

John Chapter 11

As chapter eleven begins, Jesus stands in the shadow of facing the cross. The little time that He had in the area beyond the Jordan came to an end. John picked up the story after He moved back into the area of Jerusalem, and His death on the cross was only a few days away. In those last few days before His death, the scene in John's gospel changes from hatred and rejection (10:39), to an unmistakable and blessed witness of the glory of Christ.

All the rejection and hatred could not dim His glory as displayed through the resurrection of Lazarus. That miracle evidences His glory in three ways:

- (1) it pointed to His deity;
- (2) it strengthened the faith of the disciples; and
- (3) it led directly to the cross (12:23).

The chapter can be divided as follows:

- (1) the preparation for the miracle (verses 1-16);
- (2) the arrival of Jesus (verses 17-37);
- (3) the miracle itself (verses 38-44); and
- (4) the results of the miracle (verses 45-57).

John 11:1 "Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha."

Lazarus, Mary, and Martha were friends of Jesus. Many times on His way to and from Jerusalem, Jesus stayed with them in their home.

The resurrection of Lazarus is the climatic and most dramatic sign in this gospel and the capstone of His public ministry. Six miracles have already been presented

1. Water into wine (2:1-11),
2. Healing of the nobleman's son (4:46-54),
3. Restoring the impotent man (5:1-15),
4. Multiplying the loaves and fishes (6:1-14),
5. Walking on the water (6:15-21),
6. And curing the man born blind (9:1-12).

Lazarus' resurrection is more potent than all those and even more monumental than the raising of the widow's son in Nain (Luke 7:11-16), or Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:40-56), because those two resurrections occurred immediately after death. Lazarus was raised after 4 days of being in the grave with the process of decomposition already having started (verse 39).

This Bethany is different from the other “Bethany beyond the Jordan”. It lies on the East side of the Mt. of Olives about two miles from Jerusalem (verse 18), along the road leading toward Jericho.

This is the first mention of this family in John. John related the story of Mary’s anointing of Jesus (in 12:1-8), but this reference may indicate that the original readers were already familiar with the event.

Not one word spoken by Lazarus is recorded, nor any account of his post death experiences.

John 11:2 “(It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.)”

We remember the story where Mary brought the expensive perfume (that cost a year’s wages), and poured it on Jesus. Judas Iscariot complained, because it was expensive and could have been sold to give to the poor. Jesus said she would be remembered forever for this.

John 11:3 “Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.”

Since Jesus was in the Transjordan and Lazarus was near Jerusalem, the message to Jesus would most likely have taken one whole day to reach Him. Surely by omniscience, Jesus already knew of Lazarus’ condition (see verse 6; 1:47).

He may have died before the messenger reached Jesus, since he was dead 4 days (verse 17), when Jesus arrived, after a two day delay (verse 6), and a one day journey. “He whom thou lovest”; this phrase is a touching hint at the close friendship that Jesus had with Lazarus (13:1).

John 11:4 “When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.”

Mary and Martha knew if Jesus came, their brother would be healed. They sent word to Jesus immediately to come and heal Lazarus.

“The Son of God might be glorified”: This phrase reveals the real purpose behind Lazarus’ sickness, i.e., not death, but that the Son of God might be glorified through His resurrection.

Lazarus has not become sick because of any sin in his life. This sickness is to glorify God. This sickness of Lazarus will glorify the Father and the Son.

John 11:5 “Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.”

These were friends who had been very faithful to Jesus. As I said, He stayed in their home every time He came this way.

John 11:6 “When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place he was.”

This seems as if Jesus doesn't care, but He knows the outcome before it happens. Jesus deliberately waited until Lazarus was dead so that the glory of the Lord could be shown in Lazarus.

John 11:7 “Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judaea again.”

You remember, the last time Jesus was in this area, the Jewish leaders tried to take Him and stone Him. Jesus is not afraid however, and tells His disciples to go with Him. The disciples are not for protection. Jesus didn't need protection, but so they might see the glory of God.

John 11:8 “His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?”

The disciples are afraid for themselves and for Jesus. The disciples realized that the animosity toward Jesus was so great that His return could result in His death because of the murderous Jews.

During the light of the sun, most people did their work safely. When darkness came, they stopped. The proverbial saying however, had a deeper meaning. As long as the Son performed His Father's will (i.e. during the daylight period of His ministry when He is able to work), He was safe.

The time would soon come (nighttime), when by God's design, His earthly work would end and He would “stumble” in death. Jesus was stressing that as long as He was on earth doing God's will, even at this late time in His ministry, He would safely complete God's purposes.

John 11:9 “Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.”

Jesus makes a point here, that He must work while it is day. The Lord really is saying here, that time is running out and we must work while it is still light. In the dark ages, there were very few saved. Jesus is saying while the Light (Jesus), is still with you, we must work. Night is coming when no man can work.

John 11:10 “But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.”

Jesus is saying here, that there will come a time of spiritual darkness when it will be difficult to work.

Verses 11-13 refer to Lazarus having fallen asleep which is a euphemistic term used in the new Testament to refer to death, particularly with reference to believers who will be physically raised to eternal life.

John 11:11 “These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.”

Jesus could have gone earlier and touched Lazarus and made him whole, and it would have been like thousands of other healings that Jesus had done that they had gotten so used to that it had become commonplace.

This miracle that Jesus would perform over Lazarus would show that Jesus had power over death, that Jesus had resurrection power. Jesus says he sleeps meaning that Lazarus was dead.

John 11:12-13 "Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well." "Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep."

You see, the disciples misunderstood. They thought Jesus was speaking of Lazarus taking a nap. Isn't it strange that they were not amazed at Jesus knowing what Lazarus was doing, even though Jesus was miles away from him?

They had seen so many miracles of Jesus that something as small as the miracle of Jesus knowing what Lazarus was doing miles away, had become commonplace to them.

John 11:14-15 "Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead." "And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him."

The resurrection of Lazarus was designed to strengthen His disciple's faith in Him as the Messiah and Son of God in the face of the strong Jewish rejection of Him.

They should have been astonished that Jesus knew that Lazarus was dead. See how complacent even the disciples had become of the miracles, because they had seen so many. Jesus says here, that He was glad that He had not been there to heal Lazarus before he died.

Perhaps, when He raises Lazarus from the dead, they will be astonished and believe.

John 11:16 “Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

“Die with him” is referring to Jesus, not Lazarus.

Didymus means “twin”. Perhaps Thomas was a twin brother of Matthew since they appear together in lists of the apostles (see Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18 and Luke 6:15).

Thomas' words reflect loyal devotion and at the same time, pessimism over the fact that they would probably all die. His fears were not unrealistic in the face of bitter hostility toward Jesus, and had not the Lord protected them in the garden (18:1-11), they may also have been arrested and executed (20:24-29).

These disciples knew that to die would be their gain. That life is where the trial is. They should have also known that to wish to die before carrying out the mission God had for them to do was wrong.

John 11:17 "Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already."

There is a time lapse between (verse 16 and 17). When Jesus got to where Lazarus, Mary, and Martha lived, He found that Lazarus had been dead four days. On the fourth day, the body begins to deteriorate.

"In the grave" or "in the tomb". The term "tomb" means a stone sepulcher. In first century Israel, such a grave was common. Either a cave or rock area would be hewn out, the floor inside leveled and graded to make a shallow descent. Shelves were cut out or constructed inside the area in order to bury additional family members.

A rock was rolled in front to prevent wild animals or grave robbers from entering. The evangelist made special mention of the fourth day in order to stress the magnitude of the miracle, for the Jews did not embalm and by then the body would have been in a state of rapid decomposition.

The implication of (verses 18-19), is that the family was rather prominent. The mention of the Jews also heightens the reader's awareness of the great risk that Jesus took in coming so close to Jerusalem, which was seething with the leaders' hatred for Him.

As Jews from Jerusalem were present on this occasion, some were enemies of Jesus. This explains why Martha called Mary "secretly" (verse 28).

John 11:18 "Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off:"

This distance here is between one and one half and two miles. Remember, the Jews at Jerusalem had wanted to stone Jesus the last time He was in Jerusalem.

John 11:19 "And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother."

They were well thought of in the community. Jew is used by John to denote those who did not accept Jesus. It denotes the Hebrews who were enemies of God. We know that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were from the upper class financially.

If nothing else tells us that, the expensive perfume poured on Jesus by Mary cost nearly a year's wages for a healthy man.

John 11:20-21 "Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house." "Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

Martha knew of the great healing power of Jesus; and she knew if Jesus had been there, Lazarus would not have died. Martha, however, was not aware that Jesus could raise Lazarus from the grave. Perhaps, Mary was a little upset, because Jesus had not come immediately when they went for Him.

When Martha told Jesus that if He had been there that her brother would not have died, it was not a rebuke of Jesus but a testimony of her trust in His healing power.

John 11:22 "But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee."

Martha has that strong belief that can move a mountain. She knows in her heart that Jesus' power is unlimited. With a prayer on her lips and faith in her heart, she has come to Jesus for help. She knows the Father answers Jesus' prayers.

Based on her statement in (verse 39), Martha was not saying she believed Jesus could raise Lazarus from the dead, but that she knew He had a special relationship to God so that His prayers could bring some good from this sad event.

John 11:23 "Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again."

We see Jesus encouraging her, so that she might believe. This whole scene is for the glory of God. This is to let the whole world, then and now, know that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life.

John Chapter 11 Questions

1. In what town did Lazarus live?
2. Who were his two sisters?
3. Which of the sisters anointed Jesus with the perfume and wiped His feet with her hair?
4. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, what did He say?
5. What was Lazarus sick for?
6. How many days extra did Jesus stay, after He heard Lazarus was sick?

7. What peril did the disciples remind the Lord of that was in Jerusalem?
8. Why does a man stumble when he walks at night?
9. In verse 11, what does Jesus mean when he says "...Lazarus sleepeth..."?
10. Did the disciples understand Jesus' meaning?
11. The author is surprised at them not being astonished at what?
12. When did Jesus say outright that Lazarus was dead?
13. Why did Jesus say He was glad He was not there before Lazarus died?
14. What was Thomas' other name?
15. What was Thomas' suggestion that they all do?
16. Why would that be wrong?
17. How long had Lazarus been in the grave when Jesus arrived?
18. Which sister came out to meet Jesus?
19. How far is Jerusalem from Bethany?
20. Who is specifically mentioned who came to mourn with Mary and Martha?
21. What statement did Martha make that showed she had great faith in Jesus?
22. What encouraging statement did Jesus make to her?