The Comeback

John 11:17-27

Rev. Brian Bill

March 26-27, 2016

🡪 **Transition from “Unchained”**

Are you in need of a comeback? I love those words…

*I was a captive till you set me free*

*I was an outcast and you accepted me*

*I was a dead man but you are the risen one*

*I’ve found mercy and a second chance*

*I’ve been unchained…like a prisoner that’s been set free!*

Have you ever met someone who always seems to have a good comeback line when you say something sarcastic? On a list of the “10 Best Comebacks,” Winston Churchill’s one-liners appear three different times.

One time the American socialite Nancy Astor was invited to a dinner party held by Churchill and became annoyed with him so she blurted out: *“Winston, if you were my husband, I’d put poison in your coffee.”* Unaffected by her sudden outburst, Churchill quickly replied with an unforgettable comeback: *“Nancy, if you were my wife I’d drink it!”*

We’re not going to talk about that kind of comeback today. Instead we want to focus on the kind of comeback that often follows a setback.

Everybody loves a good comeback story because they give us hope!

That’s why the *Rocky* movies are so fun to watch – well, maybe a couple of them but certainly not all 7!

Bethany Hamilton was just 13 years old when her left arm got bitten off by a shark while surfing. After a month of medical operations, she returned and learned how to surf with one arm. She’s made a pretty cool comeback!

I personally enjoyed the comeback that the Wisconsin Badgers made against Xavier a week ago when Bronson Koenig hit a three-pointer as time expired.

Or, how about that amazing half-court buzzer beater by Carson Frakes that sent Rockridge to the state finals! That comeback shot made ESPN and USA Today!

I read an article recently from the Huffington Post that began like this: *“Comebacks are possible; in fact, they happen all the time. Yet, if you have had a setback, a comeback may seem impossible to you…The challenge is how you can overcome your setback. How do you take a setback and make a comeback?”*

That question frames our topic today. *How do you take a setback and make a comeback?*

While these stories and lists of one-liners are amazing, I wasn’t able to find two of the most incredible comebacks ever. For some reason they’re left off all the lists – Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead and the comeback of Jesus Christ Himself from the grave.

Here’s the main idea today: *Because Christ came back from the dead He can turn your setback into a comeback.*

We’re going to focus our attention on John 11, where we learn about a man named Lazarus who was very sick. His two sisters, Mary and Martha, are very worried and so they send word to Jesus, hoping that He would come and heal their brother. The response of Jesus is jarring in verses 4-6: ***“But when Jesus heard it he said, ‘This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.”***

Instead of hurrying to help, Jesus purposely waited two more days. In the meantime, Lazarus dies and *then* Jesus arrives.

Decisions are very deliberate in this chapter as we see faith flourish in the midst of a mess. I’m reminded that this is the real world where lives are suddenly interrupted by the great enemy of death. There are five stages in Martha’s spiritual journey that we can apply to our lives so that Christ can turn our setbacks into a comeback.

**1. State your setback** (19). When Martha heard that her brother Lazarus had died, she was gripped with grief. Verse 19 tells us that many people came to comfort and console her and her sister ***“…in the loss of her brother.”*** The scene was one of weeping and wailing as hired mourners filled the air with loud shrieks and screams. Friend, if you’re upset today it’s important to let it out. Express what you’re feeling to God – He can handle it.

What setback has created blowback in your life?

* Have some of your relationships ruptured, leaving you lonely and abandoned?
* Are you struggling with some sort of sin that you can’t shake or an addiction that you can’t break?
* Are you overwhelmed at work…or wish you had work…or different kind of work?
* Are you stressed about school?
* Have you done something that has led to deep embarrasment and shame?
* Is debt causing deep discouragement?
* Do you just feel empty and aimless?
* Has someone close to you died and you feel gutted with grief?
* Do you just feel lost?

The first step is to state your setback. It’s good to own that you’re far away from God. Is your life spiraling downhill? Listen to how a young man describes what happened to him.

🡪 **Play Donte Video**

Do it now. It’s time to start making your comeback. It’s something that can be done but you must be willing to change.

*Because Christ came back from the dead He can turn your setback into a comeback.*

**2. Get close to Christ** (20). You have a choice to make. You can stay where you are or you can take a step toward the Savior. Verse 20 tells us about the decision Martha made. She could have stayed in the house like her sister Mary, or run the other way. Instead, ***“So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him…”*** Even before Jesus arrived inside the city limits, Martha moved toward Him. She wasn’t exactly sure what Jesus could do, but she knew she needed to get close to Him.

