

JOHN 11 | Lazarus, Come Out!

Lazarus' Illness

1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. 3 So the sisters sent to him saying, Lord, he whom you love (φιλέω) is ill. 4 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.

Jesus Goes to Awaken Lazarus

5 Now Jesus loved (ἀγαπάω) Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. 6 So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7 Then after this he said to the disciples, Let us go to Judea again. 8 The disciples said to him,

Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?

9 Jesus answered,

Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.¹

11 After saying these things, he said to them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him. 12 The disciples said to him, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. 13 Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly,

Lazarus has died,² 15 and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.

16 So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.³

¹ If the church is afraid to present its message, it stumbles. Metaphorically the daylight hours represented the Father's desire. Jesus was safe as long as he did the Father's desire (T. Constable).

² Swoon theory is discounted.

³ "The safest place to be is in the will of God."

Jesus' Encounter with Martha

17 Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. 20 So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. 21 Martha said to Jesus,

Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.

23 Jesus said to her, Your brother will rise again. 24 Martha said to him,

I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.⁴

25 Jesus said to her,

I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me (ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ), though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me (πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ) shall never die. Do you believe this?

27 She said to him,

Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.⁵

Jesus' Encounter with Mary

28 When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, The Teacher is here and is calling for you. 29 And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.⁶ 31 When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet,⁷ saying

⁴ **Da 12:1-2** 1 At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. 2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

⁵ Martha's confession is a high point of John, as Peter's is in *Matthew* (Mt 16:16). Martha uses the same words to describe Jesus as John uses in his purpose statement (Jn 20:31).

⁶ Jesus continues to take his time.

⁷ **Lk 10:39** 39 ...[Martha] had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. **Jn 12:3** 3 Mary...took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair.

to him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.⁸ 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved (ἐμβριμάομαι)⁹ in his spirit and greatly troubled (ταράσσω).¹⁰ 34 And he said, Where have you laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see. 35 Jesus wept (δακρῶω).¹¹ 36 So the Jews said, See how he loved (φιλέω) him! 37 But some of them said,

Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?

Jesus' Encounter with Lazarus

38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, Take away the stone. Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, Lord, by this time there will be an odour, for he has been dead four days. 40 Jesus said to her, Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said,

Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around,¹² that they may believe that you sent me.

43 When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus,¹³ come out!¹⁴ 44 The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth.¹⁵ Jesus said to them, Unbind him, and let him go.¹⁶ 45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him.

⁸ This is exactly what Martha had said (v. 21).

⁹ “[I]nsist on someth. sternly, warn sternly...As an expr. of anger and displeasure in...scold, censure...to feel strongly about someth., be deeply moved” (BDAG, 322).

¹⁰ “[T]o cause inward turmoil, stir up, disturb, unsettle, throw into confusion” (BDAG, 990).

¹¹ Jesus was thinking about death in relation to all humanity. All the suffering of humanity passed into his view. **Is 53:3** 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. **Luke 19:41** 41 ... [W]hen [Jesus] drew near and saw the city [Jerusalem], he wept over it.

¹² Jesus often says and does things for the sake of the crowd, that they may believe into him.

¹³ **Jn 10:3** 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

¹⁴ This story is about eschatology, not soteriology.

¹⁵ **Jn 5:25** 25 ...An hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. **Jn 5:28-29** 28 ...An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29 and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

¹⁶ Lazarus' resurrection foreshadows Jesus' resurrection and ours. It is the seventh sign.

Plans to Put Jesus to Death

46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47 So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said,

What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in (πιστεύουσιν εἰς) him,¹⁷ and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.¹⁸

49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year,¹⁹ said to them,

You know nothing at all. 50 Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.²⁰

51 He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. 53 So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.²¹

Jesus Stays in Ephraim

54 Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness (ἐρημος), to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples.

Passover at Hand

55 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves.²² 56 They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?²³ 57 Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

¹⁷ Again we see there were many more believers in Jesus than just the disciples.

¹⁸ **Ex 5:21** 21 ... [The foreman of Israel] said to [Moses], Yahweh look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.

¹⁹ Caiaphas received his office of high priest from the Romans in ad 18. His father-in-law Annas preceded him and continued to exercise considerable influence.

²⁰ This is an ironic statement that shows characters in the biblical story sometimes speak more than they know.

