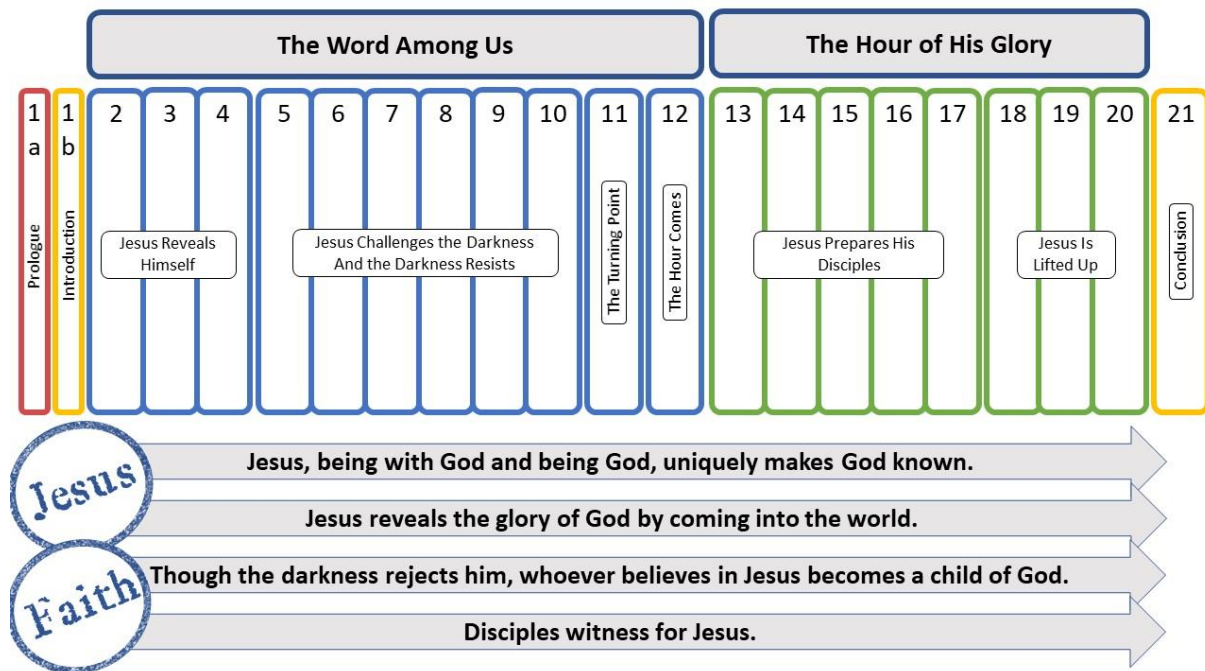


## Lesson 19: John 11 Lazarus Raised – The Turning Point

### Introduction



John 11 is the story about Lazarus. Well, it is really a story about the power of Jesus, and a story about faith in Jesus – the two great themes of John’s Gospel. Jesus has just declared authority over all life, even over his own life and death. “No one has taken it away from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again (John 10:18).”

Who do you want to entrust your life to? To a doctor? That is wise at times, though significantly limited. To a politician? That’s much less wise. To yourself? Well, you do have responsibility to care for yourself and to make wise choices. But you cannot give yourself life and you cannot long preserve your life.

Who do you want to entrust your life to? How about the one who sees all things as they truly are because he has come from God and is in fact God? How about the one who has the power to lay down his own life and take it up again? The one from whom all life has come (John 1:3)?

Jesus will give his third I am statement with an object in this chapter. With each statements so far, he has also performed a sign to affirm the truth of his declaration.

He declared, “I am the Bread of Life” and then he multiplied bread and fish to feed thousands. Do you trust Jesus to give you nourishment? He then declared, “I am the Light of the World” and healed a man born blind from birth; not blind from sickness or battle wound or accident, but blind from birth until Jesus opened his eyes to see. Do you trust Jesus to give you sight? He now declares, “I am the Resurrection and the Life” and is going to follow that statement with the resurrection of a man already four days dead. Do you trust Jesus to give you life? Life now and life after death?

The resurrection of Lazarus is the seventh and greatest of the signs John reports in the first major section of his Gospel, the public ministry of Jesus. They began his ministry at the wedding feast and now they are going to end it with the resurrection of Lazarus.

This sign is not hard to read. This sign affirms Jesus’ claim to power over human life. The power that is in Jesus overcomes death. This is true in this life. As he declared in 10:10, “I have come that you might have life, and might have it abundantly.” And it is true of life after death, as he declared in 6:40, “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him may have eternal life; and I myself will raise him up on the last day.”

Jesus’ life overcomes death.

This story is reported in four scenes, four personal conversations with Jesus: Jesus and the disciples, Jesus and Martha, Jesus and Mary, and Jesus and Lazarus.

### Jesus and the disciples (11:1-16)

We start with Jesus and his disciples. Remember Jesus has left Jerusalem. John is not going to tell us where he is at the time of this story, but at the end of the last story, due to increased animosity against Jesus, he had withdrawn out near the Jordan river to the place of his baptism. It seems like Jesus is in a holding pattern, like a plane circling an airport waiting for the right moment to land. He remains in Judea. He is not far away, but he is some distance from Jerusalem, waiting for God's timing before initiating the final confrontation with the leaders of Israel.

This first conversation with his disciples is in John 11:1-16.

<sup>1</sup> Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent *word* to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." <sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." <sup>5</sup> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days *longer* in the place where He was. <sup>7</sup> Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." <sup>8</sup> The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." <sup>11</sup> This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." <sup>12</sup> The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." <sup>13</sup> Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. <sup>14</sup> So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, <sup>15</sup> and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." <sup>16</sup> Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to *his* fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him."

There is so much to observe here. Let me first, just point out this intriguing comment about Mary. "It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick." It is not so much intriguing from the literary point of view as the from the historical point of view. John is going to tell this story of Mary anointing Jesus' feet in chapter 12. He has not mentioned it, yet. But here when he is talking about Lazarus, it seems that people know who Mary is better than they would know who Lazarus is. Of course, for us, you just mention the name Lazarus, and we all think of this Lazarus who was just raised from the dead. But none of the other Gospel writers included this story. And we do not know why. The people would not have heard it, not broadly. Richard Bauckham has wondered if the other Gospel writers did not include it because they wrote while Lazarus was still alive, and like Jesus, he was targeted by religious leaders. So, out of concern for Lazarus safety they did not mention him in their Gospels. We certainly don't know if that is the reason. It's a plausible thought. It is just a thought. But it does remind us how often there are good explanations to mysterious facts. We do not know what they are and that makes it all the more mysterious to us. But if we knew, we would understand, and it would make sense, and we would go, "Oh! That is why they did not include it." So, we don't know but it is worthwhile coming up with plausible ideas because there is one, we just don't know what it is.

What interests me most about this verse is that it indicates to us that John was writing to real people who were already familiar with the other Gospel reports but who had not heard everything. They had heard about Mary. They knew about the washing of Jesus' feet. But they might not have heard about the story of Lazarus. And this was the first time that it was written down. And it is being written down by John who was a first-hand witness.

In verse 4, Jesus makes a comment similar to his comment about the blind man of chapter 9. "But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, 'This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.'" Just as the man born blind was allowed to suffer to participate in the glorious work of God, and from that suffering also received a sight he may have never had otherwise, so also Lazarus and his sisters are allowed to suffer that the glorious work of God might be displayed and that they might benefit from this powerful validation of their faith in Jesus.

I am also struck by timeliness of the statement for us right now during the coronavirus pandemic that has engulfed the world. Think about those words. "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." The statement itself does not apply directly to our situation. That would be taking it out of context. And in truth, this virus is ending in death for thousands. Here at the beginning, China, Iran, Italy have experience significant death tolls. EU borders closed yesterday. The US just advised citizens not to gather in groups larger than 10. We do not know yet how bad it is going to get. We do know more people are going to die.

"This sickness is not to end in death", is a promise to Lazarus, not to all believers. We do not have a promise that we will not get sick and die. That is a misunderstanding of biblical truth. In truth, if you do not die from accident or murder, you will die by sickness. We have 100 or so years to live and then we all die, no matter the strength of our faith. No faith healer has escaped the final sickness, the corruption of the body that leads to death. Ultimate healing comes in the next life, not this life. But there is a principle here that applies. This sickness has been allowed, this pain and suffering and fear, that people might see God, and that God might be glorified and the Son with him. Just as that was true for these people gathered around the death of Lazarus, so that is also true of us. Human beings need to be shaken at times, so they will take their eyes off this life that is not life and ask important questions about true life, true life here and true life to come.

God calls his own to participate in this suffering. And it does not mean he does not love us. We are told here Jesus loves Martha, and he loves Mary, and he loves Lazarus and so, he waits two days. Wait a minute. He loves them, and so, he doesn't go to save Lazarus out of death? He doesn't go to prevent suffering and sadness? His love will work out for us in the end. It works for the good of all those who love him. Suffering does not always bring about evil in our lives. Sometimes suffering brings about good. And we trust God with that. Like the blind man, like Lazarus, like Jesus all who believe participate in some way in the corruption and brokenness of the world. We are to remain in the world. We are not of it, but we are in it. Do we glorify God in sickness and in death? Do we help others see the light of truth in him? Witness through suffering is a constant theme of Christian experience. It is in Scripture, and it has been through the generations. How many stories have you heard of a believer who has died well? Of doctors or nurses, friends or strangers who receive a witness to the goodness and reality of God through a believer who is prepared to go through suffering and is prepared to go through death in order to meet God? God is with them in the suffering, and it becomes apparent to people around them.

God allows suffering to come into Lazarus' life in order that he might participate in the glorious witness of who Jesus is. That God allows suffering in our lives as part of his good plan is clear in this story. Jesus intentionally chose to wait. The sisters are going to say, "If only you were here Jesus." And he could have been. He chose not to be. The plan was for Lazarus to die. Sometimes God allows us to walk in suffering. Even in that suffering, the life of Jesus overcomes death. But to experience that life, that life of Jesus that overcomes death, we have to walk with him even when it looks like he is leading us towards suffering.

Jesus says, "Let's go." The disciples had misunderstood his hesitation. They thought he was staying away from Jerusalem because of the danger. "Bethany is too close to that danger. We don't want to go there. We left to let things die down. They want to stone you. We thought we were staying put. If we did not go right away, why would we go now?" They had misunderstood the delay. But like his brothers who misunderstood Jesus plan about going up to the Feast of Booths, the disciples miss the

values that are underlying the decision of Jesus. They do not see what Jesus sees. And so, they can't understand Jesus' decision making.

Experiencing life is not the same thing as doing everything you can do to protect your life. Experiencing life means walking in the light of Jesus. There are 12 hours in the day when you have light. Walk according to the light of day. Jesus is our light. We really do base our decisions asking, "What would Jesus do?" Or maybe even better, "What is Jesus leading me to do in my situation?" To walk in the day is to walk according to the values and wisdom and guidance of Jesus. To walk in the night is to walk according to the values and wisdom and guidance of the world.

Thinking about the coronavirus again reminds me of the challenge to walk in the light. It is not always clear what we should do. I think of two biblical images. In the Old Testament law God gave instructions to quarantine for people with infectious disease to protect the community. And so, we are to act wisely to protect life. And that is one picture. The other picture is of Jesus' speaking to and touching the sick, the leper, and the outcast. And so, you have both of these pictures in Scripture of wisdom and of compassion. They are held together in tension. I just read a bit of advice from Martin Luther during an outbreak of the plague in Wittenberg. Luther wrote,

"I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me however I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely."<sup>1</sup>

See the tension there. There is wisdom to protect life. But there is also a trust in God to give aid, to help. Luther's interpretation of neighbor is broad. In the whole letter he argues for the continuation of the ministry to which you believe God has called you and an openness to assist whomever in the community God gives you opportunity to help. Walking in the light with Jesus includes wisdom in preservation of our own life and the lives of others and also compassion and courage to go where God leads.

The wisdom of Jesus comes from his vantage point, his perspective on life and reality. He sees clearly that death is not the end. Death is a door to life. At the same time, all life is precious to God because all people are made in his image. Life is a gift. At the beginning of life and the end of life, life is precious to God. We trust him with all life. He is sovereign over our lives. We are not. God determines whether our sickness leads to death or not. We trust him and seek to give witness to his glory no matter how God chooses to end our story. We do this by walking in the light of the truth of Jesus.

The disciples are a bit slow to catch on to Jesus' explanation about Lazarus. He said Lazarus is asleep. They say, "That's good, let him rest." Jesus speaks more plainly, "He has died." I wonder if he was exasperated with them. Maybe not. He knows his disciples well. He adds, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." Suffering is not the end of the story. There is purpose in Lazarus' death.

I love how Thomas ends the scene with these words, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him." I do not read that as an optimistic call to a glorious death. "Let's go and let's die with Jesus!" I read it more as a melancholy resignation to what awaits if they go back to Jerusalem. I read it as Thomas the realist, not Thomas the optimist. Which, interestingly, adds to how we think of Thomas. We usually call him Thomas the doubter or doubting Thomas because after the resurrection he refuses to believe until after he himself touches the wounds in Jesus' hands. Here though, he is Thomas the courageous, willing to go to death with Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, "Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague," *Luther's Works, Vol.43 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999)*, 132. <<<https://blogs.lcms.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Plague-blogLW.pdf>>>

There is also an affirmation in his words, maybe not intended by him, but fitting with the story. The way to true life is to walk with Jesus, even if the way of Jesus seems headed toward death. Following the light of Jesus leads us out of the darkness of natural human existence. Abiding in the word of Jesus sets us free from the power of sin and the values of this world. And abiding in his word is more than living a moral life and doing the right thing. Thomas models something else for us. True life is not just about doing the right thing. True life is doing the right thing with Jesus, in relationship with Jesus, walking with Jesus.

Jesus' life overcomes death when we walk with him.

### **Jesus and Martha (11:17-29)**

The next conversation is with Martha. This is John 11:17-29.

<sup>17</sup> So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; <sup>19</sup> and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning *their* brother. <sup>20</sup> Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. <sup>21</sup> Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup> Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup> 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." <sup>28</sup> When she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." <sup>29</sup> And when she heard it, she got up quickly and was coming to Him.

Martha starts by expressing her belief in the power of Jesus. "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

Jesus responds with a general theological statement accepted by many religions, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha affirms that theological statement, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." I am very curious to know how she said that. I wish we had her voice with it. Did she say it with resigned hope to wait for the future? "I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Or did she say it with a questioning expectation, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day...but what about now?"

Jesus responds, however Martha said it, Jesus responds to the broader theological truth by directing the conversation to himself. He says, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Theology must become personal have affect. Abstract truth does not change our lives. Coming face to face with Jesus changes lives. I am reminded of something John Wesley wrote in his journal. This is from February the 7<sup>th</sup>, 1735, the day after Wesley arrived in Georgia to serve as an Anglican minister for colonists. He had been greatly shaken by potential death during a storm at sea. Having observed the peace of Moravian families on board the ship, in contrast to his own fear, Wesley asked to speak with the Moravian leader in Georgia August Spangenberg. This is how Wesley recounted that conversation in his diary.

[Spangenberg] said, "My brother, I must first ask you one or two questions. Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?"

I was surprised, and knew not what to answer. He observed it and asked, "Do you know Jesus Christ?"

I paused and said, "I know He is the Savior of the world."

"True," he replied; "but do you know He has saved you?"

I answered, "I hope He has died to save me."  
He only added, "Do you know yourself?"  
I said, "I do." But I fear they were vain words.

When asked about Jesus Christ, Wesley responded with a broad theological statement, "I know he is the Savior of the world." Spagenberg pressed in to make it personal, "But do you know he has saved you?" Wesley said, "Yes" but he only said it because he knew that was the correct answer. He also knew that he did not truly believe it in his own soul.

Saving faith is not assent to theological truths. Saving faith involves personal knowledge of Jesus Christ, personally believing that Jesus Christ is who he said he is.

Jesus extended a strong, personal invitation to Martha. He moved her from broad theological truth and brought her to himself. "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

It is a strong offer because it is clear and direct and asks Martha to make a choice. Life does not come from assenting to abstract theological ideas. Life comes from personal belief that those ideas are indeed true. Martha responds to the invitation of Jesus with a personal statement, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, *even* He who comes into the world."

She came to Jesus distraught. Jesus pointed her to himself. She followed where he led, communicating out loud her faith in him and then, she left with hope.

When we pay careful attention to the words that Jesus spoke to Martha, we hear a distinction between physical death and eternal death. "He who believes in me will live even if he dies" that is physical death. "And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." That is eternal, spiritual death.

As we recognized with Thomas, true life come from walking with Jesus. In this conversation with Martha, we also add the idea that true life comes through personal faith in Jesus. Our walk with him is not only moral, doing the right things, and not only theological, believing the right things, our walk with him is a personal relationship. Jesus declares, "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me will never die." Then he looks right at you and asks you, "Do you believe this? Do you believe in me?"

Can you see that in your mind and your heart right now? Jesus is looking at you. And he has declared, "I am the resurrection and the life." His eyes are on you. "Do you lay your life into my hands? Do you believe in me?" How do you answer Jesus?

Jesus' life does not overcome death for you until you personally entrust yourself to him. "Yes, Jesus. I believe you are my life. You are my resurrection."

### **Jesus and Mary (11:30-37)**

Martha goes to Mary to tell her that Jesus wants to speak with her. The third conversation is with Mary and it is in verses 30-37.

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha met Him.

<sup>31</sup> Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. <sup>32</sup> 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." <sup>33</sup> When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her *also* weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, <sup>34</sup> and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." <sup>35</sup> Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup> So the Jews were saying, "See how He loved him!" <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?"

Mary comes weeping, and Jesus weeps with her. For me, Jesus affirms here the value of lamentation or expressing of deep sorrow. To believe in life does not mean we are free from the pain, from the sorrow caused by death. We who believe still grieve. And it is right to grieve. And it is right to weep.

It is not easy to interpret Jesus' response to the mourners that comes in verse 33. First, Mary repeats Martha's sentiment. "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." We are not told that Martha wept. I assume she didn't. Or she wasn't when she was with Jesus. Mary is crying, and also are the mourners who come with her. Confronted with their weeping, Jesus has an emotional response. My Bible says in verse 33 he was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled." I was surprised once in a Bible study a friend was reading from a German Bible and that friend pointed out that her text said Jesus was "angry and saddened." I assumed that the word for "deeply moved in spirit", the Greek word which is translated in English Bibles as "disturbed" or "groaning" could also mean "angry." And that for some reasons Germans preferred angry whereas Americans preferred deeply moved. As I have learned since, the word really does mean angry. Carson translates it as anger, outrage, emotional indignation. It seems that English translators are so uncomfortable understanding Jesus as being angry at this moment that they softened the language in their interpretation.

That softening of the language, instead of being angry, he is moved in spirit, it prevent us from seeing Jesus as angry with Mary for weeping. And that is good. I think that is a bad interpretation. We should not understand Jesus' anger as directed towards Mary for expressing grief at the death of her brother. But, unfortunately, softening the language prevents us from seeing what John saw and what he is reporting to us. Jesus was angry. Why? At what?

Is Jesus angry at a lack of faith being exhibited by the sisters? Well, no, that does not agree with Jesus' personal words to the sisters. It doesn't agree with this conversation he just had with Martha. Is he angry with the sisters and mourners for manipulating him to perform a miracle to bring Lazarus back? They are pressuring him, "Jesus, if you had only been here. Jesus can't you do something." No, I don't think that is where the anger comes from. Jesus knew he was going to raise Lazarus before he even came. And the sisters do not appear to be pressuring him. They are stating what they believe, "If you were here. Even now you could do something." They had sincere sorrow that he wasn't here before when Lazarus died.

So, what makes Jesus angry? There is a possibility that his anger is roused by these mourners who follow after her. The text specifically mentions that they get up and follow her. And since they are professional mourners, it is possible that their grief refuses to acknowledge any hope in the reality of life after death. And so, there may be some sense of anger at the darkness of their grief, that it is a grief that rejects life. That might be here. I think more or likely or mostly Jesus is angry at the reality of death and the persistence of the Jewish people to walk in death. In his conversations with the crowds at the Feast of Booths, Jesus told them that their opposition to him lined up with Satan's opposition. The mission of Jesus is life through truth. Those who oppose Jesus oppose life. The mission of Satan is death through deception. Jesus charged him with being a murderer and a deceiver. And in chapter 10, Jesus lines up leaders of Israel with that work. They are thieves who come to kill and steal and destroy. That is the work of Satan. And as long as they keep people bound in the darkness, they are doing the work of death. Jesus, on the other hand, came that we might have life, abundant life.

Death and persistent holding on to the way of darkness, the way that leads to death, I think these things make Jesus angry. He is angry at corruption, angry at deception, angry at death, and angry at a persistent lack of faith that holds on to these things.

This anger is not antithetical to his compassion. In Jesus the two work together. He sees the plight of all men and woman, and he weeps. He is not weeping here at the death of Lazarus. He knows he is getting ready to raise him from the dead. I do not think he is even weeping at the sorrow of Martha and Mary. Possible. How would you feel if you saw great sorrow in people you loved, knowing that in just a couple of minutes you were going to turn that sorrow into joy? Maybe you would weep for them for the sorrow they have endured. That is possible. Knowing that he is about to raise Lazarus, I think

that Jesus may be weeping here at the blight of death that has fallen on creation and at the darkness in the hearts of the men and women gathered around who refuse the light of life. He knows that some are going to believe. But he also knows that there are people in the crowd who are going to reject him even after he raises Lazarus from the dead.

With Thomas we saw that life is not simply doing right things but is doing right with Jesus.

With Martha we saw that life is not simply believing right theology, but personally believing, trusting Jesus.

With Mary I think we see that life is not about ignoring death, but includes mourning over the reality of death, even as we hope in Jesus. Life with Jesus includes anger and sorrow over the brokenness of this world and the participation of men and women in death in the darkness, refusing the light.

### **Jesus and Lazarus (11:38-46)**

The fourth conversation Jesus has is with the dead man. This is verses 38-46.

<sup>38</sup> So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup> 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." <sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup> So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me." <sup>43</sup> When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." <sup>44</sup> The man 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." <sup>45</sup> Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him. <sup>46</sup> But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done.

In the final victory of life over death we are completely passive. We lie dead and he will choose or not choose to call our name. There is nothing we can do. Death brings about complete submission, complete vulnerability.

Lazarus has already been dead four days. Now, later rabbinic belief asserted that a person's soul hovered over the body three days. Then, when decomposition had set in the soul departed. And we cannot know for sure whether this belief stretched back to the time of Jesus. But it certainly seems implied here by twice we are told that Lazarus has already been dead four days. Four days. He is dead dead. Four days in the tomb is long enough to ensure that Lazarus is truly dead. Everyone gathering expected the smell of death, the stench to come forth from the tomb, everyone except Jesus.

Jesus expected the glory of God. Even Martha, she affirmed that she believed that Jesus could bring about the glory of God. She didn't know that he meant now. That he was going to bring about the glory of God. Jesus expected the glory of God to come forth, Jesus expected the glory of God to be displayed and to show him to be the author of life. So, he cries out, "Lazarus, come forth!" And Lazarus comes out. Jesus commands, "Unbind him. Take off those clothes of death. He is free."

Imagine yourself dying. Imagine as though you have just fallen asleep for the last time. You are not going to wake up. See yourself lying down on a long flat stone. There is a funeral for you. Your body is lowered into the grave. You have no power, no ability to wake up. No one can help you. They tried all they could. You died. You are buried.

You are now completely vulnerable to the authority and power and goodness of God. You can do nothing to wake yourself. Who are you trusting for life? In the end, are you trusting in yourself? Are you trusting that your goodness and your religious activity, and your faith are powerful enough, good enough to move God to raise you to eternal life?



Or do you know, do you see that you have not been good enough. Your behavior is not going to force God's hand in your favor. Do you trust yourself or do you trust his mercy and his grace? Do you personally believe in Jesus Christ? That he is the Resurrection and the Life? Do you believe that in him God is holding on to you?

If you do, as you imagine yourself lying in death, can you hear him calling your name?

"Wake up my child." And you rise up. And he tells those around you, "Take off the grave clothes. Unbind him. Set him free." "Take off her grave clothes. Unbind her. Set her free."

Can you hear it? Can you imagine your body being transformed, the dead body being transformed into a glorified new body free from sin, free from corruption, free from death at the call of your name?

Thomas, Martha, and Mary model for us aspects of experiencing life through relationship with Jesus. In this life, we experience his life. Abundant life is experienced through a walk of faith with Jesus. Lazarus models for us the reality that our life really is completely in the hands of someone else in the hands of Jesus.

This passage ended with two different responses to the sign of Jesus raising Lazarus from death. There are two responses in 45-46.

<sup>45</sup> Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him.

<sup>46</sup> But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done.

Some of them didn't believe and they went to tell on him. This sign proved to be a tipping point for the opposition to Jesus. It is the end of his public ministry. Let's conclude our lesson from today with the verses that end the chapter. These are verses 47-57.

### **Conclusion (11:47-57)**

<sup>47</sup> Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. <sup>48</sup> 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." <sup>49</sup> But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, <sup>50</sup> nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." <sup>51</sup> Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, <sup>52</sup> and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. <sup>53</sup> So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.

<sup>54</sup> Therefore Jesus 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. <sup>55</sup> Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover to purify themselves. <sup>56</sup> So 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?" <sup>57</sup> Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he was to report it, so that they might seize Him.

The intense opposition has coalesced now into a determined plan to kill Jesus. Knowing this, Jesus ends his public ministry. He withdraws to the city Ephraim, a town about 12 miles or about 20 kilometers from Jerusalem. The priests and Pharisees plan to arrest him. The people wonder if Jesus will show up at the Passover just now about to be celebrated in Jerusalem. And, as always, Jesus waits on the Father's timing, entrusting his life and his mission into the hands of God.

### Reflection questions

1. Read John 11:1-16. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing in Jesus interaction with his disciples?
2. What does it mean for you to walk while it is day?
3. Read John 11:17-29. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing in Jesus interaction with Martha?
4. What significance do you see in Martha calling Jesus the Christ? Does Jesus call himself Christ in John? Who has called him Christ?
5. Read John 11:30-46. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing in Jesus interaction with Mary and Lazarus?
6. What significance do you see in the fact that Jesus wept?
7. Take a few moments of silence and imagine yourself dead in a tomb and you hear Jesus call your name. What impressions or thoughts come to you as you imagine yourself in that situation?
8. Read John 11:47-57. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing in the aftermath of the resurrection of Lazarus?