Wherever you are right now, would you take a step toward Jesus? Don’t stay where you are. Maybe you’re not really sure what Jesus can do but you’re open to Him. Or perhaps, like Donte, you came today because you were begged to come by a loved one. Whatever the case, can I encourage you to get close to Christ? Seek Him out. And, when you do, you’ll find what you’re looking for in Him. Jeremiah 29:13: ***“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”***

Now, when you move toward Christ, it doesn’t mean that you have to have everything answered or figured out. Some of you are waiting until you clean yourself up, change some habits, and get yourself ready before you get close to Christ. God wants you to come just as you are.

If you want a comeback, start by stating your setback. Second, get close to Christ. Third, tell Him your hurts.

**3. Tell Him your hurts** (21). When Martha got close to Jesus, she communicated her complaint directly to Him in verse 21: ***“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*** I suspect some of you have been asking *“If”* questions as well. *“If only I would have done this.” “If only so-and-so would not have done this to me.”*

These kinds of “If” questions are normal when we’re rocked by the crushing waves of circumstances that are beyond our control. We ask these questions because we somehow think that maybe if things had worked out a little differently, we wouldn’t be in the mess we’re in. Others of you may be blaming God. That’s precisely the implication Martha makes when she says, ***“Lord if YOU had been here, my brother would not have died.”***

It helps to know that Jesus can relate to us in our pain. In verse 33 after Mary registers a similar complaint to Jesus, we read these comforting words: ***“When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.”*** Just two verses later we come to the shortest verse in the Bible: ***“Jesus wept.”***

Friend, you are not alone in your agony. Jesus loves you more than you know. In John 11, we read in verse 3: ***“He whom you love is ill.”*** In verse 5 we see that ***“Jesus loved Martha and her sister.”*** In verse 36, after Jesus wept openly, people remark, ***“see how he loved him.”*** Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus sympathizes with our weaknesses.

*Because Christ came back from the dead He can turn your setback into a comeback.*

**4. Learn who the Lord is** (24). Notice what happens next. It’s not until Martha states her setback, gets close to Christ and then tells Him her hurts, that Jesus speaks. Don’t be afraid of being real with God. He can handle your honesty and absorb your attacks. And He’ll speak truth into your troubles once you communicate your complaints. In verse 23, Jesus replied, ***“Your brother will rise again.”***

Martha’s gives the correct Sunday School answer but it lacks any linkage to her life. It’s the religious response, but it has no relevancy to her. Listen to verse 24: ***“I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”***  She understands this in her head, but it hasn’t filtered down into her heart.

Does that describe you today? Do you have a cursory acquaintance with Christ? Do you know *about* Him, without actually *knowing* Him personally? Once we see who Jesus is, it’s not difficult to believe what He can do. Erwin Lutzer puts it this way: *“We do not need a Savior who can just ‘help’ us. We need a Savior who can resurrect us. We do not just need a Savior who helps us when life gets tough; we need a Savior who can help us when life ends.”*

I love how Jesus interjects Himself into Mary’s theoretical theology in verses 25-26: ***“I am the resurrection and the life.*** [literally, *“I, even I, and only I, am the resurrection and the life.”*] ***Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”***

Jesus is moving her from an abstract belief about something in the distant future to a personalized trust in Himself, who alone can raise the dead and give her a comeback. Jesus is in the present tense: ***“I Am,”*** not “I will be,” or, “I was.” He is, right now, the resurrection and the life. The resurrection is not just an event, but a Person. There is no hope for a comeback apart from Christ.

Jesus didn’t merely say that there is a resurrection. He claimed that HE IS the resurrection. The fact that He would rise from the dead was the guarantee that others would too. He doesn’t just give life; He is life. John 1:4: ***“In Him was life.”*** Jesus put it this way in John 14:19: ***“Because I live, you also will live.”***

*Because Christ came back from the dead He can turn your setback into a comeback.*

**5. Boldly believe and receive Jesus Christ** (27). Jesus’ question to Martha is the same question He’s asking you right now: ***“Do you believe this?”***  The word ***“believe”*** has much more than just an intellectual element to it. In the New Testament, *faith*, *trust*, and *belief* all come from the same general root word meaning *“to lean wholly upon,”* as when you lie down on a bed, resting your whole weight upon it. It’s the idea of being fully pursuaded, to rely on and to trust in.

Faith begins with *knowledge*, which is where the intellect is involved. Then it moves to the emotions where *convictions* are developed. Saving faith must then move to the will, where a *commitment* is made. True saving faith involves appropriating what Christ has done for us.

As I was percolating on this passage, I saw something that made me smile.

After declaring that He is the Resurrection and the Life, Jesus drives this doctrine into Martha’s life…and into ours.

1. He starts by saying**, *“Whoever believes in me, though He die; yet shall He live.”*** Whoever refers to all people, everywhere, in everyplace [put my arms out wide].
2. Next, he narrows it by saying, ***“And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”*** [bring hands closer together]
3. And then it becomes very personal as He looks intently at Martha and at you and says, ***“Do you believe this?”*** [put hands close together to frame one person]
4. I love Martha’s response in verse 27: ***“Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”*** Jesus is waiting to hear you say, *“Yes, Lord I believe.”* Have you ever said that to Him?

