



When Jesus Speaks: Through His Miracles, Week #4 LAZARUS More Miracles SIGNS from John

Miracles break this 400 years of “silence” (mindsets were created as well as civic structure):

- God’s silence is broken by John the Baptist’s declaration of Jesus’ miraculous birth.
- His miracles force us to say “yes” or “no” to Him.
- They authenticate His ministry.
- They reveal His character.

- 1. Jesus turns water to wine.** John 2:1–11
- 2. Jesus heals a nobleman’s son.** John 4:46–54
3. Jesus provides a great catch of fish. *Luke 5:1–11*
4. Jesus heals a demoniac in a synagogue. *Mark 1:21–28; Luke 4:31–37*
5. Jesus heals Peter’s wife’s mother. *Luke 4:38, 39; Matthew 8:14–15; Mark 1:29–31*
6. Jesus cleanses a leper. *Mark 1:40–45; Luke 5:12–15*
7. Jesus heals a paralytic. *Luke 5:18–26; Matthew 9:2–7; Mark 2:3–12*
- 8. Jesus heals a cripple at Bethesda.** *John 5:1–18*
9. Jesus heals a withered hand. *Luke 6:6–10; Matthew 12:9–14; Mark 3:1–6*
10. Jesus heals a centurion’s servant. *Matthew 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10*
11. Jesus raises a widow’s son. *Luke 7:11–17*
12. Jesus stills a storm. *Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25; Matthew 8:23–27*
13. Jesus delivers a demoniac in Gedara. *Luke 8:27–39; Matthew 8:28–34; Mark 5:1–20*
14. Jesus heals a hemorrhaging woman. *Luke 8:43–48; Matthew 9:20–22; Mark 5:25–34*
15. Jesus raises Jairus’s daughter. *Luke 8:41–56; Matthew 9:18–26; Mark 5:22–43*
16. Jesus heals two blind men. *Matthew 9:27–31*
17. Jesus casts out a dumb spirit. *Matthew 9:32–35*
- 18. Jesus feeds 5,000 people.** *John 6:1–14; Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17*
- 19. Jesus walks on water.** *Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–52; John 6:15–21*
20. Jesus heals a Syro-phonician girl. *Matthew 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30*
21. Jesus heals a deaf and dumb man. *Mark 7:31–37*
22. Jesus feeds 4,000 people. *Matthew 15:30–38; Mark 8:1–9*
23. Jesus heals a blind man. *Mark 8:22–26*
24. Jesus delivers a demonized boy. *Mark 9:14–29; Matthew 17:14–21; Luke 9:37–43*
25. Jesus provides money in a fish’s mouth. *Matthew 17:24–27*
- 26. Jesus heals a man born blind.** *John 9*
27. Jesus heals a woman bound by Satan. *Luke 13:10–17*
28. Jesus heals a man with dropsy. *Luke 14:1–6*
- 29. Jesus raises Lazarus.** *John 11*
30. Jesus cleanses ten lepers. *Luke 17:11–19*
31. Jesus heals Bartimaeus. *Matthew 20:29–34; Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:35–43*
32. Jesus curses a fig tree. *Matthew 21:17–22; Mark 11:12–14, 20–24*
- 33. Jesus replaces Malchus’s ear.** *Matthew 26:51–56; Mark 14:46, 47; Luke 22:50, 51; John 18:10, 11*
- 34. Wonders at Calvary.** Mt 28, Luke 24, Mark 16, John 20
- 35. Jesus provides a catch of fish.** *John 21:1–14*

¹ Richards, L. (1998). *Every miracle in the Bible* (pp. 163–165). Nashville: T. Nelson.



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Water to Wine, John 2:1–11

Official’s Son Healed, 4:46–52

Paralytic Healed, 5:1–13

Blind Man Healed, 9:1–12

Lazarus Raised, 11:38–44

Great Catch of Fish, 21:1–14

**What is Jesus saying to us in this Miracle?
Do my beliefs about Jesus and His power need to change?
How, then, should my actions change?**

4th. Jesus heals a man born blind

Jesus is the only one who can give light to those lost in darkness (spiritually as well as physically).
(He can create what is not there.)

3rd. Jesus heals an unbelieving invalid at Bethesda

Jesus and the Father are ONE. (Master of Time?)*

As Jesus went to find the man to let him know it was Christ who had the power to heal an unbeliever Jesus is the one who can bring Salvation. **Jesus and the Father are ONE:**

- Grace bestowed on anyone He chooses (believer or unbeliever)
- Even on the Sabbath (He is LORD of the Sabbath)
- Power over the hopeless. (38 year invalid)

2nd. Jesus heals a nobleman’s son. John 4:46–54

Jesus’ Words are the Power of God [Jesus spoke and what He says is Truth]

- The greatest demonstration of God’s deity is His ability to create everything by the power of His word. That’s who He is. That’s what He does. **His words are not just informative; they are performative.** Divine words spoken long-distance from over eighteen miles away had caused the terminally sick boy to recover.

Jesus Says:

- Believe and inherit eternal life. **John 3:16**
- Your sins are forgiven. **Mark 2:9**
- Faith comes through hearing God’s Word. **Romans 10:17**
- His Word exposes our inner thoughts. **Hebrews 4:12**
- His Word cleanses. **Ephesians 5:25-26**
- His Word Sanctifies. **John 17:17**
- His Word bears much fruit when it grows in our life. **John 15:7-8**
- His Word defeats the Enemy of our souls. **Ephesians 6:17**

1st. Jesus turns water to wine. John 2:1–11

Jesus Transforms

John’s Gospel **describes Jesus’ miracles as explanatory signs** (σημεῖα, *sēmeia*); the text never calls them “miracles” (δύναμεις, *dynamis*; Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic*, 88).

Roberts, R. D. (2016). [Miracle](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

**What is Jesus saying to me in this Miracle?
Do my beliefs about Jesus and His power need to change?
How, then, should my actions change?**



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Chapter 2 opens a new section of the gospel, containing John's account of the public ministry of Jesus from its commencement in Galilee to its climax in Jerusalem. It is organized around seven miracles. John's word for them is 'signs' (*semeia*), which is his alternative to 'miracles' or 'wonders'. John does not of course have any reservation about the operation of the supernatural in respect of these mighty works of power. He is concerned, however, to see beyond the miracles to their significance; they are signs, *i.e.* **special actions by Jesus which reveal his glory to those who believe and which confront others with the need to decide about Jesus.**

It is worth observing that this understanding of Jesus' miracles is somewhat different from that of the synoptic evangelists. Their favourite words for the miracles, *dynameis*, acts of power, and *terata*, portents, miracles, occur in John not at all in the former case, and only once (4:48) in the case of the latter.

