

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to week seven in our summer series called Underdog. I looked up the word “underdog” in a few online dictionaries this week, and here’s what I found:
1. “A participant in a fight, conflict, or game who is not expected to win.” (Wikipedia)
 2. “A competitor thought to have little chance of winning a fight or a contest.”
 3. Synonyms include “long shot, dark horse, little guy, David; downtrodden, victim, and loser.”
- B. The word underdog originated in the late 1800’s. It referred to the dog that lost a dogfight. The underdog.
- C. I want you to know a few things about us at Neighborhood Church. Every time I stand up here, I am deeply aware of something. I am aware that for so many people sitting in our five services week after week, that life is beating you up. You drag yourself to church wounded. You clean yourself up and put on your happy face, and you walk in the door smiling and everything looks great on the outside.
- D. But on the inside, you’re dying. You’re frightened. You’re confused. You are angry. And anybody who really knows your situation thinks you don’t have a snowball’s chance in hell to come out on top of the mess you’re in.
- E. Underdog.
- F. Then you come to church, and you want to hear a word from the Lord. Does He see? Does He know? Does He care? Does He understand? Will He hear you? And will He come in and rescue your situation?
- G. Every time I stand in front of you, I want you to know that I am painfully aware of the burdens you bear.
- H. Every week, our staff gets a list of prayer requests from our congregation. These requests come from the cards you fill out and drop in the offering basket. Or you call your prayer request in—we get those prayer requests. The list is long. And it is difficult. And it is heavy.
- I. And I don’t want today’s message to be a downer, or anything like that. And I don’t want to paint us as a bunch of victims. Or like Eeyore on Winnie the Pooh. We’re not. We are the people of God—and we stand in the triumphant victory of Jesus Christ.
1. *No weapon formed against me shall prosper (Isa 54:17).*
 2. *Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident (Psalms 27:3, NKJV).*
- J. Life may be hard, and we may be underdogs, but we are the people of God, and victory is assured. We are Easter people in a Good Friday world.
- K. On Good Friday Jesus died. The Romans nailed Him to the Cross. The religious establishment washed their hands of Him. The devil smiled and the demons cheered. And the people of God didn’t know what to think. They were crushed. Heartbroken. Devastated.
- L. Why God, did You let Him die? Why did You raise our hopes in Jesus and then dash them to the ground on Good Friday?
- M. Why is my loved one dying? Why is my money gone? Why did my marriage fall apart? Why did I commit my same dumb sin again—the one I swore I would never do again—why did I fall into that snare again? Why do people I care about turn against me or leave me? Why is life so hard?
- N. Why?
- O. Listen, here’s something I want you to know.
- P. If you are a saved, born again, redeemed, adopted, forgiven child of God—and if you feel like you’re slogging through Good Friday—please understand this one truth: Good Friday is only God’s set up for Easter Sunday.
- Q. And that’s why when we come to church; I tell our worship leaders that our main tone in worship is celebration. We don’t need to feel like a funeral service, because we believe in the Resurrection. The literal resurrection of Jesus from the grave, as well as the emotional and spiritual resurrection of YOU and ME from whatever grave we are in now. I tell our worship leaders to not beat people up—you get that six days a week. We do not come to church to get beat up. I tell our worship leaders to lift up our hearts and our spirits.
- R. I want us to be happy; to sing and clap and cut loose—even if just for a little while, to feel the joy of the Lord.
- S. Life is hard, but Jesus is bigger than the hard stuff.
- T. And in Jesus, the hard stuff is temporary. Let’s see:

II. *1 A man named Lazarus was sick. He lived in Bethany with his sisters, Mary and Martha. 2 This is the Mary who poured the expensive perfume on the Lord’s feet and wiped them with her hair. Her brother, Lazarus, was sick. 3 So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, “Lord, the one you love is very sick” (John 11:1-3, NLT).*

- A. I want to make a few really important observations here.
- B. The first one is that Jesus loves Lazarus. They are best friends. In fact, the whole family—Mary, Martha, and Lazarus—are best friends with Jesus.
- C. And look what happens. Lazarus becomes very, very sick.
- D. What does that tell you?
- E. It tells you that being tight with Jesus does not exempt you from the cares and trials of life. Write it down.
- F. You can be doing everything right, and still have the rug pulled out from under you. Why? Because we live in a fallen world. The rain falls on the just and the unjust. And trials fall on the just and the unjust too.
- G. Sometimes you suffer, and you brought it on yourself. But other times you suffer and there’s no good reason why.
- H. We believe in this thing called the Fall—when sin galloped into the world, suffering and death were riding on its back.
- I. So here, one of Jesus’ best friends is very sick. Jesus hears about it. What happens?

III. 4 But when Jesus heard about it he said, "Lazarus's sickness will not end in death. No, it is for the glory of God. I, the Son of God, will receive glory from this." 5 Although Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, 6 he stayed where he was for the next two days and did not go to them (John 11:4-6, NLT).

- A. This stinks, doesn't it?
- B. Jesus does nothing for two whole days. For two whole days, His friend grows weaker and weaker. For two whole days, His friend runs a fever, and feels miserable, and waits, and suffers. And for two whole days, the rest of the family wonders where Jesus is.
- C. Are we special to Him?
- D. Doesn't He care about us?
- E. Some of you today are in that waiting period. You've sent the message to Jesus—JESUS, WE ARE DYING HERE. We are in trouble. We need You. Come urgently. HURRY.
- F. And for two whole days, or months, or years; He does absolutely nothing that you can see.
- G. This is the single hardest part of following Jesus, isn't it? Waiting for His timing. Holding onto your faith in the in-between times. Wondering why He hasn't fixed your problem. You're dying, and He's absent.
- H. And the longer He waits, the deeper you slip into your underdog status.
- I. Why does Jesus wait?
- J. He says why, in two parts.

IV. 7 Finally after two days, he said to his disciples, "Let's go to Judea again." 8 But his disciples objected. "Teacher," they said, "only a few days ago the Jewish leaders in Judea were trying to kill you. Are you going there again?" 9 Jesus replied, "There are twelve hours of daylight every day. As long as it is light, people can walk safely. They can see because they have the light of this world. 10 Only at night is there danger of stumbling because there is no light" (John 11:7-10, NLT).

- A. This is one of those Jesus statements that make me scratch my head. What the heck does He mean?
- B. I want to lay it out in three principles, and you might want to write these down, because they are super important. If you want to survive and even thrive during your underdog season, you need these three truths hardwired into your spiritual circuitry.
 1. If you walk with God, you are indestructible till your work on earth is finished.
 - a) That's what the twelve hours of daylight is all about. The Jews divided the day into 12 hours of daylight, and 12 hours of night.
 - b) The span of a day is measured. It is predetermined. It has an allotted time. The night does not come until the clock has ticked off each of the hours assigned to the day.
 - c) Jesus said, "Let's go to Judea."
 - d) The disciples reminded Him that last time they were in Judea, the religious leaders tried to KILL JESUS.
 - e) Jesus reminds them that His clock has not yet ticked down to zero. He has not reached the end of His journey. Therefore, He is not worried about a premature death. His face is turned toward God, and He is indestructible before His work on earth is finished.
 - f) In this whole thing, Jesus is confronting the timidity and unbelief of His disciples.
 - g) Can you make the sun set one hour early?
 - h) Then, while you walk with God, you can't shorten your time on earth by an hour either. He knows what He's doing and His timing is perfect.
 - i) You are indestructible until your time on earth is done.
 2. It is impossible to fall while you are walking with God.
 - a) Jesus says, "As long as it is light, people can walk safely. They can see because they have the light of this world."
 - b) If the light is shining, you don't trip because you see what's coming your way.
 - c) The spiritual application is simple. It is impossible to fall while you are walking with God.

(1) 23 The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way. 24 Though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the LORD upholds him with His hand (Psalms 37:23, 24, NKJV).
 - d) This is where I want to get really personal with you. Are you walking with God? Is your life permanently linked with the Creator of the Stars? Do you have Jesus?
 - e) You might have come today without knowing for sure that you have Jesus.
 - f) There is a dividing line in every person's life. There is the time before you receive Jesus, and the time after you receive Jesus. Until you receive Jesus, you are messed up with God. You are in the darkness, the Bible says. But after you receive Jesus, you walk in the light. You walk with God.
 - g) Maybe you've never received Jesus. You came to church for something way more practical—help with money, or help with your family, or help with your love life, or help with your sadness and depression.
 - h) That's awesome. But here's the truth. The ultimate solution to your sadness and depression and love life and money and family and every other struggle starts with being saved. You must be born again, Jesus said.

- i) That is my invitation to you today. At the end of our service, I'm going to give you a chance to receive Jesus as your Savior if you have never done that before. No pressure. No manipulation. No weirdness. Just an opportunity for you to make the single most important decision you can ever make in your whole life.
 - j) Because if you're not walking with God, you're in danger. That's what v. 10 means: *10 Only at night is there danger of stumbling because there is no light (John 11:7-10, NLT).*
 - k) But if you are walking with God, you might be down, but you're never out.
 - l) The disciples still don't get it. And that will give us our third key principle:
- v. *11 Then He said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but now I will go and wake him up." 12 The disciples said, "Lord, if he is sleeping, that means he is getting better!" 13 They thought Jesus meant Lazarus was having a good night's rest, but Jesus meant Lazarus had died. 14 Then He told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 And for your sake, I am glad I wasn't there, because this will give you another opportunity to believe in me. Come, let's go see him." 16 Thomas, nicknamed the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let's go, too—and die with Jesus." (John 11:11-16, NLT).*
- A. I like Thomas. I think I'm a lot like him. Are you? Eeyore. Let's go with him and all die too.
 - B. Life is hard, and then you die.
 - C. Thomas gave up on God. Thomas ignored the encouragement Jesus just gave him. Thomas made everything worse than it had to be. He was bitter. He was resigned to a miserable, purposeless death that he didn't understand.
 - D. Jesus was just the opposite. He moved toward the grave of Lazarus, and He moved toward His own grave, with a sense of purpose. He had a mission. And He was going to keep on following God's plan right until the end.
 - E. The two were polar opposites.
 - F. So here's the third big truth you need as an underdog, and comes from our buddy Thomas.
 - 1. (3) You will move through dark times either with a sense of mission, serving God till the end (Jesus) or with a sense of bitterness, giving up on God before the end (Thomas).
 - G. You've got to get to this point when you are an underdog: **DON'T DIE BEFORE YOU DIE.**
 - H. As long as you are breathing, there's hope. Do you know why? Because God is bigger than death. And bigger than divorce. And bigger than bankruptcy or foreclosure or unemployment or addiction or depression or illness. God is bigger than all the dark forces that break your heart. He is the Lord of what breaks your heart, and in His own time, He will prove it.
 - I. Do you know Him? Do you have Him in your life? Have you made peace with God through Jesus? You can today, in just a couple more minutes. You be ready.
 - 1. Jesus knew when He headed toward Lazarus; He was heading toward His own death. But He didn't shrink away. Why not?
 - 2. Because His death meant our life. We were dead in sins, the Bible says. Messed up and broken down. We were alienated from God, the Bible says, and we could not reach Him.
 - 3. But God loved us and wanted to end the alienation. He wanted to create reconciliation. But He had to take care of our sins first.
 - 4. So God sent Jesus to be the Savior of the World. He lived a perfect life and died a horrible death. In that death, God poured out on Him your dark stuff, your sins, your failures, your lostness. God reached into you long before you were ever born, and God took away your sins and transferred them to Christ, hanging on the Cross.
 - 5. The Bible says that when Jesus was on the Cross, though it was noon, it became as black as night. Why? Because the sin of the world was being poured out on Christ. He absorbed it all.
 - 6. Every lie, every deception, every failure; God took it out of you, and transferred it to Christ.
 - 7. And then God punished Him. God condemned Him. God executed Him for what you had done. God punished Christ for your sins instead of punishing you.
 - 8. He was your substitute; your sacrifice, your Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world.
 - 9. Christ died for your sin, to bring you to God.
 - 10. That's how much Jesus loved you. And even though going to Lazarus would only bring Him closer to His death, He did it. He did it for you.
 - J. Jesus comes to town and finds Martha, the sister of the dead guy. Here's what happens.
- VI. *20 When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. But Mary stayed at home. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask." 23 Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 "Yes," Martha said, "when everyone else rises, on resurrection day." 25 Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in Me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again. 26 They are given eternal life for believing in Me and will never perish. Do you believe this, Martha?" 27 "Yes, Lord," she told him. "I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God" (John 11:20-27, NLT).*
- A. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life."
 - B. Jesus does not save people who improve themselves first. He does not require you to quit your sins. He does not require you to put forth effort, to strive to be holy, to pay a price, or to give Him anything at all.
 - C. He wants to give you a free gift. Actually, it's a gift package. It includes a whole bunch of really good things:
 - 1. Forgiveness of sins
 - 2. Eternal life
 - 3. Peace with God

4. Heaven
 5. His own presence day by day
 6. Adoption into the family of God.
 7. A new start, not just today, but every day.
- D. I believe that for some of you, today is your day to receive the gift of God. To receive Jesus and all He brings.
 - E. Like verse 26 says, “*You will be given eternal life and you will never perish, simply for believing in Jesus Christ as your one and only Savior.*”
 - F. Some of you believe God for a future resurrection, like Martha did. But God wants you to believe in a resurrection today—a resurrection of hope. A resurrection of your dreams. A resurrection of your health. A resurrection of your family. A resurrection of your finances. A resurrection of our church.
 - G. In the future all will be made well—yes.
 - H. But in the present, God can work too. That I believe.
- VII. *38 And again Jesus was deeply troubled. Then they came to the grave. It was a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. 39 “Roll the stone aside,” Jesus told them. But Martha, the dead man’s sister, said, “Lord, by now the smell will be terrible because he has been dead for four days.” 40 Jesus responded, “Didn’t I tell you that you will see God’s glory if you believe?” 41 So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me. 42 You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so they will believe you sent me.” 43 Then Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” 44 And Lazarus came out, bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him go” (John 11:38-44, NLT)!*
- A. Jesus does not work by improving the improvable; He works by raising the dead. This is the glory of God (John 11:4). Not what you do, but what only He can do.
 - B. Lazarus died.
 - C. Jesus let him die.
 - D. Why?
 - E. Maybe God allows a Good Friday into your life just to set up Easter.
 - F. If Jesus can raise Lazarus from the dead, can’t He handle whatever’s making you an underdog today, too? Why are you afraid? Why are you down cast? Why are you bitter and angry with God? Why have you given up hope?
 1. He has the power over death in His hands.
 2. He has the power of deliverance in His hands.
 3. He has the wealth of the cosmos in His hands.
 4. He has time and eternity in His hands.
 5. He has the molecules of your body in His hands.
 6. He has your spouse and children and ex in His hands.
 7. He has the United States of American in His hands.
 8. He has the stock market in His hands.
 9. He has the devil in His hands.
 10. He has illness in His hands.
 11. He has the economy in His hands.
 12. He has your broken down car in His hands.
 13. He has your messed up children in His hands.
 14. He has your messed up parents in His hands.
 15. He has your addictions and depressions in His hands.
 16. He has your confusion in His hands.
 17. He has the holes from the nails on the cross in His hands.
 18. He has the weight of the sin of the world in His hands.
 19. He has the weight of your failures and sins, in His hands.
 20. He has forgiveness in His hands.
 21. He has love in His hands.
 22. He has hope in His hands.
 23. And He wants you in His hands today.
 - G. And right now is the time you can set yourself in His hands for time and eternity if you have never done that before.
- VIII. Gospel
- A. Admit
 - B. Believe
 - C. Choose