When Martha said *“yes”* to Jesus she wasn’t just nodding her head or passively having some positive thoughts about Him. She was making a strong affirmation. She was saying, *“Yes and more also, truly, certainly, altogether.”* Are you ready to boldly believe and receive what Jesus has done for you?

*Because Christ came back from the dead He can turn your setback into a comeback.*

The word ***“believe”*** is found four more times in this chapter.

* The reason Jesus purposely waited until after Lazarus died before He came is found in verse 15: ***“And for your sake I am glad I was not there so that you may believe.”*** Likewise, Jesus allows us to go through grief so we can exercise belief!
* God does things for His own glory as seen in verse 40: ***“Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”***
* In verse 42, we learn why Jesus prayed aloud to His Father, ***“that they may believe that you sent me.”***
* And, the result of Lazarus coming back to life was that many experienced the miracle of new life according to verse 45: ***“Many of the Jews therefore…believed in Him.”***

Ron Hutchcraft puts it like this: *“Jesus walked out of the grave so He could walk into your life.”* At what stage are you stuck in your spiritual journey? Because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, you can have a fresh start right now and He can give you the power to live life as it’s meant to be lived.

1. Start by stating your setback.
2. Get close to Christ.
3. Tell Him about all your hurts.
4. Learn who the Lord is.
5. Boldly believe and receive Jesus Christ.

In verse 43, Jesus called out in a loud voice to Lazarus, who had been dead and decomposing for 4 days: ***“Lazarus, come out!”***  Jesus called him by name and He’s calling your name right now. He wants you to come out so He can give you a comeback!

I like what Louie Giglio writes: *“Jesus’ ultimate comeback trumps all our comebacks, but it also makes it possible in a general sense for us to come back from anything, from anywhere, at any time.”*

Watch and listen how Jesus Christ gave a comeback to a woman named Joanie.

🡪 **Play Joanie video**

It’s pretty incredible how God gives comebacks to those who have experienced setbacks. Joanie has boldly believed and received salvation…and so can you.

Paul Tripp summarizes it well: *“If Jesus defeated death, and the empty tomb tells us he did, then there is no dark thing in your heart that he is not also able to defeat.”*

Let’s see if I can pull it all together…

*No matter your setback, you can make a comeback.*

*Because the stone was rolled back, He now has your back.*

*You can pushback or you can giveback your life to Him.*

*Because Christ came back from the dead He can turn your setback into a comeback.*

The Bible says that we’re all dead in our sins. To turn our lives around and make us spiritually alive is as great a miracle as raising Lazarus from the dead.

You’ve not gone too far or done too much to be disqualified from a comeback. Jesus died as your substitute on the cross, paying the price for all your sins. And He is the resurrection that brings life, so that when you die, yet shall you live. But you must boldly believe and receive Him as your Savior and Lord right here and right now. You can demonstrate your belief by praying something like this.

## Invitation Prayer: *“Lord Jesus, for too long I’ve kept you out of my life. I admit my biggest setback is that is that I am a sinner and that I cannot save myself. I own my hurts and my sins and I repent by changing my mind about the way I’ve been living. I don’t want to stay where I am any longer and so I’m choosing to get closer to you and to learn more about you. By faith I boldy believe and receive your gift of salvation. With all my heart I believe you are the Son of God who died on the cross for my sins and as the resurrection and the life, you rose from the dead on the third day. Thank you for bearing my sins and giving me the gift of eternal life. I surrender to you as my Savior and Lord, my Forgiver and Leader. I want to be born again. Make me into the person you want me to be. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”*

If you prayed that prayer and meant it, would you have the courage to raise your hand so we can rejoice with you?

Could you also take out your Connection Card and check the box that describes the decision you made? There’s a place to indicate that you received Christ for the first time or if you rededicated your life to Him. If you want to explore baptism or membership you can let us know that as well.

We’re going to take an offering now and we’d like you to put your card in the offering plate. And remember, if you’re our guest we don’t expect you to participate in this part of our service.

The band is going to come back up and lead us in a closing song. As the ushers come forward, let’s pray.

**Offering Prayer**

**Closing Song – Forever**

We’d love for you to come back next weekend. Our topic will be, “Withered Lives Restored.” We’d love to have you come back!

Please stop by the table in the lobby and pick up a gift bag on your way out [hold up].

We began our service today by singing, “He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!” That’s quite a comeback story!

There’s a tradition that takes place all around the world this weekend and we’re going to join thousands of churches by participating in it. I will say, “He is Risen!” and you can respond with, “He is Risen Indeed!”

ME: He is Risen!

ALL: *He is Risen Indeed!*