

The Gospel of John

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Chapter Eleven

The Resuscitation of Lazarus

John 11:1-57

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (2) And it was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is the seventh sign John records of Jesus. The seven signs are:

1. Changing water into wine in John 2:1-11
2. Healing the royal official's son in Capernaum in John 4:46-54
3. Healing the paralytic at Bethesda in John 5:1-18
4. Feeding the 5000 in John 6:5-14
5. Jesus' walk on water in John 6:16-24
6. Healing the blind at birth in John 9:1-7
7. Raising of Lazarus in John 11:1-45

This last sign shows the power of Jesus over the last and most irresistible enemy of humanity – death. Mary and Martha are mentioned also in Luke (10:38-42) and perhaps in Mark (14:3-9) and Matthew (26:6-12). However nothing is mentioned of Lazarus in the Synoptic Gospels. The brief mention of Mary anointing Jesus with perfume was probably narrated in the church prior to John's writing so other readers would have known about it. He will also recount this episode in chapter 12. John mentions it to show the deep relationship Jesus had with the family. The town of Bethany has not been mentioned previously by John. It is on the other side of Olivet and less than two miles on the road to Jericho.

John 11:3-5

The sisters therefore sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." (4) But when Jesus heard it, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it." (5) Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.

The sisters knew of Jesus healing the sick so they called Him to help Lazarus who was in a grave illness. They asked for Him even though they knew He would have to return to an area where He had the death penalty waiting. They even expected Him to come quickly. As we will see later, Lazarus probably died shortly after the people sent by the sisters left to find Jesus. The reply of Jesus would have seemed strange to all involved. He had reacted quickly to heal Jairus's daughter (Luke 8:41-56) and the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-16). He said that the

illness would not end in death but He did not say that death would be the end! John states that Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus so his response would have seemed strange. He stated that the illness would be for the glory of God and that the Son would be glorified much like the situation with the man born blind.

John 11:6-8

*When therefore He heard that he was sick, He stayed then 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?"*

Stating that He would remain two days would have seemed lacking an emotional tie to the family especially since John told us that He loved the family. The disciples indicated a willingness to go anywhere but to Judea with Jesus. They feared for His life and probably for their own life also. They wanted to know why Jesus could not heal Lazarus from a distance and not repeat a trip into the lion's den. This waiting would indicate to later generations that all had to go through death before entering into the resurrection.

John 11:9-10

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."

The statement of verse 9 may have been a local proverb like underlying John 9:4. In both instances Jesus is stating His obligation to do the Father's work while He walked on earth. Jesus had a clear illumination of His duties to the Father and so was willing to return to Jerusalem. A similar statement is in 1 John 1:6. Parting from the charge of God is to walk in darkness. He may have had the same concept stated in: "*So Jesus said to them, "For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. (36) "While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light." These things Jesus spoke, and He went away and hid Himself from them.*" (John 12:35) His presence was their illumination and such was missing in Peter's denial and the doubting of Thomas. The purposes of the blindness and this illness were for a display of the glory of God. The light from the sun comes from the sun and is reflected off objects like the moon that has no source of light. A person who is "in Christ" has the source of spiritual light within and not reflected.

John 11:11-13

*This He said, and after that He *said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, that I may awaken him out of sleep." (12) The disciples therefore 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 was speaking of literal sleep.*

His explanation would appear to have been wrong when they arrived and were told Lazarus had died. He would indeed awaken him from death. The disciples seem to be saying that if Lazarus were only asleep there was no reason from them to go there. But Jesus saw physical death as a

parenthesis followed by an awakening and not permanently removed from life. Jesus used sleep to mean death but not to imply that death results in total unconsciousness for in Luke 16:19-31 Jesus illustrates that people have a conscious state after death.

John 11:14-16

Then Jesus therefore said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, (15) and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." (16) Thomas therefore, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

The reply of Jesus would have been shocking to them. They would have thought that He should have wanted to be there to save Lazarus and to comfort the sisters. How is it that death could bring benefits to the disciples? Jesus knew that His role as the Son would be strengthened and the faith of all involved would be strengthened. He knew that positive belief and joy would result. This is the first appearance of Thomas in John's gospel. He is also mentioned in 14:5, 20:24-29, and 21:1. The "Him" refers to Jesus and not Lazarus, for Thomas expected them to all be seized and persecuted. His attitude is that if Jesus is to die then he would rather be dead than left alone. But he shows his willingness to follow Jesus anywhere.

John 11:17-20

So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. (18) Now 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) Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him; but Mary still sat in the house.

