

John 11
September 21, 2025

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When do we tend to second-guess God? [Let people engage]

Transition: All of us have times when we second-guess God, especially when we've prayed hard about something and wonder if our prayers rose above our ceiling! But imagine being in the shoes of Jesus's disciples, who second-guessed whether it was a good idea to head back to a region where Jesus was almost stoned to death. Imagine being Martha and Mary who were convinced that if Jesus had come when they had summoned him, Lazarus wouldn't have died. Let's read today's passage and watch the disciples, Mary and Martha, and the Jewish people who were mourning the loss of Lazarus go from second-guessing Jesus to being amazed that Jesus could raise the dead! Let's begin.

BOOK:

The Death of Lazarus

11 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² 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. ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."
⁴ 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." ⁵ Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.
⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."
⁸ "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"
⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. ¹⁰ It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."
¹¹ 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."
¹² His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." ¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.
¹⁴ So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."
¹⁶ Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Jesus Comforts the Sisters

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹ “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴ Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”

²⁸ And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

The Plot to Kill Jesus

⁴⁵ Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

⁴⁷ Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

“What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many miraculous signs.

⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place (the temple) and our nation.”

⁴⁹ Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰ You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”

⁵¹ He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, ⁵² and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. ⁵³ So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

⁵⁴ Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.

⁵⁵ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. ⁵⁶ They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple area they asked one another, “What do you think? Isn’t he coming to the Feast at all?” ⁵⁷ But the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

When we find ourselves confronted by disease, disappointment, delay, and even death, our only encouragement is the Word of God. We must live by faith and not by sight. Their situation seemed hopeless, yet the sisters knew that Jesus was the Master of every situation. The promise in Psalm 50:15 finds a parallel here: “And call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.”

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 333-338)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead was not our Lord's last miracle before the Cross, but it was certainly His greatest and the one that aroused the most response both from His friends and His enemies. John selected this miracle as the seventh in the series recorded in his book because it was really the climactic miracle of our Lord's earthly ministry. He had raised others from the dead, but Lazarus had been in the grave four days. It was a miracle that could not be denied or avoided by the Jewish leaders.

If Jesus Christ can do nothing about death, then whatever else He can do amounts to nothing. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). Death is man's last enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), but Jesus Christ has defeated this horrible enemy totally and permanently.

The emphasis in John 11 is on faith; you find some form of the word *believe* at least eight times in this account. Another theme is "the glory of God" (John 11:4, 40). In what Jesus said and did, He sought to strengthen the faith of three groups of people.

The Disciples (John 11:1–16)

We sometimes think of the disciples as "super saints," but such was not the case. They often failed their Lord, and He was constantly seeking to increase their faith. After all, one day He would leave them, and they would have the responsibility of carrying on the ministry. If their faith was weak, their work could never be strong.

Jesus was at Bethabara, about twenty miles from Bethany (John 1:28; 10:40). One day, a messenger arrived with the sad news that our Lord's dear friend Lazarus was sick. If the man had traveled quickly, without any delay, he could have made the trip in one day. Jesus sent him back the next day with the encouraging message recorded in John 11:4. Then Jesus waited two more days before He left for Bethany; and by the time He and His disciples arrived, Lazarus had been dead for four days. This means that Lazarus had died *the very day* the messenger left to contact Jesus!

The schedule of events would look something like this, allowing one day for travel:

Day 1— The messenger comes to Jesus (Lazarus dies).

Day 2— The messenger returns to Bethany.

Day 3— Jesus waits another day, then departs.

Day 4— Jesus arrives in Bethany.

When the messenger arrived back home, he would find Lazarus already dead. What would his message convey to the grieving sisters now that their brother was already dead and buried? Jesus was urging them to believe His word no matter how discouraging the circumstances might appear.

No doubt the disciples were perplexed about several matters. First of all, if Jesus loved Lazarus so much, why did He permit him to get sick? Even more, why did He delay to go to the sisters? For that matter, could He not have healed Lazarus at a distance, as He did the nobleman's son? (John 4:43–54) The record makes it clear that there was a strong love relationship between Jesus and this family (John 11:3, 5, 36); yet our Lord's behavior seems to contradict this love.