The distinction can be put in this way: for the synoptic writers Jesus' miracles are actual occasions of the incursion of the kingdom of God. 'Fundamentally [they] are acts by which Jesus establishes God's reign and defeats the reign of Satan.' For John, the miracles, though no less real as historical acts of supernatural power, are more symbolic; they point beyond themselves to Jesus and his significance. Put more succinctly, the synoptic miracles are essentially eschatological, John's essentially christological. For John, faith based on miraculous signs is not regarded as satisfactory.² It is, however, at least a step beyond those who willfully refuse to even see the signs.

One other aspect of the 'signs' is worth noting. Jesus commonly refers to them as 'works' (*erga*). 'Works' can also include his words (*cf.* 14:10). The use of 'works' directly links the ministry of Jesus to that of the Father—'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working' (5:17). So close is the union of Son with Father that the works of Jesus can be considered as the Father's works in him (14:10). Thus the signs, like the entire gospel, confront us with Jesus and the inescapable challenge, 'Who are you?' (8:25).

There is some consensus among commentators that the two events in chapter 2, the changing of the water into wine at Cana, and the cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem, establish the terms of Jesus' ministry. They also anticipate Christ's future work. 'To attend a marriage feast and to cleanse the temple were among the first acts of our Lord's ministry at his first coming. To purify the whole visible Church and hold a marriage supper will be among his first acts, when he comes again.'²

John 20:30-31

The Purpose of This Book

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

² Milne, B. (1993). *The message of John: here is your king!: with study guide* (pp. 62–63). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.



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5th Johannian Only Miracle in John's Gospel
7th Recorded Miracle in John's Gospel
Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

John 11

(In chronological order, this would be recorded miracle #29)

Reminder:

- John uses the phrase “the Jews” for the Religious leaders and the Pharisees.

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 2:11

This, the first of his **signs**, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and **manifested his glory**. And his disciples **believed in him**.

[Signs of Holy Spirit Filled Ministry are for WHAT?]

The Death of Lazarus

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” ⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” ⁸ The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews **were just now seeking to stone you**, and are you going there again?” ⁹ Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰ But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” ¹¹ After saying these things, he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.” ¹² The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” ¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, **but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.** ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” ¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that **we may die with him.**”

Jesus and His Disciples:

- Do we see any signs of closeness? (they want to stone you!)
- They removed themselves from the Jews, why?
[not to cause more unrest until the time is right? Was Jesus preparing Himself for the Passover-Death-Burial-Resurrection?

John 10:40-42

⁴⁰ He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained. ⁴¹ And many came to him. And they said, “John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.” ⁴² And many believed in him there.

- They still did not understand everything Jesus was saying. Why should we be flustered when we do not?
- Lazarus ‘sleeps’...

When I go down to the grave, I can say like so many others that I have finished my day's work; but I cannot say that I have finished my life. Another day's work will begin the next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley—it is a thoroughfare. It closes with the twilight to open with the dawn. *Victor Hugo*



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- Jesus took the time to clarify.
- 20 miles away from Bethany - Jesus and his disciples were across the Jordan River in Perea when word of Lazarus's illness arrived ([John 10:40](#)).
- Waited two days before departing...why?
- Jesus says...*Let us go to him* (15). Him, we note, is a person, not a corpse.
- "Doubting Thomas"? [Live for Him VS Die for Him]

Why are they 'removed from society'?

John 10: I and the Father Are One

²² At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

²⁵ Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

³¹ **The Jews picked up stones again to stone him.** ³² Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" ³³ The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God." ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? ³⁵ If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—³⁶ do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? ³⁷ **If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; ³⁸ but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.**" ³⁹ Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.

⁴⁰ He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained. ⁴¹ And many came to him. And they said, "John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." ⁴² And many believed in him there.

I Am the Resurrection and the Life

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb **four days**. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and **many of the Jews** had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Why Four days?

- 3 days = Coma check. After that, decay shows.

A Family of Friends

- Well known/liked/connected family, so many visitors.
- Odd that Martha (and Mary) own their own place. No children? Older?

Luke 10:38 Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.

- Similarities between Jesus' relationship w/Martha, Mary, Lazarus as w/Disciples?
- Sweetness of familiarity.
- Bold truth stated with personal questions of belief and application. HONEST CONVERSATION
- Jesus revealed Himself (like He did with Peter "Who do you say that I am?" Mark 8:28-29)
- An understanding of WHO Jesus is and WHAT He is supposed to do (John 12 – Mary anoints Jesus with 'burial oil'?)



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Verse 17 brings us directly to the time-frame of this sign. Whatever our view of the geographical sub-plot it is clear that Jesus' moment of arrival is **deliberately designed** so that *Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days* (17). The reason for this must now be explored.

There is good rabbinic evidence for a Jewish belief that, for three days after death, the soul of the deceased person 'hovered' around the body seeking re-entry. On the fourth day, 'when it sees the colour of its face has changed (*i.e.* that decomposition has commenced) then it goes away and leaves it'. This evidence is from the third century and so some caution needs to be exercised in assuming that it was held generally in Jesus' day. Hoskyns, however, finds a more general cultural support for the distinction between the third and fourth days. Hospitality in the East allowed visitors a stay of three days' duration, a day to rest, a day for fellowship and a day for departure. To stay on for a fourth day was a very serious breach of etiquette. A similar distinction between the third and fourth days was apparently later used by some Christians to test the validity of a travelling prophet. True prophets would be on their way by the end of the third day. Those staying longer were spongers on Christian hospitality. There is a similar conviction in the ancient Persian religion, Zoroastrianism, that on the morning of the fourth day after death the soul finally abandons the body and passes over the bridge Cinvat, where the good and evil are separated from each other. Hoskyns describes the belief in this distinction as 'widespread' among the Jews of that period.¹³⁹ Edersheim mentions that Jewish mourning customs viewed the first three days after death as being for the greatest and most intense mourning, during which the dead person was still present to witness the grief of his or her family and friends.