Bethany was greater than 20 miles from where Jesus was in Perea so the trip would take a day. Lazarus was dead for four days. Jesus waited 2 days after being told of the illness. It would have taken one day for the people to get to Jesus, 2 days waiting, and one day for Jesus to travel for a total of four days. Lazarus then must have died shortly after the messengers left to find Jesus. Many came so the family must have been well known. The procession to the grave and the mourning lasted for several days normally. Decomposition happened quickly in the extreme heat so burial was quickly done. Martha was more aggressive than Mary who stayed home. The Portrayal of the sisters is the same as in Luke 10:38-42. The use of the word "Jews" does not have any theological overtones here for they were friends in the Judean area. John relates the actions of Mary and Martha similarly as is done by Luke (Luke 10:38-42).

John 11:21-22

Martha therefore said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. (22) "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

Martha seems to have scolded Jesus somewhat but showed her true faith in Jesus to obtain whatever He asked of God.

John 11:23-26

*Jesus *said to her, "Your brother shall rise again." (24) Martha *said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." (25) Jesus said to her, "I am*

the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, (26) and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Martha was well versed in the Pharisee theology of the resurrection life (Acts 23:7). But Jesus turned her belief in a dogma into a belief in His power. Physical death for a believer is just a gateway to the eternal life. Paul expressed this when saying at death he would be with the Lord (Phil 1:23) and the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43) speaks of the same transformation. The resurrection is mentioned in 1 Thess 4:16-17 but Jesus is not speaking of the general resurrection at the End Times. Jesus has been quoted as referring to this general resurrection but with the addition that He is the One who will raise the dead at that time since the Father has given Him that authority (John 5:21, 25-29; 6:39). The first mortal life must die but the spiritual life will live forever and the bodies of believers will be resurrected at the End Times. Thus those who believe in Jesus Christ will never totally cease to live even if their body dies.

John 11:27-31

*She *said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world." (28) And when she had said this, she went away, and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, "The Teacher is here, and is calling for you." (29) And when she heard it, she *arose quickly, and was coming to Him. (30) Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha met Him. (31) The Jews then who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.*

Martha stated her firm belief in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. She exhibited a faith like Andrew when she confessed Him to be the Messiah (John 1:41), she also reacted as Nathanael when she confessed Him as the Son of God (John 1:49), and He was the One prophesied by Moses and the prophets (John 1:45). Evidently it was not generally known that Jesus had arrived in the area as Martha told Mary secretly about Him being there. They generally spoke of Him as the Teacher, meaning Rabbi. Mary quickly responded to the request by Jesus for her to come to Him. But Martha's attempt to keep His presence secret was frustrated for the Jews knew something was happening so they followed her. They probably thought that she was heading to the tomb for some unknown reason so they were curious.

John 11:32-37

*Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." (33) When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her, also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit, and was troubled, (34) and said, "Where have you laid him?" They *said to Him, "Lord, come and see." (35) Jesus wept. (36) And so the Jews were saying, "Behold how He loved him!" (37) But some of them said, "Could not this man, who opened the eyes of him who was blind, have kept this man also from dying?"*

Mary spoke to Jesus in exactly the same way that Martha had done. Mary did not continue her statement with an even deeper statement of her faith as did Martha. However this does not mean we should infer any different state of mind of Mary from Martha since at each time when Mary

of Bethany is said to be with Jesus she is at His feet (Luke 10:39; John 12:3). Jesus was “deeply moved”, which literally means “snort like a horse” and denotes anger or extreme displeasure. Jesus was probably upset at the presence of sickness and death because of the havoc it brings to human life. He could also have been upset at the blindness and lack of faith of those who were around them. Troubled means agitated or in turmoil like a sea in a storm. Wept means a human reaction but with tears that were shed silently, not the loud mourning of hired mourners. The Jews read His reaction as a human reaction at the death of a loved one. However they were troubled by His reaction as they wondered why He had not healed Lazarus as He did the blind man, which was an event that occurred several months previously so that healing made a deep impression on everyone. His reaction is similar to that of other humans and John would probably have agreed with the writer of Hebrews concerning the ability of Jesus to empathize with the weakness of people as He also had been tested in suffering: “*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.*” (Heb 4:15) His reactions demonstrate His total human nature that exists with His God nature.

John 11:38-40

*Jesus therefore again being deeply moved within, *came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. (39) Jesus *said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, *said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days." (40) Jesus *said to her, "Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"*

John repeats “deeply moved” to demonstrate that Jesus was still under an emotional tension. The graves were normally carved out of a hill of limestone rock with a stone to cover the entrance to keep wild animals away from the body. Now Jesus had to keep His prediction to His disciples that this event would be for the glory of God and His promise to Martha that her brother would rise again. Jesus ordered the sealing stone to be removed but Martha warned Him of the smell of a decaying body since Lazarus had been dead for four days. Jesus knew that Lazarus would be raised from the dead but He needed Martha to be more receptive to the working of a miracle such as had been done only a few times in history. This was to be resuscitation and not a resurrection for Lazarus would die again. Martha certainly understood the difference from her previous statement about the resurrection.