God's love for His own is not a pampering love; it is a perfecting love. The fact that He loves us, and we love Him is no guarantee that we will be sheltered from the problems and pains of life. After all, the Father loves His Son: and yet the Father permitted His beloved Son to drink the cup of sorrow and experience the shame and pain of the Cross. We must never think that love and suffering are incompatible. Certainly they unite in Jesus Christ.

Jesus could have prevented Lazarus' sickness or even healed it from where He was; but He chose not to. He saw in this sickness an opportunity to glorify the Father. It is not important that we Christians are comfortable, but it is important that we glorify God in all that we do.

In their "prayer" to Jesus, the two sisters did not tell Him what to do. They simply informed Him that there was a need, and they reminded Him of His love for Lazarus. They knew that it was dangerous for Jesus to return to Judea because the Jewish leaders were out to destroy Him. Perhaps they hoped that He would "speak the word" and their brother would be restored to health.

Our Lord's message to the sisters did not say that their brother would not die. It promised only that death would not be the *ultimate* result, for the ultimate result would be the glory of God. (Note that once again, Jesus called Himself "the Son of God.") He wanted them to lay hold of this promise; in fact, He reminded Martha of this message when she balked at having the tomb opened (John 11:40).

When we find ourselves confronted by disease, disappointment, delay, and even death, our only encouragement is the Word of God. We must live by faith and not by sight. Their situation seemed hopeless, yet the sisters knew that Jesus was the Master of every situation. The promise in Psalm 50:15 finds a parallel here: "And call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."

What about our Lord's delay? He was not waiting for Lazarus to die, for he was already dead. Jesus lived on a divine timetable (John 11:9) and He was waiting for the Father to tell Him when to go to Bethany. The fact that the man had been dead four days gave greater authenticity to the miracle and greater opportunity for people to believe, including His own disciples (see John 11:15).

When our Lord announced that He was returning to Judea, His disciples were alarmed, because they knew how dangerous it would be. (Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem.) But Jesus was willing to lay down His life for His friends (John 15:13). He knew that His return to Judea and the miracle of raising Lazarus would precipitate His own arrest and death.

The Lord calmed their fears by reminding them that He was on the Father's schedule, and that nothing could harm them. As we have seen, this is an important theme in the Gospel of John (John 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1). But the disciples not only misunderstood the schedule, they also misunderstood the reason for the visit. They thought that, if Lazarus was sleeping, he was getting better! It was another example of their inability to grasp spiritual truth. "If he is sleeping, he must be improving—so let's not bother to go to Bethany!"

Then He told them openly that Lazarus was dead. (Death for the believer is compared to sleep. See Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thes. 4:13–18.) He did not say He was glad that His friend died, but that He was glad He had not been there; for now He could reveal to His disciples His mighty power. The result would be glory to God and the strengthening of their faith.

If Thomas' attitude was any indication, the faith of the disciples certainly needed strengthening! The name Thomas means "twin" in the Aramaic language; the Greek equivalent is Didymus. We do not know whose twin he was, but there are times when *all of us* seem to be his twin when we consider our unbelief and depressed feelings! It was Thomas who demanded evidence before he would accept the truth of our Lord's resurrection (John 20:24–28).

Thomas was a doubting man, but we must confess that he was a devoted man: he was willing to go with Jesus into danger and risk his own life. We may not admire his faith, but we can certainly applaud his loyalty and courage.

The Sisters (John 11:17–40)

Jesus was concerned not only about the faith of His own disciples, but also about the faith of Mary and Martha (John 11:26, 40). Each experience of suffering and trial ought to increase our faith, but this kind of spiritual growth is not automatic. We must respond positively to the ministry of the Word and the Spirit of God. Jesus had sent a promise to the two sisters (John 11:4), and now He would discover how they had received it.