Turning to strictly biblical data, we should note the importance of the third day after death, especially significant in respect of the resurrection of Jesus (cf. Ho. 6:2; cf. 20:1). The time of Jesus' arrival, therefore, coincided with the conclusion of the first three intense days of mourning, the period when the soul has left the body beyond any recall and decomposition had set in. Jesus deliberately withholds his succour until the enemy he is confronting has assumed a fullness of authority and destructiveness. **The greater the challenge, the greater the miracle, and the greater the strengthening of his followers' faith as a result; and above all, the greater the glory accruing to his Father through it.**

The presence of mourners reflected the Jewish custom. Rabbis taught the solemn duty of comforting mourners, and the sisters clearly had a significant company of friends in the nearby city, probably confirming the impression (*cf.* 12:3) that theirs was a family of some means.

Jesus Weeps

²⁸ *When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you."* ²⁹ *And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.* ³⁰ *Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.* ³¹ *When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.* ³² *Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* ³³ *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, **he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.*** ³⁴ *And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."* ³⁵ *Jesus wept.* ³⁶ *So 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 also have kept this man from dying?"*

What Jesus KNOWS:

- That He will be calling Lazarus out to live again – HOW does He know this?
- No matter what He does, He will be judged. His personal affirmation comes from...His worship relationship with His Father. Obedience. Watching the Disciples 'get it'.
- Jesus wept...why?

The further and somewhat unexpected element in John's description of Jesus' reaction is in the verb in verses 33, and 38, translated **deeply moved** in the NIV. This word (*embrimaomai*), when used outside the Bible, can refer to the snorting of horses; applied to human emotion it invariably speaks of anger! We may cite Schnack-enberg, 'The word, *embrimasthai* ... indicates an outburst of anger, and any attempt to interpret it in terms of an internal emotional upset caused by grief, pain or sympathy is illegitimate.' Thus G. R. Beasley-Murray offers in translation: 'Jesus ... became angry in spirit,'¹⁴⁴ and D. A. Carson suggests: 'He was outraged in spirit ...'. B. B. Warfield comments forcefully: 'What John tells us, in point of fact, is that Jesus approached the grave of Lazarus in a state, not of uncontrollable grief but of inexpressible anger. True, he did also respond with tears (35), but the emotion which tore his breast and clamoured for utterance was just rage.' Once again in this gospel, as at the cleansing of the temple (2:15), we encounter the 'wrath of the Lamb'.



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Jesus Raises Lazarus

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² **I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.**" ⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." ⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

- Does Martha not believe?
- "I know you always hear me" did God tell Jesus that this last big miracle before the Resurrection would be Lazarus? Or did Jesus just walk in obedience and 'notice' the acceleration? After hearing Lazarus was sick, spending time in God's presence, knowing this was 2nd to the last step?
- Making sure ALL knew it was to be to God's glory that Lazarus was being raised. (The killing of the "my ministry" mindset.
- Lazarus was a 'silent and powerful' witness to the Messiah. He never speaks. There are no details of him.

The Plot to Kill Jesus

⁴⁵ **Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him,** ⁴⁶ **but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.** ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, **"You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."** ⁵¹ **He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation,** ⁵² and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³ So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

⁵⁴ **Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples.**

⁵⁵ Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. ⁵⁶ They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?" ⁵⁷ Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

- Imagine, seeing a dead man rise and your first thought is: I need to tell the authorities.
- Tipping point for the Religious Leaders & Pharisees – Jesus is really too powerful. He now must die. And Lazarus along with Him (**John 12:10-11**).
- Caiaphas' prophetic word: ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." ⁵¹ He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation,
- Did Caiaphas ever understand he was prophesying? A Messianic prophecy?
- Christ did die to keep 'the conqueror' away. Not Rome but Death.
- The desire for Jesus to be removed became a reality. They began working on a plan. What was their plan?



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Small Group ASK:

- **What does this story of Lazarus teach us about God’s ‘delays’ (timing)?**

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

- They are inevitable.
 - They are not final.
- **When Thomas utters** *“¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”*

What does that look like in our life today? How is that sentiment applicable to my life?

Thomas reflects a whole-heartedness which will find later expression (cf. 20:28). He also unwittingly lays out the terms of following Jesus: *Let us also go, ... that we may die with him*. The invitation to follow Jesus is precisely that. ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’ (Mk. 8:34). ‘When Jesus calls a man to follow him he bids him come and die.’ The disciples, however, have still to learn this lesson in experience. A fiery crucible awaits them before they too will walk the way of the cross.

- **What is John communicating about Christ in this Miracle?**
(About Jesus’ Divinity and His unique Mission).

“Special actions by Jesus which reveal his glory to those who believe and which confront others with the need to decide about Jesus.”

CLOSING:

Jesus – Martha – Mary – Lazarus – The mourners – The chief priests and Pharisees – Caiaphas

Revelation 21:4 *He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

The Coming of the Lord

¹³ *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, ^[d] that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

What is Jesus saying to me in this Miracle? Do I relate more to Martha? Mary? Disciples?
Do my beliefs about Jesus and His power need to change? When God, delays, my reaction is....
How, then, should my actions change?



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5th. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. Jesus has Power over death.

4th. Jesus heals a man born blind

Jesus is the only one who can give light to those lost in darkness (spiritually as well as physically).
(He can create what is not there.)

3rd. Jesus heals an unbelieving invalid at Bethesda

Jesus and the Father are ONE. (Master of Time?)*

As Jesus went to find the man to let him know it was Christ who had the power to heal an unbeliever
Jesus is the one who can bring Salvation. **Jesus and the Father are ONE:**

- Grace bestowed on anyone He chooses (believer or unbeliever)
- Even on the Sabbath (He is LORD of the Sabbath)
- Power over the hopeless. (38 year invalid)

2nd. Jesus heals a nobleman's son. John 4:46–54

Jesus' Words are the Power of God [Jesus spoke and what He says is Truth]

- The greatest demonstration of God's deity is His ability to create everything by the power of His word. That's who He is. That's what He does. **His words are not just informative; they are performative.** Divine words spoken long-distance from over eighteen miles away had caused the terminally sick boy to recover.

Jesus Says:

- Believe and inherit eternal life. **John 3:16**
- Your sins are forgiven. **Mark 2:9**
- Faith comes through hearing God's Word. **Romans 10:17**
- His Word exposes our inner thoughts. **Hebrews 4:12**
- His Word cleanses. **Ephesians 5:25-26**
- His Word Sanctifies. **John 17:17**
- His Word bears much fruit when it grows in our life. **John 15:7-8**
- His Word defeats the Enemy of our souls. **Ephesians 6:17**

1st. Jesus turns water to wine. John 2:1–11

Jesus Transforms



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NOTES:

JESUS RAISES LAZARUS [John 11](#)

Jesus restored life to Lazarus three days after his death.