²¹ How can one put to death the one who just proved he has power over death? How can one put the Life to death?

²² Ritual cleanness was necessary for observing the Passover (Nu 9:6-11). R. Brown estimates between 85,000 and 125,000 pilgrims were added to the normal Jerusalem population of 25,000.

²³ **Jn 7:11** 11 The Jews were looking for [Jesus] at the feast [of Booths] and saying, Where is he?

Biblical Worldview

1. Introduction.

- a. Have you ever been miffed that God did not stop your suffering, or the suffering of someone close to you? Have you ever felt like telling God off saying, “God you have the power to heal, so why don’t you!!!”
- b. What would you think of close friend who knew you were dying and refused to visit you in your last hours? What if he deliberately stopped and chatted to other friends so that he didn’t have to visit you on your death bed.
- c. What if you were hanging out with a supposed close friend who healed tons of people at will and then refuses to do so in your case?
- d. Do you doubt God’s existence because of the suffering you see in the world, or the suffering you have personally faced?

2. John at a Glance.

- a. In John 10, Jesus claimed to be the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11). He said that he came that his sheep may have life and have it abundantly (Jn 10:10). He said that he gives his sheep eternal life, that they will never perish, and that no one will snatch them out of his hand and the Father’s hand (Jn 10:28). But if that’s so, how can he permit those he loves (Jn 11:3, 5, 36), his sheep, to die. He must not be a very good shepherd after all! Sure, Jesus can give sight to a blind beggar (Jn 9:7). But he can’t defeat the ultimate enemy, death.
- b. The primary message of John 11 is that because of Jesus life triumphs over death.

3. Lazarus’ Illness (Jn 1:1-4).

- a. Mary and Martha send to Jesus because Lazarus is still alive. There is still a chance for him to recover. Jesus can heal him. They’d seen him do it many times before. And because Jesus loved Lazarus, surely he would come and heal Lazarus now, or at least heal him from a distance, like the nobleman’s son (Jn 4:49-51)).
- b. Jesus has greater situational awareness than do Mary and Martha. He knows how the Father will use this illness to glorify himself and his Son. He knows that Lazarus’ illness will not ultimately lead to his death (v. 4).
- c. Application.
 - (1) The illnesses of believer never lead to ultimate death. No illness can finally defeat the believer. Even death cannot defeat the believer. We have victory over all illness and all death.
 - (2) Believer, whatever illness you are battling—know that “this illness does not lead to death” (v. 4). Your illness “is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (v. 4). Think of the example of Joni E. Tada.
 - (3) Suffering always has a purpose. There is no such thing as pointless suffering.

4. Jesus Goes to Awaken Lazarus (Jn 11:5-16).

- a. Jesus loves Lazarus and his sisters and knows Lazarus is ill (v. 5). So why does he intentionally delay (v. 6)? How would you like it if your physician came to you and said, “We know what to do keep you alive, and we’ve got all the supplies we need in stock. But we’d rather just wait. It’s God’s will for you to die.” Or what if your best

friend knew you were in hospital and had only a few hours left to live, but he purposely avoided visiting you, even though you asked for her by name? What is Jesus doing here?

- (1) Believer, have you ever asked, why doesn't God heal me now, if he has the power to do so? Is Jesus delaying in your case, just as he did in the case of Lazarus? Are you frustrated at Jesus' delay?
- b. When the two days of delay are over, Jesus then calls the disciples to go with him back to Judea (v. 7). This is a very dangerous decision (v. 8). But Jesus responds that by walking in the day, one sees the light of this world and never stumbles (v. 9). It is those who walk in the night who stumble (v. 10).
 - (1) Believer, are you walking in the day and seeing the light of this world? In other words, are you obeying the desire of your heavenly Father? Oh, that we may be a local church that walks in the day! It may entail danger. We may have to be "counter-cultural." We may have to be a "subversive community" of disciples after Jesus. But the promise is we won't stumble. How would we like to be a subversive community of disciples of Jesus that walks in the day and never stumbles?
 - (2) We live in a dangerous cultural environment. We are certainly outnumbered. If the church is afraid to present its message, it stumbles. But shall we claim this promise? If we walk in the day, seeing the light of this world, Jesus, the promise is we won't stumble. Obey the Father in what he is calling you to do. Walk in the day! "The safest place to be is in the will of God."
 - (3) As Thomas says, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (v. 16).
- c. In the interchange with his disciples, Jesus makes clear Lazarus is not just asleep. He is dead (Jn 10:11-14). A great sign of Jesus' identity, the seventh sign of John's gospel, is being set up. The purpose is that the disciples faith may increase (v. 15).