The event recorded in Luke 10:38–42 makes it clear that Mary and Martha were quite different in their personalities. Martha was the worker, the active one, while Mary was the contemplative one who sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to His word. Jesus did not condemn Martha's service, but He did rebuke her for being "torn apart" by so many things. She needed to have priorities and center her activities on the things that God would approve. As an old Wesley hymn puts it, we need to have a balanced life:

Faithful to my Lord's commands,
I still would choose the better part:
Serve with careful Martha's hands
And loving Mary's heart.

We would expect Martha to rush out to meet Jesus while Mary sat in the house, weeping with her friends. Since Mary later echoed Martha's words of greeting (John 11:32), it is likely that the sisters often said these words to each other as they waited for Jesus to arrive. While there may have been a tinge of disappointment in the statement, there was also evidence of faith, for

nobody ever died in the presence of Jesus Christ. “If” is such a big word! How futile it is to imagine what might have been, if—!

Martha was quick to affirm her faith in Jesus Christ (John 11:22), and Jesus responded to that faith by promising her that her brother would rise again. He was thinking of the immediate situation, but she interpreted His words to mean the future resurrection in the last day (Dan. 12:2–3; John 5:28–29). Here is another instance in John’s Gospel of people lacking spiritual perception and being unable to understand the words of Jesus.

Our Lord’s reply is the fifth of the I AM statements. It is important to note that Jesus did not deny what Martha said about the future resurrection. The resurrection of the human body is a cardinal doctrine in the orthodox Jewish faith. But in His great I AM statement, our Lord completely transformed the doctrine of the resurrection and, in so doing, brought great comfort to Martha’s heart.

To begin with, He brought the doctrine of the resurrection out of the shadows and into the light. The Old Testament revelation about death and resurrection is not clear or complete; it is, as it were, “in the shadows.” In fact, there are some passages in Psalms and Ecclesiastes that almost make one believe that death is the end and there is no hope beyond the grave. False teachers like to use these passages to support their heretical teachings, but they ignore (or misinterpret) the clear teachings found in the New Testament. After all, it was not David or Solomon who “brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10), but Jesus Christ!

By His teaching, His miracles, and His own resurrection, Jesus clearly taught the resurrection of the human body. He has declared once for all that death is real, that there is life after death, and that the body will one day be raised by the power of God.

He transformed this doctrine in a second way: He took it out of a book and put it into a person, Himself. “I am the resurrection and the life”! (John 11:25) While we thank God for what the Bible teaches (and all Martha had was the Old Testament), we realize that we are saved by the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and not by a doctrine written in a book. When we know Him by faith, we need not fear the shadow of death.

When you are sick, you want a doctor and not a medical book or a formula. When you are being sued, you want a lawyer and not a law book. Likewise, when you face your last enemy, death, you want the Saviour and not a doctrine written in a book. In Jesus Christ, every doctrine is made personal (1 Cor. 1:30). When you belong to Him, you have all that you ever will need in life, death, time, or eternity!

But perhaps the greatest transformation Jesus performed was to move the doctrine of the resurrection out of the future and into the present. Martha was looking to the future, knowing that Lazarus would rise again and she would see him. Her friends were looking to the past and saying, “He could have prevented Lazarus from dying!” (John 11:37) But Jesus tried to center their attention on the *present*: wherever He is, God’s resurrection power is available *now* (Rom. 6:4; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10).

Jesus affirmed that believers would one day be raised from the dead (John 11:25). Then He immediately revealed the added truth that some believers would never die (and it is a double negative, “never never die!”) (John 11:26). How is this possible? The answer is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 18. When Jesus Christ returns in the air to take His people home, those who are alive at His coming shall never die. They shall be changed and caught up to meet Him in the air!

Martha did not hesitate to affirm her faith. She used three different titles for Jesus: Lord, Christ (Messiah), and Son of God. The words “I believe” are in the perfect tense, indicating a fixed and settled faith. “I have believed and I will continue to believe!”

Our Lord dealt with Martha’s faith; now He had to help Mary. Why did Martha call Mary “secretly”? Possibly because of the danger involved: they knew that the Jewish leaders were out to arrest Jesus. When Mary arose to go to meet Jesus, her friends misunderstood her actions and thought she was going to the tomb to weep. They wanted to weep with her, so they followed along. Imagine their surprise when they met Jesus!

