



## John 11. The Lazarus Story

Lesson #32, By Gerald Cumby, Teacher

**John 11 offers a profound narrative highlighting Jesus' ultimate power over life and death. It presents a moving depiction of Jesus' compassion, His deep connections with those He loved, and His absolute mastery over physical and spiritual realms. This chapter illuminates the hope and life that comes from faith in Jesus, even in the face of death, urging believers to find comfort, strength, and confidence in Him.**

**John 11 is located precisely at the center of the Gospel: 10 chapters precede it and 10 chapters follow it (elementary, but important).**

**The Raising of Lazarus in John 11 stands as:**

1. A hinge between Jesus' public ministry and his private ministry to the disciples.
2. It represents a climax to Jesus' earlier actions (this is the final and utmost sign, the last in a series of 7) and a foreshadowing of his own death and resurrection.
3. A moment of profound irony...Our Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life, the light of the world, starts to walk the path of self-renunciation that will ultimately lead Him through the narrow and dark alleys and valleys of death.
4. THE ULTIMATE PLAN AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EVENT FOR THE BELIEVER:

***THE RAISING OF LAZARUS FORESHADOWS JESUS' OWN RESURRECTION AND GLORIFICATION.***

**One of the reasons why the Gospels were written was to motivate the believers to have a longing to be like Jesus (in thinking and actions).**

- Lazarus' resuscitation, then, stands for the community's daring affirmation that it is belief in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, the Logos of God, that enables them to claim their right to abundant life, that is, to full participation in the life of God's reign.
- Therefore, the center of the gospel speaks of the belief of the community that despite their predicament they can still find true life and real liberation in their communion with Jesus, the true vine.

**Placement of Martha's confession in the layout of John 11 is significant and revealing. This says a lot about John as to making sure his version of the gospel was organized and easily understood by believers and unbelievers alike.**

- **Martha's confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, which is precisely the purpose of the gospel as expressed in 20:30-31, "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.<sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."**
- **This is not only the center of John 11, but also the rhetorical and theological center of the entire gospel. It constitutes its main theological statement and it is verbalized by a woman!**

**A similar confession like Martha's came in John 1:49...from the lips of Nathanael, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" This belief in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God is placed at the beginning, middle, and end of the gospel, which bespeaks of a strategic rhetorical positioning that is meant to convey meaning by its mere presence.**

**Note: In the Gospel of John, it is usually women (the Samaritan woman in John 4, Mary and Martha in John 11) that make such prolific theological statements about Jesus being God's Son...the Messiah. As a matter of fact, it is obviously true that women make more and better theological statements in the Gospel of John than their male counterparts.**

**How could this information affect our teaching/preaching when using John as a text?**

**John 11:1-16:** "Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."<sup>4</sup> When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." <sup>5</sup> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, <sup>7</sup> and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."<sup>8</sup> "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"<sup>9</sup> Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. <sup>10</sup> It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."<sup>11</sup> After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."<sup>12</sup> His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." <sup>13</sup> Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.<sup>14</sup> So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, <sup>15</sup> and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."<sup>16</sup> Then Thomas (also known as Didymus<sup>1a</sup>) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

**Cliff Note teaching: Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha, falls sick.**  
Despite the sisters' message, Jesus deliberately stays two more days before deciding to visit, affirming the situation will glorify God and the Son of God. Jesus announces Lazarus's death to the disciples and their subsequent journey to Judea, despite their concerns about Jewish opposition.

- “**This sickness is not unto death**”: Lazarus was already dead when Jesus said this, but He knew the end result would be **the glory of God**, not death. Jesus also knew that the events recorded in this chapter would set the religious leaders in determination to kill Jesus. This meant the end result would be **that the Son of God may be glorified** in His death and resurrection.
- Jesus had a close relationship with this family. When **Lazarus was sick** it was natural for them to bring their need to Jesus. It was expected that if He miraculously met the needs of so many others, He would meet their need also.
- After Jesus heard Lazarus was ill...He stayed ministering in the area for 2 more day (delaying his journey to minister to Lazarus and family!

### **What??**

- The delay was probably mystifying to the disciples and agonizing to Mary and Martha. It sure would be to us if our pastor knew that I (or you) was seriously ill...and our he did not come immediately. Calling or texting would not be enough if he were noticeably able. However, if the disciples heard Jesus state that Lazarus was only sleeping, they were even more confused. You can't go in to check on Lazarus because the authorities were trying to kill him.
- “The only right understanding of this answer, and our Lord's whole proceeding here is, — that *He knew and foresaw all from the first.*” (Alford) Our pastor, as good as he is, does not know the outcome of a serious illness.
- Jesus admits that Lazarus was dead and stated so to the questioning disciples (v.14).
- **Why all the confusion? Jesus wanted the disciples to see the significance of the power of God...even to raising the dead.**

**John 11:17-27**, “On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.<sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,<sup>19</sup> and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.<sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.<sup>21</sup> “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”<sup>22</sup> But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

<sup>24</sup> Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;<sup>26</sup> and whoever lives by believing in me will never

die. Do you believe this?”<sup>27</sup> “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

**CLIFF NOTES: On reaching Bethany, Jesus consoles Martha, promising resurrection and life to those who believe in Him. Martha expresses faith in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God.**

- ***Friends comforting the family are an important ministry of the church.***

“The love of Jesus does not separate us from the common necessities and infirmities of human life. Men of God are still men.” (Spurgeon)

- **What significance did the fact that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days?**

✓ Jesus waited **four days** because He knew the Jewish superstition of that day that said a soul stayed *near* the grave for three days, hoping to return to the body. Therefore, it was accepted that after **four days** there was absolutely no hope of resuscitation.

✓ **To fulfill Scripture... “Nothing is impossible with God.”**

**Jeremiah 32:17**, “Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! **Nothing is too hard for you.**

**Luke 1:37**, “**For nothing will be impossible with God.**”

**Matthew 19:26**, “**But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”**

**“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died”:** Martha honestly stated her disappointment in Jesus’ late arrival. She believed that Jesus was able to heal her brother while he was sick yet still alive. It’s possible that she didn’t even consider that Jesus was able to raise Lazarus from the dead *now*.

**“Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You”:**

There can be great power in “**even now**” prayers.

Martha was not confident that Jesus would raise her brother. Instead, she said that she would still trust Jesus *despite* this disappointment..

**“Your brother will rise again”:** Martha understood that her brother Lazarus would **rise again** with all the righteous on the **last day**. She did not even consider that Jesus might immediately bring Lazarus from the dead.

✓ We may comfort a grieving person by saying, “You will see him again.” We sincerely mean it and sincerely mean the comfort, but we don’t mean “You will see him again right now.” *Jesus meant that Lazarus would rise again right now.*

**“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live”:**

- Jesus boldly challenged Martha to trust that He was the source of eternal life.
- Jesus presented Himself as the champion over death.
- While humanity in general fears death, the Christian can only fear dying.
- The believer will never die, but simply make an instant transition from an old life to a new life.

“Those that believe in Jesus Christ appear to die, but yet they live. They are not in the grave; they are forever with the Lord. They are not unconscious they are with their Lord in Paradise. Death cannot kill a believer, it can only usher him into a freer form of life. Death comes to the ungodly man as a penal infliction (**inflicting** punishment on the offender as a consequence of his wrongdoing), but to the righteous as a summons to his Father’s palace: to the sinner it is an execution, to the saint an undressing. Death to the wicked is the King of terrors: death to the saint is the end of terrors, the commencement of glory.” (Spurgeon)

### **“Do you believe this?”**

- ✓ Jesus challenged Martha not to debate or intellectual assent, but to *belief*.
- ✓ She must believe Jesus was who He said He was and that He could do what He said He could do.

### **Does that mean that He would not raise her brother unless she believed?**

- ✓ No; for He had determined to ‘awake him out of sleep’ before He left Perea.”

### **“Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world”:**

- ✓ Martha answered correctly. Jesus was and is indeed the Messiah (**the Christ**). Jesus was and is God in human form among us (**the Son of God**).

### **The “I believe” statement is important:**

Note: ‘I’ is emphatic. Whatever may be the case with anyone else, she has put her trust in Jesus.

The scholar, James Boice, called these words of Martha *faith’s foothold* –

The great mountain climbers state that one must have a firm and steady foothold before he can climb higher. It is imperative for an ascent to higher ground.

FAITH IS THAT WAY. FAITH IS THE ULTIMATE FOOTHOLD TO GAIN ACCESS TO THE PALACE OF THE KING.

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[Raising Lazarus from the Dead \(John 11:1-44\) - Walking by Faith](#)