Background of the miracle. Jesus had already restored the life of a widow's son ([Luke 7](#)) and Jairus's daughter ([Luke 8](#); [Mark 5](#)). Each of these restorations occurred immediately after the person had died.

The custom in first-century Judaism was to bury an individual on the day of his death. But the Jews were aware of the possibility of a coma, so they would check a tomb for three days after the burial to see if the victim had revived. After three days, all hope of awakening from a coma was gone, and the body would have begun to decay.

The raising of Lazarus was significant because it took place the full three days after he had died, plus one extra day ([John 11:39](#))! There could be no doubt in anyone's mind that Christ had restored a person who was truly dead.

It is no wonder that this most spectacular of Jesus' miracles troubled the chief priests and Pharisees. After this, they were certain that "if we let him alone like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation" ([John 11:48](#)). Thus the greatest proof of who Jesus was became the critical event that drove the Jewish hierarchy to seek Jesus' death ([John 11:53](#)).

There can be no vacillation for modern believers. We must accept Jesus for who he is, acknowledging him as Lord. If we fail to do this, we take sides with the rulers of first-century Israel and choose to force him out of our lives.

Parties to the miracle. The entire chapter is devoted to this miracle account and Jesus' interaction with the people involved. These include: Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus; the disciples, and especially Thomas. John also reports the reaction of those who had come to comfort the sisters as well as the response of the Jewish leaders.

Jesus. Jesus is portrayed in this account as one who dearly loved Lazarus and his sisters. Yet he failed to respond to an urgent plea to come and heal his friend. The delay seems out of character. But when Jesus finally did arrive, Mary—perhaps with some hint of rebuke—declared, "If You had been here, my brother would not have died" ([John 11:32](#)).

Jesus called on the sisters to believe that he had power over death in the present as well as at history's end. Then Jesus called to Lazarus, who stumbled out of his tomb—still wrapped in the strips of linen that served as burial clothes.

The disciples. Jesus and his disciples were across the Jordan River in Perea when word of Lazarus's illness arrived ([John 10:40](#)). They had retreated in part because the hostility of the leaders had become so intense that Christ was in danger of being stoned ([John 11:8](#)).

After the messenger's arrival, Jesus stayed in Perea for two more days. Then he told his disciples, "Let us go to Judea again" ([John 11:7](#)). The disciples were afraid. They objected when Christ told them that "Lazarus is asleep," assuming that Jesus meant that Lazarus was resting after the crisis had passed. But Jesus meant that Lazarus was dead. He stated his intention to wake him. The disciples' fears were reflected by Thomas, who declared, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" ([John 11:16](#)).

Thomas. This disciple is commonly known as "doubting" Thomas because of his refusal to believe in Christ's resurrection until he could touch the wounds in Jesus' hands and side. But here we see Thomas in a different light, as "loyal" Thomas.

Thomas was certain that danger awaited all of them in Judea. But he encouraged the disciples to stay with Christ. Thomas had no hope; he did not expect to die *for* Jesus, or to be able to turn the danger aside. The best Thomas and the others could expect was to die *with* Jesus. And this Thomas was ready to do. Nothing could separate loyal Thomas from his Lord.



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We are blessed because God has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” ([Heb. 13:5](#)). Courageous Thomas reminds us that we are to be as committed to God as he is to us—whatever the danger, whatever the cost.

Martha. She and her sister Mary were close to Jesus. They often sheltered him in their Bethany home when he visited Jerusalem. Bethany, about twenty miles from Perea, was only two miles outside Jerusalem. Christ stayed at Bethany when Jerusalem was crowded with pilgrims during the annual festivals.

When Martha saw Jesus, she expressed faith in him: “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” But Martha went on to say that “even now” ([11:28](#)) she believed God would give Jesus whatever he asked.

This statement was one of great faith, but even Martha’s faith couldn’t grasp Jesus’ meaning when he told her, “Your brother will rise again” ([John 11:23](#)). She assumed that Jesus was speaking of the final resurrection at history’s end. Jesus then affirmed that he was the resurrection and the life. The eschatological hope was present in his person. God’s plans and promises were fulfilled *in him*.

Martha, still unaware of what Jesus intended, confessed her belief that Jesus truly was the Christ, the Son of God.

How often Martha is remembered only for her attention to dinner preparations and her criticism of Mary, who chose instead to listen to Jesus’ teachings ([Luke 10:40, 41](#)). Here we see Martha in a far more flattering light, as one whose faith in Jesus burned bright and true—and one whose faith was about to be rewarded!

Mary. Mary, the second sister, then came out to greet Jesus. Like Martha, she expressed her faith: “If You had been here, my brother would not have died.” But unlike her sister, Mary sobbed as she spoke. Even if she shared her sister’s hope, she must not have felt it in her moment of loss.

Lazarus. We know little about Lazarus. He is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, although we are told that Jesus had developed a deep affection for him. Even after Lazarus was raised, John’s account mentions nothing of what Lazarus felt or said or did. **But he was a silent and powerful witness to the power of Jesus.**

There are many unknown people whose actual words have not been passed on to future generations, but whose restored lives serve as powerful witnesses to Jesus Christ. Many times a believer does not need to say anything: the difference Jesus makes in his or her life will shine through brightly. May our lives, renewed and transformed by Jesus, be the witness to our neighbors that Lazarus was to his.

The mourners. The mourners who had come to comfort Mary and Martha were stunned by Jesus’ miracle. Many “believed in him” ([John 11:45](#)). But others rushed to report to the Pharisees what Jesus had done. By this time, the entire city of Jerusalem was aware of the attitude of the Pharisees toward Jesus. Those who hurried to them certainly didn’t go with an intent to witness!

The chief priests and Pharisees. These men had to admit that “this man works many signs” ([11:47](#)). But they didn’t intend to submit to him. Instead, their hostile attitude toward Jesus became even more fixed, and they determined to kill him—one way or another.

Caiaphas. As the Jewish high priest, Caiaphas served as president of the Sanhedrin. He summed up the fears of the religious leaders and passed judgment. Jesus must die.

In saying “it is expedient... that one man should die for the people” ([11:50](#)), Caiaphas was representing the leaders’ concern. As the founder of a messianic movement, Jesus’ teaching might stimulate a rebellion, bringing Roman armies against Judea. Some interpreters have argued that Caiaphas’ reference to the Romans’ taking away “both our place and nation” expressed fear for the temple (“our place”). It is far more likely he was referring to the privileges enjoyed by his own priestly class.