Mary is found three times in the Gospel record, and each time she is at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39; John 11:32; 12:3). She sat at His feet and listened to His word; she fell at His feet and poured out her sorrow; and she came to His feet to give Him her praise and worship. Mary’s only recorded words in the Gospels are given in John 11:32, and they echo what Martha had already said (John 11:21).

Mary did not say much because she was overcome with sorrow and began to weep. Her friends joined in the weeping, as Jewish people are accustomed to do. The word used means “a loud weeping, a lamentation.” Our Lord’s response was to groan within and “be moved with indignation.” At what was He indignant? At the ravages of sin in the world that He had created. Death is an enemy, and Satan uses the fear of death as a terrible weapon (Heb. 2:14–18). No wonder Jesus was indignant!

The mystery of our Lord’s incarnation is seen by His question in John 11:34. Jesus knew that Lazarus had died (John 11:11), but He had to ask where he was buried. Our Lord never used His divine powers when normal human means would suffice.

“Jesus wept” is the shortest and yet the deepest verse in Scripture. His was a silent weeping (the Greek word is used nowhere else in the New Testament) and not the loud lamentation of the mourners. But why did He weep at all? After all, He knew that He would raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11:11).

Our Lord’s weeping reveals the humanity of the Saviour. He has entered into all of our experiences and knows how we feel. In fact, being the perfect God-Man, Jesus experienced these things in a deeper way than we do. His tears also assure us of His sympathy; He is indeed “a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). Today, He is our merciful and faithful High Priest, and we may come to the throne of grace and find all the gracious help that we need (Heb. 4:14–16).

We see in His tears the tragedy of sin but also the glory of heaven. Perhaps Jesus was weeping *for* Lazarus, as well as *with* the sisters, because He knew He was calling His friend from heaven and back into a wicked world where he would one day have to die again. Jesus had come down from heaven; He knew what Lazarus was leaving behind.

The spectators saw in His tears an evidence of His love. But some of them said, “If Jesus loved Lazarus so much, why did He not prevent his death?” Perhaps they were thinking, “Jesus is weeping because He was unable to do anything. They are tears of deep regret.” In other words, *nobody present really expected a miracle!* For this reason, nobody could accuse Jesus of “plotting” this event and being in collusion with the two sisters and their friends. Even the disciples did not believe that Jesus would raise Lazarus from the dead!

The one person who declared her faith was Martha (John 11:27), and she failed at the last minute. “Open the tomb? By now he smells!” Jesus gently reminded her of the message He had sent at least three days before (John 11:4), and He urged her to believe it. True faith relies on God’s promises and thereby releases God’s power. Martha relented, and the stone was rolled away.

The Jews (John 11:41–57)

The emphasis from this point on was on the faith of the spectators, the people who had come to comfort Mary and Martha. Jesus paused to pray (John 11:41; also see 6:11) and thanked the Father that the prayer had already been heard. When had He prayed? Probably when He received the message that His friend was sick (John 11:4). The Father then told Him what the plan was, and Jesus obeyed the Father’s will. His prayer now was for the sake of the unbelieving spectators, that they might know that God had sent Him.

A quaint Puritan writer said that if Jesus had not named Lazarus when He shouted, He would have emptied the whole cemetery! Jesus called *Lazarus* and raised him from the dead. Since Lazarus was bound, he could not walk to the door of the tomb; so God’s power must have carried him along. It was an unquestioned miracle that even the most hostile spectator could not deny.

The experience of Lazarus is a good illustration of what happens to a sinner when he trusts the Savior (Eph. 2:1–10). Lazarus was dead, and all sinners are dead. He was decayed, because death and decay go together. All lost people are spiritually dead, but some are more “decayed” than others. No one can be “more dead” than another.

Lazarus was raised from the dead by the power of God, and all who trust Christ have been given new life and lifted out of the graveyard of sin (see John 5:24). Lazarus was set free from the graveclothes (see Col. 3:1ff) and given new liberty. You find him seated with Christ at the table (John 12:2), and all believers are “seated with Christ” in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6), enjoying spiritual food and fellowship.