5. Jesus' Encounter with Martha (John 11:17-27).

- a. Jesus wanted Lazarus to be in the tomb four days (v. 17). That was the reason for his delay (v. 6). This four days matches the Jonah prophecy (Mt 12:40) and suggests Jesus may have died on a Wednesday, not a Friday.
- b. It is important for the Jewish leaders and residents of Jerusalem to hear of this sign. After all, it is the final sign they will receive. That's why this sign must take place only two miles from Jerusalem (v. 18), despite the danger to Jesus and his disciples. The Jews who come to console Martha and Mary are important witnesses to the Jewish leaders (v. 19).
- c. There are generally two responses to the problem of illness, suffering, and death—the Martha response, and the Mary response.
 - (1) Martha is proactive (v. 20) and objective.
 - (2) Mary is reactive (v. 20) and subjective.
 - (3) They both place a bit of blame on Jesus for not coming sooner and preventing their brother's death. They both say, "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died" (vv. 21, 32).
 - (4) Martha, though, still believes Jesus may want to do something special in the situation. She believes in the power of Jesus' words and his close connection to the Father (v. 22).

- (a) May we say along with her, “But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you” (v. 22).
- d. Like Martha, we are to firmly believe in the final resurrection on the last day. With Lazarus, all believers will rise again in the resurrection on the last day (vv. 23-24). This belief is central to Christianity (Da 12:1-2).
- e. But even more, we are to believe that the resurrection and the life is not just something that happens to us. It is a person. Jesus himself is the resurrection and life (v. 25). It is because Jesus is the resurrection and the life that there is no other way to God. The way to God is not a philosophy, programme, or even religion. It is person.
 - (1) Jesus is asking you, as he did to Martha: “Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (vv. 25-26).
 - (2) Will you answer as Martha answered: “Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is coming into the world” (v. 27).
 - (3) This is exactly why the gospel of John was written (Jn 20:30-31).

6. Jesus’ Encounter with Mary (Jn 11:28-37).

- a. In our grief and sorrow, the Teacher calls for us, just as he did for Mary (v. 28).
- b. Like Mary, when we hear the Teacher’s call, we are to rise quickly and go (v. 29).
- c. Jesus, the Shepherd, continues to delay (v. 30). He takes his sweet time. Where is he? But we must learn to wait for his timing. He knows what he is doing.
- d. Like Mary, when we see Jesus in our grief, we are to fall at his feet and pour out our deep most emotions, feelings, complaints, questions, doubts to him (v. 32).
- e. Jesus sees our weeping, and he is deeply moved by it (v. 33, 38). He is greatly troubled by the evil and suffering in our fallen world. If you are greatly troubled by the evil and suffering you see in our world, know that Jesus is greatly troubled by it a thousand times more. Jesus weeps for our fallen world (v. 35).
- f. In our grief, we are tempted to doubt Jesus’ power (v. 37), even if we don’t doubt his love (v. 36). But we called to trust in both Jesus’ love and his power.

7. Jesus’ Encounter with Lazarus (Jn 11:38-46).

- a. As in the case of Lazarus, Jesus asks us to “take away the stone” (v. 39). We do this today by totally trusting in Jesus in our Christian life.
- b. We are conditioned to think naturally, like Martha: “Lord, by this time there will be an odour” (v. 39).
- c. But Jesus asks us to recondition ourselves to think supernaturally. Jesus invites to believe and see the glory of God (v. 40).
- d. Jesus always works in tandem with the Father. The communication between them is incredible. The Father always hears the Son (vv. 41-42).
- e. Our experience of illness, death, grief, and pain is an opportunity for us to see the glory of God (v. 40). This includes not only us but also the “people standing around” (v. 42).
- f. At the right time, Jesus cries out with a loud voice in our lives, “_____ come out!” (v. 43). Note the power in Jesus’ voice. He is the Word (Jn 1:1, 14), and he calls his own by name (Jn 10:3).

- g. If you are not yet a Christian, is now the time? Do you hear Jesus' loud voice today? "_____, come out!" Is it time for out to come out of the tomb (v. 44)? Are your hands and feet bound with linen strips? Is your face wrapped with a death cloth? Is it time for those to be unbound? If you are willing to hear Jesus' voice today, you will be unbound and let go. As Jesus said:
- (1) **Jn 10:9-10** 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 ...I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.
- h. We are to let Jesus' operating in the circumstances of our suffering, illness, or death be a catalyst for many to believe in him (v. 45).
- i. Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead has no natural explanation.
- (1) Jesus previously raised Jairus' daughter, who had been dead a very short time (Mt 9:25; Mk 5:42; Lk 8:55), and the son of the widow of Nain, who had been dead about one day (Lk 7:15). But Lazarus had been dead four days and was in his grave.
- j. What did Lazarus consciously experience for those four days?
- (1) See Gary R. Habermas and J. P. Moreland, *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidence for Immortality* (2004).
- k. While there are similarities between Lazarus and Jesus' resurrections, there are also significant differences. Lazarus came to life only to die again, as a mortal, whereas Jesus arose never to die again, as an immortal (T. Constable).

8. Plans to Put Jesus to Death (Jn 11:45-53).

- a. Jesus' signs are unmistakable and undeniable (v. 47).
- (1) The arguments for the existence of God plus the historical life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in view of Old Testament prophecy prove the Christian faith is true.
- (2) "It has always been the case that those whose minds are made up to oppose what Christ stands for will not be convinced by any amount of evidence" (L. Morris).
- b. Jesus and those who follow him are a threat to the old order (v. 48). The world elites cannot let Jesus go on. Their place of power, prestige, and privilege will be taken (v. 48). If everyone believes in Jesus (v. 48), everything they've built their whole lives upon crumbles.
- c. Caiaphas unknowingly and ironically prophecies that Jesus will die for the people of Israel (v. 50-51). Actually, Jesus does even more. He dies to gather into one flock, one church, all the children of God (Jn 1:12) who are scattered over the earth, both Jews and Gentiles (v. 52).
- d. The official decision of the Jewish Sanhedrin concerning Jesus is made in v. 53. They will put Jesus to death. As foreseen, Israel has chosen to reject her Messiah.

9. Jesus Stays in Ephraim (Jn 11:54).

- a. Jesus knows he will die. He's come to lay down his life for the sheep (Jn 10:11-15). But it must be as the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29, 36) on Passover. So he strategically retreats to Ephraim and stays with his disciples (v. 54).

10. The Final Passover at Hand (Jn 11:55-57).

- a. The suspense is building. The stage is being set for the climax of the story. The Jewish leaders want Jesus arrested (v. 57), and many going up to Jerusalem for the Passover are wondering whether he will come (v. 56).

Biblical Worldview

1. Jesus came not only to defeat illness, but death itself.

- a. In the war between life and death, life wins. This is totally because of Jesus!
- b. This is what was foretold by the Old Testament prophets.
 - (1) **Is 25:7-8** 7 ...[Yahweh] will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. 8 He will swallow up death forever. And Yahweh God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for Yahweh has spoken.
 - (2) **Is 26:19** 19 Your dead shall live. Their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.
- c. Jesus doesn't just *give* resurrection and life, he *is* the resurrection and the life. That's why he must be the only way to God.
 - (1) "When you are sick, you want a doctor and not a medical book or a formula. When you are being sued, you want a lawyer and not a law book. Likewise, when you face your last enemy, death, you want the Savior and not a doctrine written in a book. In Jesus Christ, every doctrine is made personal (1 Cor. 1:30)" (W. Wiersbe).
- d. In atheism, death wins. In Christianity, life wins.

2. In God's economy, suffering always has a purpose.

- a. In God's economy, there is no pointless suffering.
 - (1) God always has a reason for what he does and what he allows. We may not know what God is doing, but God knows what God's doing (v. 4). Remember God has all eternity to right every wrong. Our suffering, especially undeserved suffering, is God's opportunity.
- b. Sometimes Jesus doesn't stop our suffering because he loves us (vv. 5-6).
 - (1) "...[W]hen God makes us wait, it is the sign that He purposes to bless, but in His own way—usually a way so different from what we desire and expect" (A. W. Pink).
- c. Jesus knows the right time to end our suffering—and he will!