Scripture informs us that several people were raised from the dead such as the widow’s son at Zarephath: “*Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the LORD and said, O LORD my God, I pray You, let this child's life return to him.*” (1Kings 17:21 NASB) The Hebrew word translated “return” is H 1725 and means “to turn back”. Another such event was the son of the Shunammite woman: “*And he went up and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his hands on his hands, and he stretched himself on him; and the flesh of the child became warm. Then he returned and walked in the house once back and forth, and went up and stretched himself on him; and the lad sneezed seven times and the lad opened his eyes.*” (2Kings 4:34-35 NASB) We are not told what Elijah prayed so we cannot analyze this further. Another such event involved Jesus with the widow’s son at Nain: *And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother.*

(Luke 7:14-15 NASB). The Greek word translated “arise” is G 1453 meaning “to waken”. A second event involving Jesus was with Jairus’s daughter: “*Taking the child by the hand, He *said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which translated means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"* (Mark 5:41 NASB). The word “Talitha” is G 5008 and means “young girl”. The word “kum” is G 2891 and means “rise”. The Greek word translated “get” is G 1453, the same as used in the Luke verse translated as “arise”.

Resuscitations are events of bringing people back from the dead and all of those people died again. But a resurrection is bringing back to physical life to never die again and to receive a glorified body that will be like that of Jesus after His resurrection. The Greek word for resurrection is G 386, “anastasis” such as used in: Acts 26:23 “*That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the **first that should rise from the dead**, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.*” The Greek word translated “rise” is “anastasis” so the resurrection of Jesus is clearly the first such happening. This distinction is not just a matter of semantics for other Scripture informs us that it is a critical theological point that the raising from the dead of Jesus is unique and then will occur for every person at the second coming of Jesus: “*and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.*” (John 5:29)

The only person in history who has been resurrected and thereby defeated death was Jesus Christ. This distinction is very important for if raising Jesus from the dead was only like that of other people then there was nothing different about this event in the life of Jesus and it has no special relevance to Christians. The word “resurrection” appears 41 times in the New Testament and always refers either to His resurrection or to the time when Jesus returns. The following verses refer to this event as the **first** of many that will occur at the End Times.

1Cor 15:20-24 NAS77 *But now Christ has been raised from the dead, **the first fruits of those who are asleep**. For since by a man came death, by a man **also came the resurrection of the dead**. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: **Christ the first fruits**, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.*

We read in verse 21 of Cor 15 that the resurrection of the dead was initiated at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His resurrection was the first fruits of all those who have and will die (asleep). This event was the first of its kind and not just a rare occurrence among other people who were raised from the dead. Verse 23 again states that the raising from the dead occurred in order of Jesus being the first and afterwards those who are in Christ will also be made alive again at His return.

Paul again states in his letter to the saints at Colossae that Jesus was the first-born from the dead: “*He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, **the first-born from the dead**; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything.*” (Col 1:18)

John also writes that Jesus was the first-born of the dead, meaning the first to experience a resurrection: “*and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the **first-born of the dead**, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood,*”(Rev 1:5)

The following refers to the **first group resurrection** that will occur:

Rev 20:5-6 NAS77 “*The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the **first resurrection**. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years*”

This first resurrection is the group resurrection of believers who will then receive their resurrected bodies. The second death is the time when death, hades, and unbelievers will be sentenced to banishment forever:

Rev 20:14 NAS77 *And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.*

Rev 21:8 NAS77 “*But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*”

A clear understanding of the unique resurrection of Jesus gives us a sure hope of one day being with Him and like Him (1 John 3:2).

John 11:41-42

And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou heard Me. (42) "And I knew that Thou hear Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me."

Jesus now took the next step in the resuscitation of Lazarus. The people were probably a bit uneasy about moving the stone but they did as Jesus asked. Jesus did not pray that God would raise Lazarus but He thanked the Father for having already done it. He asked the Father to bring forth Lazarus so that the people would believe that He had been sent by the Father. This desire is similar to that expressed by Jesus in John 17:21. Jesus continues to express His desire that the people understand that He was sent by the Father.

John 11:43-47

*And when He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." (44) He who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus *said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." (45) Many therefore of the Jews, who had come to Mary and beheld what He had done, believed in Him. (46) But some of them went away to the Pharisees, and told them the things which Jesus had done*

Jesus knew that Lazarus had already been raised from the dead so He told him to come out of the cave. Jesus had previously said that a time would come when those in their graves would hear His voice (John 5:28). This event is a parable of that later time when all in their tombs will hear the quickening voice of Jesus and come out. It is only a parable because Lazarus is called out to a renewal and continuation of mortal life, whereas those who hear the shout on the last day will be called out to a resurrection life. Before resurrection could be given to others Jesus had to first experience His resurrection. Therefore it is critically important to understand the difference between the resuscitations and the resurrections. This was a single event of what would happen later. His words could be interpreted as someone giving directions on how to navigate a dark area. Only God has the power of life and the Father had exercised that power to negate any decomposition and bring life to the body of Lazarus. He came out of the cave still wrapped in his death cloths so Jesus told the people to take off the bindings and let him go. The bindings of Jesus were left behind at His resurrection, which again points to the difference between the events.

Many people believed in Jesus because of the evidence of Lazarus again living before them for such was even more convincing that the healing of the man born blind. But some of the Jews went to inform the Pharisees what Jesus had done. It seems since John is stating that the Jews told what Jesus had done that these people still did not understand that Jesus was acting as an emissary of the Father. It is hard to understand how they could not believe that Lazarus had really been raised from the dead but a hard heart will not understand spiritual things (1 Cor 2:14) and perhaps they thought this event had been staged somehow.

John 11:47-50

Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. (48) "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." (49) But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, (50) nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish."

This event was so astounding that the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. They expressed a strong frustration because of all the signs done by Jesus. It seemed that if Jesus were allowed to continue doing such signs that many people would follow Him and the Romans would fear a revolution so that they would take over the area and do away with what authority the Jews had. The "our place" referred to in verse 48 is the temple (Acts 6:13; 21:28). At the time of the writing of this gospel the catastrophe they feared had already happened but not because of the activity of Jesus. They did not understand that Jesus had no political schemes so He would not be in favor of any such revolt by the people. Jesus clearly showed His lack of political ambition when He stated: "*They *said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He *said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."*" (Matt 22:21 NASB)

Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas (John 18:13) who had been a high priest from A.D. 7 to 14 and was succeeded by three of his sons and then to Caiaphas from A.D. 18 to 36. Matthew

refers to Caiaphas as the high priest during the passion narrative (Matt 26:5) and Luke mentions him twice (Luke 3:2; Acts 4:6). He belonged to the party of the Sadducees and they had a reputation of rudeness. His statement revealed a cynical, arrogant attitude as he told them they should eliminate Jesus instead of taking a risk of the Roman government acting against them. He refers to the Jewish community both as the people (*laos*) and the nation (*ethnos*). It seems insensitive that one man should die so that others could continue their current existence but such a rationale was appealing to them. He was then advocating that Jesus serve as a scapegoat to keep disaster away from them all.

John 11:51-54

Now this he did not say on his own initiative; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, (52) and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. (53) So from that day on they planned together to kill Him. (54) Jesus therefore no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples.

John states that this statement by Caiaphas was a prophecy of his office and not a reflection on him individually for he certainly would not be certified as a prophet. John applies this statement not only to the nation Israel but to all the children of God scattered into the world. This could be an anachronistic statement regarding the future bringing into the Kingdom Of God people from all nations who become children of God (John 1:12; 10:16). The “children of God” are those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God (John 1:12) and, because of His total ministry and resurrection, all would become one. Thus the eventual bringing of the Gentiles into the flock is foreshadowed. John indicates in verse 53 that the point of no return had been reached in that the death of Jesus was now a certainty. Of course Jesus knew this from the beginning of His ministry but it was not yet time for His death so He stopped walking publically among the Jews. He then left Bethany and went to Ephraim that was a village northeast of Bethel. This was on the edge of the desert and He could go there if the situation demanded it.

John 11:55-57

Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover, to purify themselves. (56) Therefore they were seeking for Jesus, and were saying to one another, as they stood in the temple, "What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?" (57) Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he should report it, that they might seize Him.

Because John refers to this as the Passover of the Jews, it seems that he expected the readers of his gospel to be primarily Gentiles. The Passover was a very important event and required ceremonial cleansing of participants so many people would be converging on Jerusalem. This cleansing is specified in Num 9:6 and Josephus states that the pilgrims came about a week before the event to undergo the purification. This is the third Passover mentioned by John. The first (2:1) occurred early in the ministry of Jesus. The second Passover was during the Galilean ministry of Jesus (6:4) but He did not go to Jerusalem for that event. During this third Passover

Jesus is in Judaea where He has been since the Feast of the Tabernacles. The first Passover seems to have been in AD 28, forty-six years after Herod began rebuilding the Jerusalem temple (2:20). If that date is correct then this third Passover would be the one that occurred in AD 30. The people thought that perhaps Jesus would come also even though an order for His arrest had been issued. The Pharisees had also stated that if anyone knew the location of Jesus they were required by law to let them know. Several attempts at seizing Jesus had been reported by John (5:18; 7:30, 44; 8:20, 59; 10:38) but nobody could capture Him until it was time for the final sacrifice (7:8, 30; 8:20, 59).