Because of the great change in Lazarus, many people desired to see him; and his “living witness” was used by God to bring people to salvation (John 12:9–11). There are no recorded words of Lazarus in the Gospels, but his daily walk is enough to convince people that Jesus is the Son of

God. Because of his effective witness, Lazarus was persecuted by the religious leaders who wanted to kill him and get rid of the evidence.

As with the previous miracles, the people were divided in their response. Some did believe and on “Palm Sunday” gave witness of the miracle Jesus had performed (John 12:17–18). But others immediately went to the religious leaders and reported what had happened in Bethany. These “informers” were so near the kingdom, yet there is no evidence that they believed. If the heart will not yield to truth, then the grace of God cannot bring salvation. These people could have experienced a spiritual resurrection in their own lives!

It was necessary that the Jewish council (Sanhedrin) meet and discuss what to do with Jesus. They were not seeking after truth; they were seeking for ways to protect their own selfish interests. If He gathered too many followers, He might get the attention of the Roman authorities; and this could hurt the Jewish cause.

The high priest, Caiaphas, was a Sadducee, not a Pharisee (Acts 23:6–10); but the two factions could always get together to fight a common enemy. Unknown to himself and to the council, Caiaphas uttered a divine prophecy: Jesus would die for the nation so that the nation would not perish. “For the transgression of My people was He stricken” (Isa. 53:8). True to his vision of a worldwide family of God, John added his inspired explanation: Jesus would die not only for the Jews, but for all of God’s children who would be gathered together in one heavenly family. (note John 4:42 and 10:16.)

The official decision that day was that Jesus must die (see Matt. 12:14; Luke 19:47; John 5:18; 7:1, 19–20, 25). The leaders thought that *they* were in control of the situation, but it was God who was working out His predetermined plan (Acts 2:23). Originally, they wanted to wait until after the Passover, but God had decreed otherwise.

Jesus withdrew to Ephraim, about fifteen miles north of Jerusalem; and there He remained in quiet retirement with His disciples. The crowd was gathering in Jerusalem for the Passover feast, and the pilgrims were wondering if Jesus would attend the feast even though He was in danger. He was now on the “wanted” list, because the council had made it known that anyone who knew where Jesus was must report it to the officials.

John 11 reveals the deity of Jesus Christ and the utter depravity of the human heart. The rich man in Hades had argued, “If one went unto them from the dead, they will repent” (Luke 16:30). Lazarus came back from the dead, and the officials wanted to kill him! Miracles certainly reveal the power of God, but of themselves they cannot communicate the grace of God.

The stage had been set for the greatest drama in history, during which man would do his worst, and God would give His best.

Blum, E. A. (1985). John. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 312-316) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

E. The great sign at Bethany (11:1–44)

This climactic miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead was Jesus' public evidence of the truth of His great claim, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Death is the great horror which sin has produced (Rom. 5:12; James 1:15). Physical death is the divine object lesson of what sin does in the spiritual realm. As physical death ends life and separates people, so spiritual death is the separation of people from God and the loss of life which is in God (John 1:4). Jesus has come so that people may live full lives (10:10). Rejecting Jesus means that one will not see life (3:36) and that his final destiny is "the second death," the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15).

11:1–2. This **Lazarus** is mentioned in the New Testament only in this chapter and in chapter 12. **Bethany** (cf. 11:18) is on the east side of the Mount of Olives. Another Bethany is in Perea (cf. 1:28). Luke added some information on the two sisters **Mary** and **Martha** (Luke 10:38–42). **This Mary ... was the same one who** later (see John 12:1–10) **poured perfume on the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair**. However, John may be assuming that the original readers of his Gospel already had some knowledge of Mary (cf. Mark 14:3–9).

11:3. **The sisters** assumed, because of the Lord's ability and His **love** for Lazarus, that He would immediately respond to their **word** about Lazarus' illness and come.

11:4. **Jesus** did not go immediately (see v. 6). But His delay was not from lack of love (cf. v. 5), or from fear of the Jews. He waited till the right moment in the Father's plan. Lazarus' **sickness** would **not end in death**, that is, in permanent death. Instead Jesus would **be glorified** in this incident (cf. 9:3). This statement is ironic. Jesus' power and obedience to the Father were displayed, but this event led to *His* death (cf. 11:50–53), which was His true **glory** (17:1).

11:5–6. In spite of Jesus' love for all three (**Martha and her sister and Lazarus**), **He** waited **two more days**. Apparently (vv. 11, 39) Lazarus was already dead when Jesus heard about him. Jesus' movements were under God's direction (cf. 7:8).

11:7–10. **His disciples** knew that His going **to Judea**, would be dangerous (10:31). So they tried to prevent Him from going. **Jesus** spoke in a veiled way to illustrate that it would not be too dangerous to go to Bethany. In one sense He was speaking of walking (living) in physical **light** or darkness. In the spiritual realm when one lives by the will of God he is safe. Living in the realm of evil is dangerous. As long as He followed God's plan, no harm would come till the appointed time. Applied to people then, they should have responded to Jesus while He was in the world as its Light (cf. 1:4–7; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5). Soon He would be gone and so would this unique opportunity.

11:11–12. Jesus then said, **Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep**. The word "friend" has special significance in Scripture (cf. 15:13–14; James 2:23). This "sleep" is the sleep of death. Since the coming of Christ the death of a believer is regularly called a sleep (cf. Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 15:20; 1 Thes. 4:13–18). Dead Christians are asleep not in the sense of an unconscious "soul sleep," but in the sense that their bodies appear to be sleeping. The **disciples** wrongly assumed that Jesus meant Lazarus had not died, but was sleeping physically (cf. John 11:13) and was on his way to recovery: **If he sleeps, he will get better**.

11:13–15. As was often the case in the Gospels, **Jesus** was **speaking** about one thing **but** the **disciples** were thinking about another. The words **Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there** seem shocking at first. But if Lazarus had not died, the disciples (and readers of all ages) would not have had this unique opportunity to have their faith quickened. Lazarus' death was **so that you may believe**.

11:16. **Didymus** means “twin.” **Thomas** is often called “doubting Thomas” because of the incident recorded in 20:24–25. But here he took the leadership and showed his commitment to Christ, even to death. **That we may die with Him** is ironic. On one level it reveals Thomas' ignorance of the uniqueness of Christ's atoning death. On another level it is prophetic of many disciples' destinies (12:25).

11:17. Apparently **Lazarus had** died soon after the messengers left. **Jesus** was then a day's journey away. Since Palestine is warm and decomposition sets in quickly, a person was usually buried the same day he died (cf. v. 39).

11:18–19. The fact that **Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem** points up two things. It explains why **many Jews** from Jerusalem were at the scene of this great miracle (vv. 45–46). It also prepares the reader for the coming climax which was to take place in the great city. When a person died, the Jews mourned for a prolonged period of time. During this period it was considered a pious duty **to comfort** the bereaved.

11:20–22. **Martha**, the activist, **went ... to meet** Jesus while **Mary**, the contemplative sister, waited. (Cf. Luke 10:39–42 for a similar portrayal of their personalities.) Martha's greeting is a confession of faith. She really believed that **Jesus** could have healed her brother **if He had been** there. No criticism of Jesus seems to be implied since she knew her **brother** was dead before the messengers got to Jesus. Her words **But I know ... God will give You whatever You ask** might imply by themselves that she was confident Lazarus would be resuscitated. But her actions in protest at the tomb (John 11:39) and her words to Jesus (v. 24) contradict that interpretation. Her words may be taken as a general statement of the Father's blessing on Jesus.

11:23–24. **Your brother will rise again**. Since the word “again” is not in the Greek it is better to omit it in the translation. This promise sets the stage for Jesus' conversation with **Martha**. She had no thought of an immediate resuscitation but she did believe **in the final resurrection at the last day**.

11:25–26. **I am the Resurrection and the Life**. This is the fifth of Jesus' great “I am” revelations. The Resurrection and the Life of the new Age is present right now because Jesus is the Lord of life (1:4). Jesus' words about life and death are seemingly paradoxical. A believer's death issues in new life. In fact, the life of a believer is of such a quality that he **will never die** spiritually. He has eternal life (3:16; 5:24; 10:28), and the end of physical life is only a sleep for his body until the resurrection unto life. At death the spiritual part of a believer, his soul, goes to be with the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 5:6, 8; Phil. 1:23).

11:27. Martha gave a great confession of faith in Christ. She agreed with Jesus' exposition about eternal life for those who **believe** in Him. Then she confessed three things about Jesus. He is (a)

the Christ (“Messiah”), (b) **the Son of God**—which is probably a title of the Messiah (cf. 1:49; Ps. 2:7)—and (c) the One **who was to come into the world** (lit., “the Coming One”; cf. John 12:13). She believed that Jesus is the Messiah who came to do God’s will, but as yet she had no hint of the coming miracle regarding her brother.

11:28–30. Martha then told **Mary** that Jesus **the Teacher** was **asking for** her. He evidently wanted to have a private conversation with Mary. His purpose was probably to comfort and instruct her. “The Teacher” is a notable title for it was unusual for a Jewish Rabbi to instruct a woman (cf. 4:1–42).

11:31–32. Mary’s sudden departure to see Jesus caused the crowd of Jewish comforters to follow **her**. So a private session with Jesus became impossible. Reaching **Jesus**, **Mary fell at His feet**. This is significant, for on a previous occasion she had sat at Jesus’ feet listening to His teaching (Luke 10:39). Her greeting to Jesus was the same as her sister’s (John 11:21). She felt the tragedy would have been averted **if He had been** present. Her faith was sincere but limited.

11:33–34. In great contrast with the Greek gods’ apathy or lack of emotion, Jesus’ emotional life attests the reality of His union with people. **Deeply moved** may either be translated “groaned” or more likely “angered.” The Greek word *enebrimēsato* (from *embrimaomai*) seems to connote anger or sternness. (This Gr. verb is used only five times in the NT, each time of the Lord’s words or feelings: Matt. 9:30; Mark 1:43; 14:5; John 11:33, 38.)

Why was **Jesus** angry? Some have argued that He was angry because of the people’s unbelief or hypocritical wailing. But this seems foreign to the context. A better explanation is that Jesus was angry at the tyranny of Satan who had brought sorrow and death to people through sin (cf. 8:44; Heb. 2:14–15). Also Jesus was **troubled** (*etaraxen*, lit., “stirred” or “agitated,” like the pool water in John 5:7; cf. 12:27; 13:21; 14:1, 27). This disturbance was because of His conflict with sin, death, and Satan.

11:35–37. Jesus’ weeping differed from that of the people. His quiet shedding of tears (*edakrysen*) differed from their loud wailing (*klaiontas*, v. 33). His weeping was over the tragic consequences of sin. The crowd interpreted His tears as an expression of love, or frustration at not being there to heal Lazarus.

11:38–39. Disturbed emotionally (cf. comments on **deeply moved**, in v. 33), **He came to the tomb**. Tombs were often cut into limestone making **a cave** in the side of a wall of rock. **A stone** was placed over **the entrance**. **Jesus** commanded that **the stone** door be taken **away**. To do so was to risk defilement. But obedience was necessary if Jesus’ purpose was to be realized. The scene was highly dramatic. The crowd watched and listened. Mary was weeping and **Martha** objected because after **four days** putrefaction had set in.

11:40. **Jesus** reminded Martha of His earlier promise (vv. 25–26; cf. v. 4). **If she believed** His word that He is the Resurrection and the Life and trusted Him, **God** would be glorified. But unless the sisters had trusted Jesus, permission would not have been given to open the tomb.

11:41–42. With **the stone taken away**, the tension mounted. What would **Jesus** do? He simply thanked His **Father** for granting His request. He knew He was doing the Father’s will in manifesting His love and power. His prayer of thanksgiving was public, not so that He would be honored as a Wonder-Worker but so He would be seen as the Father’s obedient Son. The granting of His request by the Father would give clear evidence to the people that He had been **sent** by the Father and would cause the people to **believe** (cf. Elijah’s prayer; 1 Kings 18:37). 11:43–44. On other occasions **Jesus** had said that men would hear His voice and come out of their graves (5:28) and that His sheep hear His voice (10:16, 27). After His brief prayer He **called** (*ekraugasen*, lit., “shouted loudly”) **in a loud voice**. This verb is used only nine times in the New Testament, eight of them in the Gospels (Matt. 12:19; Luke 4:41; John 11:43; 12:13; 18:40; 19:6, 12, 15; Acts 22:23).

Jesus shouted only three words: **Lazarus come out!** Augustine once remarked that if Jesus had not said Lazarus’ name all would have come out from the graves. Immediately, **the dead man came out**. Since he was **wrapped in strips of linen**, a special work of God’s power must have brought him out. Jesus’ directive to the people, **Take off the grave clothes**, enabled Lazarus to move on his own and at the same time gave evidence that he was alive and not a ghost.

This event is a marvelous picture of God’s Son bringing life to people. He will do this physically at the Rapture for church saints (1 Thes. 4:16), and at His return for Old Testaments saints (Dan. 12:2) and Tribulation saints (Rev. 20:4, 6). Also He now speaks and calls spiritually dead people to spiritual life. Many who are dead in sins and trespasses believe and come to life by the power of God (Eph. 2:1–10).

F. The plot to kill Jesus (11:45–57).

11:45–47a. Jesus’ revelation of Himself always produces two responses. For **many of the Jews**, this miracle was clear proof of Jesus’ claim. In response they trusted **Him**. **But** others were only hardened in sin or confused. They **went to His enemies, the Pharisees, and** reported **what** had happened. This miraculous sign was so significant that **the chief priests and the Pharisees** decided to call an emergency session **of the Sanhedrin** (see comments on 3:1 on the Sanhedrin). Doubtless they felt that Jesus was some kind of magician who by secret arts was deceiving the people.

11:47b–48. The council expressed its inability to solve the problem by continuing to do what they had been doing. Official disapproval, excommunication, and counterteaching were not stopping Jesus’ influence. The outcome would be insurrection and **the Romans** would crush the Jewish revolt; taking **away both our place** (i.e., the temple) **and our nation**.

11:49–50. **Caiaphas** was the **high priest that year** (cf. 18:13–14, 24, 28). Originally the high priest held his position for a lifetime, but the Romans were afraid of letting a man gain too much power. So the Romans appointed high priests at their convenience. Caiaphas had the office from a.d. 18 to 36. His contempt was expressed in his words, **You know nothing at all!** His judgment was **that this Man** must be sacrificed if the **nation** was to continue in Rome’s favor. The alternative was destruction of the Jewish nation in war (11:48). But their rejection of Jesus did not solve the problem. The Jewish people followed false shepherds into a war against Rome (a.d. 66–70), which did in fact destroy their nation.

11:51–53. John by God’s Spirit recognized a deep irony in Caiaphas’ words. **As the high priest**, Caiaphas pointed to the last sacrificial Lamb in a prophecy he did not even know he made. Caiaphas meant **Jesus** had to be killed, but God intended the priest’s words as a reference to His substitutionary atonement. Jesus’ death would abolish the old system in God’s eyes by fulfilling all its types and shadows. His death was not only for Jews but also for the world, thus making a new body from both (cf. Eph. 2:14–18; 3:6). The Sanhedrin then decided to kill Jesus.

11:54. **Jesus ... withdrew** from Bethany **to a village** 15 or so miles to the north **called Ephraim**. The little village provided a place for rest and it was close to the wilderness of Judea in case it was necessary to escape.

11:55–57. **Jewish** pilgrims **went up to the Passover** feast at **Jerusalem** and looked **for Jesus**. Previously (2:13–25) He had attended the national festivals during which time He publicly taught **in the temple area**. Would He continue this pattern of ministry? Large crowds gathering in the city **kept looking for** Him. The religious authorities gave **orders** for **anyone** to **report** if he **found out where Jesus was** so **they** could **arrest Him**.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 11. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.