You can't tell me that there is no God.**

6. Now if we read verses 5-7, we would think that after Jesus receiving word that his friend Lazarus was sick and that Lazarus is a friend that Jesus loved that Jesus would drop everything to go to Bethany to heal him. But after reading verse 6, that wasn't the case. A matter of fact Jesus stayed where he was for 2 more days before he and his disciples left. In this scripture, some people may say if Jesus really loved Lazarus he would have left immediately to go see him. **(Behind the ugliness of ministry)** Some people may have said if he really loved Lazarus, he would have at least sent his disciples to go see him until he got there. **(Behind the ugliness of ministry)**. I'm not being harsh saints, but my favorite saying is this, "An emergency on your part does not constitute an emergency on mine's." Saints you are not Superman or Superwoman and one day if you keep on trying to save and rescue everyone you will run yourself sick trying to save everyone from their problems. Yes, it's great to help, but your duty as a Christian is to introduce those people who have problems to the problem solver who is God. See saints in today's world some people have given up the faith because after they prayed they saw nothing happen. They felt as though there was no god because they feel as though their prayer wasn't answered. So I ask you my brothers and sisters, when trouble comes, do you grumble, complain, and blame God, or do you see your problems as opportunities to honor him? See I wish I had somebody in the house that knows that God's delays are not his denials. Church if our prayers are not immediately answered, then we should know that God is teaching us patience because once God answers our prayers it will be answered in a more marvelous way than we ever anticipated. See during this time Jesus was already doing ministry in another country and just couldn't leave the people stranded. Jesus and the disciples just came from Judea after Jesus was being threatened to be stoned so he had to be careful for his and the disciples safety. See, church, behind the ugliness in ministry are things you don't see or don't know because God knows that you can't handle it. See if the people knew that Jesus had a chance to be stoned they probably would have been in hiding because they wouldn't want to have the same fate happen to them because they were his followers. See Jesus' love for his friend in verse 8 surpassed all of the disciples' doubt about Jesus being stoned for going back into Judea. Saints God loves you so much that he will do anything for you so that you won't perish, but the only thing he requires is that you come to him.

7. See in verse 17, we see that Jesus arrived in Bethany 4 days later and found his friend Lazarus laid dead in the grave. Before Jesus arrived there he knew that Lazarus had died, but Jesus was setting the scene for a great miracle to take place. See I had to learn that in order for me to live and in order for me to grow, I had to learn to let certain relationships die. I had to stop answering the phone when certain people called because they always needed something and didn't pray for anything. They didn't call to check on how I or my family was doing. They said

they were going to visit my church and never did, but yet they wanted a donation or sought help from my church. I had to learn that behind the ugliness of ministry that some people want to use your kindness as a weakness because you are a Christian. They want to use you until they can't use you no more and then they head onto someone else.

8. In verse 21 of this text, Jesus didn't even have time to grieve before he got blamed for not being in their mind on time to heal Lazarus. But how many people in the house know that, **"he may not come when you want him, but he will be there right on time."** See saints, God doesn't operate on our time. For Isaiah 55:8 says, "For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD." Yes, in this text Martha had faith that Jesus could have saved her brother from death, but her faith was still imperfect. Her faith should have let her know that just believing in Jesus, that Lazarus could have been raised from the dead. All of the miracles that Martha saw Jesus perform should have told her that God can make the impossible possible and that nothing that happens in life does not happen without God's permission. I have learned and seen as a family man and pastor the miracles of God. It's funny how you can do 99 things right, but that 1 thing that you don't do for people they want to crucify you on that issue. You helped people get out of their mess and then the moment you can't get them out of another mess you get cursed out or talked about. See behind the ugliness of ministry these people didn't know that you had to take care of your mother while she was ill. Behind the ugliness of ministry people didn't know that on payday you had to rush to PSE&G to pay the bill before the lights went off in your own house. Behind the ugliness of ministry the people didn't know that you just came out of the doctor's office with a bad report and still believe in God for healing and that's why you are still pressing on. Sometimes people can be so selfish that they take away the wrong purpose of being a Christian. Yes we are to help one another, yes we are to love one another, but a part of being a Christian is learning how to trust God in all circumstances so that he can build a powerful ministry in you. Pastors, ministers, deacons, 1st ladies, mothers of the church and all of those who profess to be Christians all go through something even when we have a smile on our face, but the most powerful Christians are those who love the Lord and will endure to the end.

9. See in the 38th verse of this text Jesus was still grieving through the death of his friend and **the scripture does not say that anyone comforted him.** It's crazy and bizarre that sometimes if a leader grieves there is no one to comfort him or her. **(Behind the ugliness of ministry)** In verse 39 Jesus commanded the onlookers to remove the tomb from the grave. Now as you know when a Jewish person dies, they have a funeral ceremony within 24 hours. So now knowing that Lazarus was in the tomb for 4 days, you can imagine how badly his physical body smelled since the body could start to decompose. This was proof that Lazarus was dead.

10. But see what I liked about this miracle that was going to take place is that after the stone had been removed Jesus prayed and thank God for hearing him. See the reason why I like verses 41 & 42 because it shows that Jesus was speaking to God continually during this whole time before he even arrived at the tomb. Here we see that Jesus is thanking God for the miracle that is to come. Oh my brothers and my sisters before you go to the doctor's office, before you go to work, before you come to church, before you go to school, before you go anywhere if you

want to be blessed with blessings just start thanking God for the miracles that are to come. Thank God for his power, thank God for his glory, thank God for his majesty and you will receive more power than you have ever received before. Because God knows you and you know him. God knows that our lives are totally dependent on him. And see, just like Jesus we have the power to command mountains to move; to command diseases to cease; to command our houses to be in order.

11. See if we command our blessings in authority according to God's Will then we can boldly call out anything and it will come to life. How do I know? Because in verse 43 we see that Jesus specifically called out Lazarus' name to come forth. Some have believed that if Jesus didn't call out Lazarus specifically then all who were dead in the graves would come forth according to 1st Thessalonians 4:16. Saints aren't you glad that Jesus knows your name.

12. And church I wasn't there and you weren't there when Lazarus came out of the grave. I don't know whether he came out hobbling. I don't know if he ran out from the grave. I don't know if he came out on his hands and knees. I don't know if he came out floating, but I do know as the scripture reads in verse 44 that he came out from the grave alive. Jesus asked the onlookers to remove the grave clothes from him to remove all doubt that this was the same Lazarus that died.

13. See saints behind the ugliness of ministry is a blessing that eyes have not seen nor ears have heard.

SEE SAINTS EVEN THOUGH YOU MAY NOT SEE EVERYTHING THAT GOD IS DOING IN THIS CITY OR IN THIS MINISTRY, JUST KNOW THAT GOD IS PREPARING FOR SOMETHING GREATER FOR YOU IN THIS MINISTRY THAT WILL BLESS YOUR LIFE

OH I WISH THAT SOMEONE WILL UNDERSTAND THAT ALL THAT WHAT YOU GO THROUGH IN YOUR LIFE IS NOT JUST FOR YOU, BUT FOR YOU TO BLESS SOMEONE ELSE

DON'T BE LIKE MARTHA AND HAVE HALF-WAY FAITH, HAVE FULL FAITH IN GOD TO SEE YOU THROUGH.

SAINTS ARE YOU GLAD THAT YOU SERVE A GOD THAT CAN MAKE THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE? ARE YOU GLAD TO KNOW THAT YOU ALL YOU GO THROUGH IN MINISTRY IS ALL FOR GOD'S GLORY?

SAINTS WILL YOU JOIN WITH ME IN FAITH TO SAY THAT NO WEAPON FORMED ME SHALL PROSPER

I BELIEVE I GOT A WITNESS THAT KNOWS IT WILL NOT WORK

SAINTS I WANT TO ENCOURAGE YOU TO KEEP WORKING FOR THE LORD BECAUSE YOUR REWARD IS NEAR

NO MATTER IF YOUR CHILDREN FORSAKE YOU

NO MATTER IF YOUR FRIENDS FORSAKE YOU

NO MATTER IF YOUR FAMILY FORSAKE YOU

NO MATTER IF YOUR JOB DISRESPECTS YOU

NO MATTER IF THE BILL COLLECTORS HOUND YOU

NO MATTER IF THE WORLD IS AGAINST YOU

JUST KNOW THAT IF GOD IS FOR YOU, WHO CAN BE AGAINST YOU
SAINTS GOD LOVES YOU AND WANTS TO BLESS YOU
GOD WANTS YOU TO PERSEVERE THROUGH IT ALL
GOD WANTS YOU TO BE THE HEAD AND NOT THE TAIL
GOD WANTS YOU TO BE ABOVE AND NOT BELOW
AND CHURCH IF YOU BELIEVE IN HIM HE WILL MAKE YOUR LIFE BRAND NEW
THROUGH THE TEARS HE WILL DELIVER YOU
SO SAINTS WORK YOUR MINISTRY THROUGH THE UGLINESS
WORK YOUR MINISTRY THROUGH THE NAYSAYERS
WORK YOUR MINISTRY THROUGH LIFE'S DISAPPOINTMENTS
WORK YOUR MINISTRY EVEN WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE GIVING UP
SAINTS ENCOURAGE YOUR NEIGHBOR TO NEVER GIVE UP ON THE PROMISES ON GOD
DON'T GET TIRED, DON'T YOU GIVE UP, BECAUSE GOD'S GOT YOUR BACK



Rev. Dr. Craig R. Jackson, a.k.a. “Pastor J” is the Founder/Pastor of Agape Baptist Church in Newark, NJ. Pastor J is the husband of Shelia Jackson and they are the proud parents of five children Latricia, Devian, Brooks, Elisha, and Esaias. Through many trials and tribulations Pastor J has always had a heart for the community. Through his passion he established CJ Community Development Corporation (CJCDC). CJCDC is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization that was organized to address many of the community’s needs.

My motto is from the Bible: John 15:7 which says, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” It’s a Bible verse of strength and encouragement.

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