While Caiaphas had one thing in mind, his words were prophetic. Christ would die for the nation—not to keep the Roman armies away, but to defeat sin and Satan and make eternal life available to all.

How the story unfolds. Jesus and his disciples were about twenty miles from Bethany when a messenger arrived with word that Lazarus was sick. For two days Jesus did nothing. Then he told his disciples it was time to return to



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Judea, explaining that Lazarus was “asleep” (has died). The fearful disciples accompanied Jesus on the day-long walk back to Bethany.

Martha hurried out to meet Jesus, expressing her belief that if Jesus had been there her brother would not have died. Jesus announced that he was the resurrection and the life, leading her to confess her belief that he was the Christ, the Son of God.

Martha then brought out Mary, who also expressed her belief that if Jesus had been with them her brother would not have died. Mary was weeping, heartbroken; and as Jesus followed her to Lazarus’s tomb, he also wept.

At the tomb, Jesus told the onlookers to roll away the stone that closed the burial place. Martha objected. Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days: there would be a stench. But Jesus reminded her of their earlier conversation, and the stone was rolled away.

Jesus then thanked the Father aloud for always hearing him. He offered this prayer for the sake of the bystanders, that they might believe God had sent him. Jesus then shouted, “Lazarus, come forth!” ([John 11:43](#)). And the dead man, restored to life, stumbled out into the light, still wrapped in his grave clothes and his face covered with a cloth.

On Jesus’ command, the tight wrappings were removed, and many of the stunned onlookers believed in Jesus.

Other witnesses to the miracle hurried into Jerusalem to carry word to the religious leaders. These men gathered almost in despair. What could they do? Jesus was performing such amazing miracles that soon everyone would believe in him!

There was no thought in their minds that *they* should consider his claims. Jesus was too great a threat to their own position and to the *status quo*! They concluded that Jesus must die. From that day forward, they set about getting rid of this “Christ.” John revealed in his Gospel that they even plotted to kill Lazarus, whose existence was a convincing witness to Jesus’ power ([John 12:10, 11](#)).

Jesus, knowing their intent, withdrew with his disciples to a remote town ([John 11:54](#)), where he stayed quietly until the next Passover arrived ([John 12:1](#)).

“He whom you love is sick” ([John 11:3](#)). The sisters had no doubt of Jesus’ love for their brother. How they must have anguished as the messenger hurried to Jesus. But before he could cover the 20 miles to tell Jesus, Lazarus died.

“For the glory of God” ([11:4](#)). Although Lazarus was dead when the messenger arrived, Christ said that the sickness would not *end in death*. The end would be life restored, and Christ glorified.

Our sicknesses too—even our last sickness—will not end in death. History is rushing even now toward God’s intended end—resurrection and life eternal for Christ’s own. For the glory of God!

“Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” ([11:5](#)). It is often harder for those left behind to sense God’s love for them than to believe that God loved the person who has died. John through his Gospel wanted us to know that Jesus does care, deeply, for the grieving.

“Our friend Lazarus sleeps” ([11:11](#)). The Bible appropriately speaks of death as sleep ([1 Cor. 15:51](#); [1 Thess. 4:14](#)). We can be confident as we lie down at the end of our earthly existence that we will awaken, and rise again.

“He groaned in the spirit and was troubled” ([11:33](#)). This—and the shortest verse in Scripture, “Jesus wept” ([John 11:35](#))—reminds us that even as God permits our suffering, he feels with us.

Christ knew that he was about to bring Lazarus back to life. But he did not discount the pain of his dear friends. Instead, he entered into their pain, felt it deeply, and wept with them.

It is good for us to remember that God is committed to bringing good out of all the things that happen to us ([Rom. 8:28](#)). Yet it is important to remember that God takes our hand in the meantime and does not abandon us in our sorrow. He feels our pain. And he weeps with us as we grieve. And then, when the time is right, God will wipe away all tears from our eyes, welcoming us into the glory he intends for us and our loved ones to share ([Rev. 21:4](#)).



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“I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25). There is no clearer statement in Scripture of the significance of Jesus for us individually. He is the resurrection and the life. His is the power; he is the source. Those who believe in him may die physically, but they will live eternally. This is his promise to us if we will trust in Jesus as the resurrection and the life.

This truth points us toward the ultimate significance of the miracle. Jesus’ claim to be the resurrection and the life was proven by the restoration of Lazarus. Jesus’ deeds always backed up his words.

Today we can contemplate this miracle, finding in it a foreshadowing of what lies ahead. One day Christ will return and shout to our dead, “Come forth.” Then we will arise, and together with the believers alive in that day, rise up to meet the Lord in the air ([1 Thess. 4:16, 17](#)).

Truly Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

JESUS RESTORES MALCHUS’S EAR [Matthew 26:51–56](#); [Mark 14:46, 47](#); [Luke 22:50, 51](#); [John 18:10, 11](#)

When Peter struck a member of the mob that had come to take Jesus, he cut off part of the ear of a man named Malchus. Jesus touched the ear and healed it.

Background of the miracle. Jesus’ last miracle before his death was performed on the night of his capture and trial, just hours before his crucifixion. A mob led by Judas arrested him on the Mount of Olives in the garden of Gethsemane.

Only John, who was from a wealthy family which maintained a large house in Jerusalem, names Malchus. He was “the” servant of the high priest, an important official in his own right and clearly a person whom John knew. It is ironic that Jesus’ last miracle of healing was performed for an enemy who had come with the mob to make sure Christ was arrested.

Parties to the miracle. The miracle is not the focus of the story, but it seems almost an aside. Judas led a mob to Gethsemane to take Jesus prisoner. Peter, named only in John’s Gospel, resisted the arrest and struck out with his weapon, cutting off part of Malchus’s ear. Jesus restored the ear, then told his disciples not to resist and left with the crowd as they went back to Jerusalem.

Jesus. Although he was being arrested, Jesus was clearly in command of the situation.

Peter. Frightened by the crowd, Peter drew a weapon and struck one of the mob that had come to take Jesus away.

Malchus. As an important official of the Jewish high priest, Malchus was probably in charge of the detail which had come to bring Jesus in for trial. He was accompanied by a mob carrying torches and weapons.

How the story unfolds. Jesus had finished a time of prayer and returned to his disciples when a mob led by Judas appeared. Judas pointed out Jesus. As the mob surged forward to seize him, Peter drew a weapon and struck at the group. He cut off part of the ear of the servant of the high priest, whom John identified as Malchus.

Jesus told Peter to put his sword back in its place. Jesus could have called legions of angels to defend him. But the Scriptures had to be fulfilled, so it was necessary that he be taken away.

“Drew his sword” (Matthew 26:51). The word for “sword” and “knife” are the same in Greek, so we can’t be sure what kind of weapon Peter drew. It is clear that he attacked the crowd with it in an attempt to defend Jesus.

“Cut off his ear” (26:51). Mark uses the diminutive Greek word *otarium* for ear, suggesting that perhaps only the ear lobe was cut off. This would explain why [Luke 22:51](#) indicates that Jesus healed the ear rather than reattaching it. In any case, this was a gracious miracle which he performed for an enemy.

“Put your sword in its place” (26:52). [Luke 22:38](#) indicates the disciples had two swords, and [22:49](#) points out that other disciples were only awaiting Jesus’ word to fight back. But Peter didn’t wait for Jesus’ command; he drew his weapon and struck! This was so like Peter.

Pacifists have argued for nonresistance from this passage, while their opponents have noted that Jesus told Peter to put his sword back, not throw it away. But this account of Jesus’ capture is hardly one on which to base arguments over pacifism. Jesus himself said he could have called on legions of angels to fight for him, if this had been God’s will.

Christ allowed himself to be taken so “the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus” ([Matt. 26:54](#)).

The meaning of the miracle. This last miracle, taking place just before Jesus was arrested and sentenced to death, is a striking reminder. Christ was not *forced* to the cross. He was never overpowered by his opponents. He could have escaped the fate they intended for him at any time.

Jesus’ last miracle was actually a warning to his accusers, who refused to believe his claims to be the Christ—in spite of the evidence of his signs and wonders. As Jesus warned them during his trial, “I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” ([Matt. 26:64](#)).

Those who refuse to accept healing at Jesus’ hand will surely face his judgment.

JESUS CAUSES A GREAT CATCH OF FISH [John 21:1–14](#)

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples by the Sea of Galilee and caused a great catch of fish.



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Background of the miracle. This is the second miraculous catch of fish reported in the Gospels. The first was associated with the calling of the disciples as Jesus' followers (see p. 176). This extraordinary catch of fish is related to the recommissioning of Peter and Jesus' call to "follow Me."

Parties to the miracle. The parties to this miracle were the resurrected Jesus and his disciples, with the focus on Peter.

Jesus. This was the third time the disciples had seen Jesus following his resurrection. The other two took place in Jerusalem. This appearance was by the Sea of Galilee.

Peter. Back in Galilee, Peter took the lead and announced that he was going fishing ([John 21:3](#)). A man of action, Peter may have been unable to wait patiently for Jesus to come to them (see [Matt. 28:7](#)). Peter must have been uneasy as well. On the night before Jesus was crucified, Peter had denied the Lord three times.

Peter was so eager to see the Lord that he leaped into the water and swam to shore when Jesus appeared. Then he lingered behind to drag the full nets ashore and count the catch.

After a shared meal on the shore, Jesus spoke to Peter, asking three times about Peter's love for him. After each response, Peter was told to tend or feed Christ's sheep. Peter was thus recommissioned for the ministry to which all the disciples had been called.

But the spiritual significance of this miracle is not Christ's dialogue with his disciple. It is found in a miracle within the miracle.

How the story unfolds. The disciples had returned to Galilee. Peter announced he was going fishing, and the others went with him. Although they fished all night, they caught nothing.

Then as morning dawned, a person was seen on the shore. The figure called to them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. When the fishermen obeyed, they caught a school of large fish so heavy it could not be pulled into the boat.

At this point, John said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" ([John 21:7](#)). Peter grabbed his outer garment and leaped into the sea to swim to shore. The other disciples brought the boat into the shallows, dragging the heavy net. When they reached the shore, they saw that Jesus had a fire going, with bread and fish already laid on the fire.

Jesus instructed them to bring some of the fish they had just caught. The net was pulled on shore and the catch counted. They had caught 153 large fish. Christ called them to the meal, serving them the bread and fish he had prepared.

After this meal, the dialog with Peter occurred.

"They caught nothing" ([John 21:3](#)). The disciples were professional fishermen. But this night their best efforts were futile.

"Cast the net on the right side" ([21:6](#)). Some interpreters have suggested that Jesus could see from the shore the school of fish that the disciples could not. Given the conditions, and the fact that Christ himself was only an indistinct figure in the dawning light, this theory is as absurd as it is unnecessary.

Before his resurrection, Jesus had directed the path of fish in the seas (page 176). He was surely able to cause this school of fish to swim into the net of his disciples.

"A fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread" ([21:9](#)). This is a miracle within the miracle. Jesus caused the disciples to catch fish. But before they brought their catch ashore, he was already preparing fish for them to eat—fish they had not caught, fish which Jesus obtained and prepared for his followers.

The significance of the miracle. The meaning of the miracle lies in three verses that speak of fish.

[John 21:3](#) indicates the disciples caught no fish. Their best efforts were futile, even though they were expert fishermen.

[John 21:6](#) reveals that by following Jesus' instructions they caught a "multitude of fish."

[John 21:9](#) tells us that while the disciples were still out on the lake, Jesus was already preparing for them fish which they had not caught.

As the disciples set out on their mission to spread the gospel of the risen Christ, they left their old occupations. However skilled they were at these jobs, there was nothing more in them for persons called to guide Christ's church.

Jesus' instructions to the disciples to cast their nets in the path of a school of fish remind us that Christ is able to make us successful in any chosen pursuit, as long as we are obedient to him.

The meal Jesus served the disciples was a promise that they could rely on him to supply all their needs as they carried out their mission. This miracle within a miracle—Jesus' supply of fish which the disciples did not catch—was the most significant miracle of the two.

Both miracles speak to us today. We learn from one that our success depends on living by Christ's Word. And we learn from the other that we are free to obey him completely.

We can rely on his ability to meet our every need.³

18. The seventh sign—the raising of Lazarus (11:1–57)

³ Richards, L. (1998). [Every miracle in the Bible](#) (pp. 246–249). Nashville: T. Nelson.



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The 'revealing of his glory' (1:14) through the 'signs' (2:11) now reaches its final stage with the greatest 'sign', the raising of Lazarus from the dead, an action which will lead inexorably on to the all-surpassing 'sign' of the death and resurrection of Jesus himself. It is helpful to sub-divide the chapter as follows.

- a. The sickness and death of Lazarus of Bethany (1–16)
- b. The meetings with Martha and Mary and Jesus' grief (17–37)
- c. The raising of Lazarus from the dead (38–44)
- d. The Sanhedrin's decision to have Jesus killed (45–57)

a. The sickness and death of Lazarus of Bethany (11:1–16)

Jesus has withdrawn from Jerusalem prior to his return to the city for the final Passover, as was noted in 10:40. His preparation for that supremely demanding crisis is interrupted by an urgent request for help. This comes from a family especially close to him, living at Bethany, a few miles south east of Jerusalem. The family consists of two sisters, Martha and Mary, and their brother, Lazarus. John identifies Mary as *the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair* (2). This anticipates what we learn about her in the next chapter (12:1–8), and the description is no doubt to distinguish her from other Marys in the gospel (*cf.* 19:25–26; 20:1). It may also indicate that John's first-century readers are already familiar with the incident and have some knowledge of the Christian story.

It is usually presumed that Lazarus and his sisters were resident in the same household, though in fact the text does not state that. If Lazarus was a man of mature years, as by all accounts he appears to have been, then he would almost certainly have been married and living in his own home, though within the village. This may explain the comment in 12:2 where, at the dinner given in Jesus' honour by the sisters, Lazarus is explicitly identified among the guests, an unnecessary detail if the dinner was being served in his own home. The unity of the family is patent, however, so when their brother falls seriously ill the sisters send to Jesus for help. Their message is somewhat oblique—*Lord, the one you love is sick* (3). It may be that they were informed of his recent encounter with the authorities in Jerusalem, and recognized that to bring him again to the vicinity of the city would be dangerous. Certainly, Thomas is in no doubt about the folly of such a journey in these circumstances (16). The wording may be a conscious compromise. Perhaps they are also aware of Jesus having healed on a previous occasion by means of a word, without his physical presence being necessary (4:43–54). The title given to Jesus, *Lord*, probably renders the Aramaic for 'rabbi' (*cf.* 28; 20:16). As D. A. Carson observes, the message 'hints at friendships and relationships that are barely explored in the Gospels, and suggests that some at least felt peculiarly loved by him'.

Jesus responds to the message by making two comments on the illness of Lazarus, and by deliberately choosing to stay *where he was two more days* (6). His first comment is that the sickness will not prove fatal in the long run (4). Some see this as a recognition that Lazarus was not in fact dead at this point and that Jesus hoped he could still be cured. This appears to conflict, however, with the evident control of events which Jesus exercises at every point in this incident. It is therefore better to interpret this initial reaction as setting the scene for what follows. Lazarus, a beloved and valued friend, has succumbed to the power of sickness, the emissary of the 'god of this world'. But the power of sickness, this manifestation of the fall, will not have the final say. The final outcome (Jesus' second comment), will be life, not death, therein manifesting the glory of the Son, the dethroning of the god of this world, and the further glory of the Father through him (4).

Jesus' attitude to sickness here is parallel to 9:3: the sickness provides a platform so that the 'work of God might be displayed in his life'. What is true here at the level of physical illness can be extended to all the trials we face as Christian disciples. Our natural response is to rebel against them as alien intruders, which must be expelled from our lives as quickly and painlessly as possible by every means available, including God's miraculous intervention. With hindsight, however, another perspective is possible. We can offer our trials to God for him either to remove or retain as *he* pleases, thereby bringing glory to his name and deepening our faith, and possibly that of others too.

Joni Eareckson Tada, a paraplegic sufferer, authentically expresses this second alternative. 'I do not care if I am confined to this wheelchair provided from it I can bring glory to God.' The same conviction is expressed more generally by Hudson Taylor. 'Trials afford God a platform for his working in our lives. Without them I would never know how kind, how powerful, how gracious he is.' While we may feel daunted by the heights of devotion



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reflected in these quotations, we can all make a beginning in our present pains by offering them consciously to God for his using. From such small seeds a new maturity can blossom.

According to verse 6, Jesus, receiving the news of Lazarus' condition, deliberately remained where he was for two further days before making any response. This is in no way a contradiction of his love for the family (5). Why the two days' delay? Our answer will necessarily touch the issue of Jesus' precise whereabouts. The traditional location is in Transjordan, which would set him within a day or so's journey from Bethany. By this view Lazarus died almost as soon as the messenger set off for Jesus. His delay in that case has two possible explanations. *Either* he is unwilling to allow his movements to be determined merely by his natural desire to hurry to Bethany as soon as possible. (He is at the command of the Father and must wait for the Father's timing for a move back to the proximity of Jerusalem.) *Or* Jesus waited to ensure that by the time he arrived at Bethany Lazarus would have been dead four days (*cf.* 17). The reason for this timing will be indicated below (*cf.* comment on 17).

If, however, Jesus had withdrawn all the way to Batanea, which was a good four days' journey to the north east, the reconstruction in that case has Jesus receiving the message about Lazarus at a time when Lazarus is still alive. The statement in verse 4, *This sickness will not end in death*, then belongs to the point where Lazarus is still hanging on to life. Two days later, Jesus, perceiving by supernatural means that Lazarus has died, proceeds on his journey of four days to reach Bethany and raise him again.

A location at further remove from Jerusalem fits the need for Jesus to escape the city entirely at this point. *Let us go back to Judea* (7) appears to imply a significant change of location. The synoptics, however, appear to locate John's early ministry in some proximation to Jerusalem (*cf.* Mt. 3:1–5). The Batanea location would also necessitate Jesus modifying his plans in view of the unforeseen deterioration in Lazarus' condition. It also leaves somewhat unexplained the evangelist's drawing attention to the two-day delay. In all this we necessarily deal in suppositions. The essential issue appears to be that Jesus does not respond immediately to the sisters' plea, with the result that by the time he arrives at Bethany Lazarus has been dead for four days.

The delays of God are clearly part of the biblical record. One may ask at the most basic level why the effects of the fall were not addressed more immediately, or more particularly why so many centuries preceded the coming of the Redeemer. We can likewise ask why the Lord delays his return, with all its concomitant blessings. True, Peter addresses that in terms of God's patient grace which gives sinners further opportunity to repent (2 Pet. 3:9). But even limited contact with the pain and anguish of so many human lives world-wide makes the question inescapable. Many find the question of delays raised for them personally as they pray through long years for some particular need, perhaps some personal disability they seek freedom from, or a loved one for whose salvation they yearn. Others struggle with some promise of God which remains unfulfilled after weary years of waiting.

This story teaches us two things about God's delays. **The first** is that they are inevitable. Since we are mere finite creatures, we are necessarily largely unaware of the circumstances which surround the events taking place in our lives and those of others, as well as the consequences which result from them. Only God is omniscient. Further, since our desires are not fully renewed, even if we were aware of all the implications, there is no guarantee that we would choose only what was for the highest good for ourselves and others. Our imperfect desires also make us want immediate answers, and render us unprepared for the patient ripening of God's plans. His delays, however, do not contradict his love (*cf.* 5). He loves us as fully and as truly when he remains in Transjordan (or Batanea), ministering to others' needs, as when he journeys to Bethany to minister to ours. **The second point** about God's delays is that they are not final. He will come, in his own time and way. No doubt that will frequently be later than we would have chosen. From his divine perspective, however, it will be the right time. God is the best of time-keepers. He created time; he is never late for his appointments.

The delay concluded, Jesus gives the order to go to Bethany (15). The disciples are well aware of the danger there and remind him of it (8). In response Jesus warns against over-estimating the danger. Just as there is daylight as well as darkness, and journeys are always possible if the right hour is chosen, so while the darkness of opposition is looming there is still time to 'do the work of him who sent me' (9:4). Further, since he is the light of this world, the disciples, if they keep close to him, will have light to walk by also.

Jesus announces that Lazarus has died, first metaphorically (11) and then directly (14). 'Sleep', while used of death in the Old Testament, as, for example, 'Amaziah rested [slept] with his fathers' (2 Ki. 14:22), was not a common way of referring to it, which perhaps explains the disciples' failure to grasp the import. The use of this metaphor by Jesus, both here and in the raising of Jairus' daughter, (Mk. 5:39) set the trend for later Christian usage (*cf.* Acts 7:60; 1 Thes. 4:13). As a metaphor for death it need not imply the end of all consciousness following



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the moment of death. In Scripture, sleep is regularly a very 'active' experience. Primarily, 'sleep' implies the truth of the recovery of consciousness after death.

When I go down to the grave, I can say like so many others that I have finished my day's work; but I cannot say that I have finished my life. Another day's work will begin the next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley—it is a thoroughfare. It closes with the twilight to open with the dawn.

Victor Hugo

Jesus reiterates that this death of Lazarus is a 'good death' about which he is personally glad, *so that you may believe* (15). The pain and anguish of the family are still of less worth than the nourishing of the faith of both the family and the attendant disciples. Once again the cruciality of faith is stressed.

Let us go to him (15). Him, we note, is a person, not a corpse. As spokesperson, Thomas reflects a whole-heartedness which will find later expression (*cf.* 20:28). He also unwittingly lays out the terms of following Jesus: *Let us also go, ... that we may die with him.* The invitation to follow Jesus is precisely that. 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me' (Mk. 8:34). 'When Jesus calls a man to follow him he bids him come and die.' The disciples, however, have still to learn this lesson in experience. A fiery crucible awaits them before they too will walk the way of the cross.

b. The meetings with Martha and Mary and Jesus' grief (11:17–37)

Verse 17 brings us directly to the time frame of this sign. Whatever our view of the geographical sub-plot it is clear that Jesus' moment of arrival is deliberately designed so that *Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days* (17). The reason for this must now be explored.

There is good rabbinic evidence for a Jewish belief that, for three days after death, the soul of the deceased person 'hovered' around the body seeking re-entry. On the fourth day, 'when it sees the colour of its face has changed (*i.e.* that decomposition has commenced) then it goes away and leaves it'. This evidence is from the third century and so some caution needs to be exercised in assuming that it was held generally in Jesus' day. Hoskyns, however, finds a more general cultural support for the distinction between the third and fourth days. Hospitality in the East allowed visitors a stay of three days' duration, a day to rest, a day for fellowship and a day for departure. To stay on for a fourth day was a very serious breach of etiquette. A similar distinction between the third and fourth days was apparently later used by some Christians to test the validity of a travelling prophet. True prophets would be on their way by the end of the third day. Those staying longer were spongers on Christian hospitality. There is a similar conviction in the ancient Persian religion, Zoroastrianism, that on the morning of the fourth day after death the soul finally abandons the body and passes over the bridge Cinvat, where the good and evil are separated from each other. Hoskyns describes the belief in this distinction as 'widespread' among the Jews of that period.¹³⁹ Edersheim mentions that Jewish mourning customs viewed the first three days after death as being for the greatest and most intense mourning, during which the dead person was still present to witness the grief of his or her family and friends.

Turning to strictly biblical data, we should note the importance of the third day after death, especially significant in respect of the resurrection of Jesus (*cf.* Ho. 6:2; *cf.* 20:1). The time of Jesus' arrival, therefore, coincided with the conclusion of the first three intense days of mourning, the period when the soul has left the body beyond any recall and decomposition had set in. Jesus deliberately withholds his succour until the enemy he is confronting has assumed a fullness of authority and destructiveness. The greater the challenge, the greater the miracle, and the greater the strengthening of his followers' faith as a result; and above all, the greater the glory accruing to his Father through it.

The presence of mourners reflected the Jewish custom. Rabbis taught the solemn duty of comforting mourners, and the sisters clearly had a significant company of friends in the nearby city, probably confirming the impression (*cf.* 12:3) that theirs was a family of some means.

Although the character details given in the gospels are meagre, the sisters' reactions appear at least congruent with what we derive from Luke's cameo of the home (Lk. 10:38–42). Martha, arguably the older, takes immediate initiative to meet Jesus while Mary, more dependent and spiritually intuitive, waits for Jesus' initiative (20). Martha immediately addresses Jesus, *Lord* (*cf.* 3), ... *if you had been here, my brother would not have died* (21). This almost appears as a rebuke for his tardiness in responding to the message, and hence by implication lays on Jesus some



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measure of responsibility for Lazarus' death. On the other hand, she may simply be indicating that she believes that had Jesus been able to be there he would have saved Lazarus from death. However her opening words are to be construed (and it should be noted that Mary was to repeat them; 32), her next words appear in a different and more hopeful tone. *But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask* (22). This strikes a positive note, as though she is quite ready to believe in the astounding miracle which is shortly to take place. The statement has to be qualified, however, in view of verse 24, and more especially verse 39, where Martha objects to the opening of the tomb. Perhaps she is simply saying that as a person with unique intercessory power, Jesus will still be able to bring hope to the family even in face of the enormous tragedy of their brother's death.

Jesus' immediate reassurance of Lazarus' future resurrection (23) calls forth Martha's confession: *I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day* (24). Here Martha identifies with the larger hope of Judaism. