

The Doctrine of Total Inability

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[0 : 00] Music We've been discussing some very deep, very important and interrelated doctrines.

! These topics include God's sovereign decrees, God's sovereign election, God's sovereign predestination. And these are all based on something that is very important and something we must not overlook.

God is the one who saves us. God is the one who regenerates us. God is the one that calls us. God is the one that justifies us. God is the one that sanctifies us. And we can keep going with that list. Why does God do all that for us? Well, when you boil it all down, because we are unable to do it for ourselves.

Try as we might, or at least we think we're trying, we can't do it. And because this is true, we come tonight to perhaps, for right now, the most important doctrine in this line of doctrines that leads us to salvation.

[1 : 35] And it's probably not one that you've read about in some of your commentaries or systematic theologies. But it is called the doctrine of absolute inability.

I once heard Dr. MacArthur take credit for naming this doctrine. He did so, it was not done in an egotistical manner.

He based it on the fact that he'd never heard it referred to that. Well, I assumed, you know, I gave him credit for years. And then one day I was reading some old reform and old Puritan books of the 16th and 17th centuries and discovered references to the doctrine of inability.

And I started to send those to John, but I thought, no, I'll let sleeping dogs lie. So as a doctrine, this doctrine has really been around a long time. It just isn't often referred to as the doctrine of total inability.

We're going to spend some time in John 11. I'll be referencing those verses. I may not be reading them verbatim, but we know the story there.

[2 : 53] Because it is in this great chapter that we find the astonishing picture. And there's no other way to put it.

The absolute astonishing snapshot, if you will, of Christ raising a man from the dead.

Think about that. Think about that, guys. We got cemeteries all over this town, all over this county. There's 87 Indian burial sites in Washington County.

Edgar Wesson, the county historian now dead himself, found them all. Jesus raised a man from the dead.

Now, we remember this. It was the raising of Lazarus from the grave. Lazarus was a friend of Jesus.

[3 : 58] Close friend. Perhaps his closest during his human walk. And he had two sisters named Mary and Martha. The Lord spent many restful hours at their home, weary from ministry.

Remember, he was a man. He was a human. He got tired. Basically, he went to the home of Lazarus and Mary and Martha and got his batteries recharged by visiting in their home and receiving their hospitality, which must have surely included some home-cooked meals.

Well, we discover in this chapter that Lazarus had become very ill. And the sisters were very concerned to the point that they arranged for a messenger to find Jesus and to tell him that his dear friend Lazarus was sick.

And I think we can conclude from their actions that they were worried about whether he was going to make it or not. Kind of the way Diane and I felt the last couple weeks. Jesus told those around him when he got the message, don't worry, this sickness is not unto death, but was divinely decreed by God that God the Father and God the Son would be glorified by his sickness.

Now, Jesus loved Lazarus and his two sisters, but upon hearing of his friend's condition, he did something kind of amazing. He delayed his departure.

[5 : 46] He hung around a couple days. And the disciples were amazed. I'm sure they were over in the corner talking about it and whispering as if he couldn't discern what they were saying.

But after a couple of days, the Lord then departed with his men to go check on Lazarus. He arrived and discovered that Lazarus had already been dead for four days.

The sisters were surrounded by local citizens, no doubt friends, some family members.

There were probably some professional mourners as well, and that's a very Middle Eastern thing to this day. If they think you don't have enough mourners, they'll hire some people, and boy, they'll get into it.

And I wouldn't dare do it, but those women can do something with their tongue. You may have seen that on documentaries or whatever. It's pretty amazing. I wouldn't even pretend. So you can picture the scene of wailing and tears, probably some fainting.

[7 : 01] You'd probably get a little extra money if you fainted. Martha met the Lord and issued to him an indictment. She told him that if he had been there, her brother would still be alive.

Now, it was quite obvious that Martha had great belief in the power of Jesus to heal, but as we will see, she had no confidence in his power to resurrect a dead person.

Jesus told Martha, said, your brother will rise again. And she confirmed, and she said, I know that. She declared that her belief that Lazarus would rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Come out of that grave.

At that point, Jesus gave her a declaration that continues to reverberate down through history.

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

[8 : 19] Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. I've used that passage in more than just a couple of funerals, including your dad's.

This rumor that Ralph Dersham died, you've got to be kidding me. Ralph was more alive than anyone sitting in that church that day. A little later, the other sister, Mary, shows up, and she had a very similar exchange.

So Jesus asked Mary and those with her to show him the tomb of Lazarus. And they took him. And it was at this point that we have the shortest verse in all the Bible.

It says, Jesus wept. Now, we're not going to focus tonight on why Jesus wept. It's something to think about. I mean, you're getting ready to raise him from the dead.

There's been books written on that and sermons preached. Suffice it to say that when we come to the tomb of a loved one, it's okay to weep.

[9 : 35] When you're at the funeral of a loved one, close friend, whatever, you can weep. Jesus did. We're to be like him.

And the Lord Jesus wept. And when he arrived at the tomb, he asked those standing around him, he says, well, remove the stone there blocking the entrance.

Now Martha is horrified. She knows there's going to be a tremendous stench that of a decomposing body.

I would have been horrified because I'm very familiar with that. He's been in there four days.

He wasn't embalmed. As we know, like the Egyptians even knew, they put some stuff on him and put him in there. But in obedience, those around remove the stone.

[10 : 45] And then Jesus offered a prayer to the Father. He says, Father, I thank you that you've heard me. I knew that you always hear me.

But I said this on account of the people standing around that they may believe that you sent me.

And if I had thought about it, I would have got the little segment on video in Franco Zeffirelli's film Jesus of Nazareth and we could have played that.

It takes about 40 seconds at most. Because next, Jesus cries out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. Come forth. Does this strike you and perhaps me as just a bit unusual?

Jesus gave a command to a dead man. I want you to think about that. This guy's been dead for four days.

This isn't done every day. I've been around a lot of dead people. Pastors conduct funerals. We've all stood around the casket of a loved one.

[12:04] We don't normally give a command to a dead person. Pastor, have you ever done that? I might say, here is our dear brother and he knew the Lord and we will see him again.

I remember attending a funeral for a guy that was a reprobate and Ed Saucier, former pastor, I said, Ed, what are you going to say? He said, oh, I'll handle it. And when it came time he said, if Horace could talk to you, he'd tell you, you need Jesus.

That's how he had handled it. But we don't normally give commands to dead people. But if I were to go to a funeral and command a corpse to come forth, I'm going to come off as probably a little mentally unbalanced.

Or the family's going to kick me out. Or if I did like the ultra charismatics and say, well, you didn't have enough faith or he would have. See, here's the thing.

Dead men can't hear. Dead men can't think. Dead men can't respond.

[13:26] Have you ever considered the definition of what it means to be dead? Being dead is the absolute inability to do anything.

You can't do anything. You can't even breathe. You can't ask someone to turn you over. You can't ask anyone to give you CPR. They are. It's the inability to do anything.

Dead men can't talk. He can't do anything to improve his situation and particularly can't do anything to bring himself back to the status of a living being.

A dead man cannot respond to any stimulus. nothing he can do. But then we read these words in John 11.

When Jesus had said these things he cried out with a loud voice Lazarus come out the man who died came out his hands and feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped with a cloth and Jesus said to them unbind him and let him go.

[14:48] I'm not sure I would have been hanging around. I might have been hooking him. Do we really I mean we've we've read that section a thousand times.

Everyone in here. Do we realize what's happening here? Lazarus a dead man did exactly what Jesus commanded him to do.

And to put it mildly Lazarus did what was impossible. If Lazarus had died at Mayo Clinic they wouldn't have been any good to him.

They wouldn't have been any good to him. A dead man can't do any of those things unless the creator commands him to do them.

So how did Lazarus do all of this? And the answer is both simple and profound. Christ gave him the ability to do it.

[16:05] Put it another way Jesus Christ did it for him. Christ gave Lazarus the ability to respond the way he did.

And I would imagine from a biological standpoint a lot happened. I mean blood's now coursing through his veins and the brain cells that were deteriorating and now they're back and they're better than they ever have been and we can go on and on on that.

But Christ gave him the ability to hear the command and obey the command. Now where am I heading with all this?

This is not a picture of a dead man coming back to life. I know it sounds like it is. This is a picture of salvation.

This is a portrait of Lazarus salvation and yours and yours and yours and yours and yours and mine. This is salvation guys. That's what this is about.

[17:13] Does that give you goosebumps? It should. If you don't have them I got some extra ones up here. The gospel commands dead men to rise.

The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is a command for dead men to rise. Dead men are commanded to believe.

Dead men are commanded to understand truth. Dead men are commanded to repent of their sins. The gospel of Christ commands dead people to do exactly what they are not capable of doing.

So in John 11 we have a description of Lazarus. But in Ephesians chapter 2 we see a description not of Lazarus but of everybody.

And the first three words in that chapter 2 of Ephesians says you were dead. dead. Who's the Holy Spirit talking to?

[18:30] Everyone will ever believe. Everyone will ever be saved. Every believer in this room you were dead.

God speaks to every one of us there. At one time every human on earth was dead. Most still are. I read Douglas Wilson some of you may not be familiar with that name I've read several of his things. He's a pastor in Idaho in Moscow Idaho. He says this we live in a desolate graveyard. The planet earth is a desolate graveyard. And most people are the walking dead. They're walking around dead.

They don't know they're dead. We're talking about spiritually obviously. But let's read on in Ephesians here and try to grasp what this means.

[19 : 41] Chapter 2 verse 1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. Following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit is now at work that is now at work and the sons of disobedience among whom we all lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

We were all dead. At one time we were dead to God. We were dead to spiritual reality and we were dead to truth.

And that all being true, and it is, mankind has a tremendous problem. See, our problem is not a lack of self-esteem.

You've got preachers that write books on self-esteem. The new reformation is a reformation of self-esteem. Our problem is not that people are out of harmony with their creator.

the problem is with lost mankind is that they are absolutely dead. There's no spark in there.

[21 : 12] There's no spark of divinity. There's no spark of curiosity. Because people are dead, they cannot relate to God as a person, as a savior, as the Lord of the universe, or to God's truth.

sin has killed the human race and that began in Genesis chapter 3, which we've looked at at some length.

And it continues down to this very day. The Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death. Now you will probably all remember that Jesus had a conversation with a would-be disciple, I believe it was Matthew 8, and rather than join with Jesus, the man said, well, first let me go home and bury my father.

And Jesus said, hey, let the dead bury the dead. Jesus was declaring that everyone not in his kingdom were already dead.

They were already dead. Here's another important point. dead men cannot respond to God because they're dead.

[22 : 31] They have no capacity to make such a response. That is not to say that lost men and women are incapable of doing human good.

They are. And many such actions are on record. But in the spiritual world, such men can do nothing spiritually positive because they are spiritually dead.

Spiritually dead men can do nothing to please God. To please God, you must be spiritually alive.

And to please God, it must be done in the name of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what pleases God the Father. the lost sinner is incapable of doing good and is caught up totally with the world, the flesh, and the devil as a total.

He cannot live outside of that. He is trapped in that world and neither can nor desires even to escape. He didn't know there's an escape.

[23 : 39] Back in Ephesians chapter 2, we see dead men and then we see the Spirit of God as he begins to speak of saved people in that same chapter but he doesn't say and one day you came to your senses.

You were dead but thank God you came to your senses. He doesn't say one day you were dead and trespassed to sin but you got led to pray a prayer and that got God's attention.

Instead the Holy Spirit makes this essential declaration and I love this every time I read it in scripture. It's in there a lot. He says but God you're dead but God God wow wow Ephesians chapter 2 verses 4 to 6 but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead he's talking to you guys he's talking to me he's talking to us even when you were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ who made us alive God did he made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ

Jesus. do we understand that was all God's work and it has to be all his work because the recipients of that grace a moment earlier were dead and now suddenly the light bulbs come on

they've been made alive people often enter objection to this point and say but I still have to believe don't I I still have to have faith don't I well absolutely you do it's essential God takes care of that in verse 8 for by grace you have been saved through faith that's the word believe pastuo you've been saved by grace you've been saved through faith through the ability to believe and that ability to believe is not your own doing it is the gift of God he even gives us the gift of belief of faith this is a pretty good system we're under by the way

I wouldn't want to be under another one even the faith by which we believe has been given to us by a gracious God we did not conjure up our faith on our own and then God rewarded us with eternal life God is not sitting in heaven next to the sun and they're wringing their hands saying isn't anybody going to get saved today just like the Laodicean church you know I love that when that's corrected that passage in there Jesus is standing at the door he can kick the door off the hinge he can rip that door door is not stopping Jesus listen to how Peter commented on this faith a faith received or a faith obtained 2 Peter 1 1 Simon Peter a servant and apostle of Jesus

[27 : 39] Christ to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours so they obtained a faith they didn't conjure it up or did they obtain it by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ he gave it to them he gave it to them so we see the father the son and the spirit at work in this in the salvation we have obtained a faith equal with Peter's equal with Paul's righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ here Peter acknowledges this faith to believe came from God as a divine gift listen to the Philippians in chapter 1 verse 29 for if you go to 39 you're too far 29 for it has been granted to you for the sake of

Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake the ability to come alive and believe in Christ has to be granted by God it has been granted to you you didn't work for it you didn't earn it you didn't deserve it you were granted it for the sake of Christ and God says I've not given you the ability to believe and will give you the ability to suffer at the same time the ability to come alive and believe in Christ has to be granted by God dead people can't believe it's the doctrine of total inability when Peter and John healed a man in Acts chapter 3 they declared that the man's faith healed him and he obtained that faith from and through Christ Jesus his faith to believe in Christ had to come from Christ maybe we should all look at Philippians 1 6 in a new light and I am sure of this Paul says that he that's God he's talking about he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ who began the work God did who's going to complete the work God is wasn't me I didn't begin any good work it wasn't you it was God and God will complete it listen to what Paul says to the good people at Corinth 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 30 and because of God you are in Christ Jesus wow

I'm most amazed when I use all these passages with my good friends from some Arminian churches and they're good people they love the Lord but they'll say well I don't believe that means that what does it mean that I don't know I'll get back to you on that they never do he told us in verse 29 humans have no right to boast in themselves in verse 31 he says if you're going to boast and make sure you boast in the Lord dead men don't obey dead men don't respond dead men don't do anything because they can't remember dead men are incapable of doing anything that is why it's called the doctrine of inability Ephesians chapter 4 tells us that the unsaved are alienated from the life of God in Colossians 2 13 we read this and you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh

God made alive I don't know how many times Paul and Peter have to say this I really don't God is the one that made us alive our original parents remember that chart we looked at last time our original parents were born alive Adam and Eve were alive in every sense of the word spiritually alive their soul was alive their body was alive and they were living a spiritual life with God and I told you last time that's the second person of the trinity a theophany or Christophany pre pre incarnate appearance of Christ and he's taking walks with them in the cool of the evening how cool would that be

[32 : 53] I didn't mean a pun on that how nice would that be when I get home I've got to take my bird figures down and put corn out for the deer! Hon Jesus and I are going to put the corn out tonight!

Would that be Lord I'll carry that while you just do the talking! Let me do the listening! Adam and Eve and really Adam before Eve was given one prohibition not to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden and the Lord said the day you eat from that tree you will die and you know how many people I mean they got the warning they got the warning that the day they ate they would die and

one day they ate and you know how many people even sermons have been preached but they didn't die I heard one last week on the radio they didn't die God he had another plan they died they were dead as mackreels laying on the bottom of the Pacific Ocean and the Mariana Strait they died spiritually they died spiritually it was a spiritual death we would have evidence of I'm losing my voice we even have evidence of how strong their death was spiritually what's the first thing they did we got to get out of this guy we got to get away from him we got to hide from God my gosh what the evil look at is we're naked I didn't know we didn't have any clothes on and they went and hid themselves from God and then of course they blamed each other for the sin the woman you gave me and then they tried to blame the serpent and what they succeeded in doing is plunging the human race into spiritual death everything that followed them was born spiritually dead and where do we begin Cain we know his story don't we

Paul talks about a lot of this in Romans chapter 5 listen chapter 5 verse 12 just as sin came into the world through one man that's Adam and death through sin there's that word and so death spread to all men because all sin but when you skip down a few verses we can get to the right page starting around verse 15 but the free gift is not like the trespass for if many died through one man's trespass much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many and the free gift is not like the result of the one man's sin for the judgment following one one trespass brought condemnation but the free gift following many trespasses probably a room full of them brought justification for if because of one man's trespass death reigned through that one man much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man

Jesus Christ therefore as one trespass led to condemnation condemnation for all men so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men for as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners all in Adam so by the one man's obedience many will be made righteous and that's Christ now the law came to increase the trespass but where sin increased grace abounded all the more so that as sin reigned in death grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord guys we could spend the rest of our lives on just that section of scripture it would be very easy to do there are a lot of people and some are very good friends of mine that reject any concept of divine election we've been through all that it's unfair they want to make an argument for free will and we've already dealt with that in here it died in the garden as Adam and Eve knew it but if salvation is dependent upon dead men then by what power does the dead man rise if we've got to do something to get ourselves saved what power do we have inside ourselves apart from the spirit of God apart from the father and son that will raise us to newness of life if God does not make a man willing and able to believe where then does that power come from and let me just say this as I'm getting ready to close it does not come from dead men it doesn't come from dead men my friends that my friends that reject election believe that deep down there is something inside men that can make themselves willing to come to Christ that Jesus is standing there at the door wringing his hands hoping something happens if it doesn't happen today maybe it will happen tomorrow they might believe that but they cannot support that with scripture man is not disabled man is not sick man is not wounded man is not injured man is dead if he's injured give him a band-aid do mouth-to-mouth do CPR but he's dead well this is where we are going to leave it for tonight and let me just put a little plug in we got some exciting times ahead for us in this classroom and I mean that with all sincerity because next time we're going to start to explore how dead men come back to life you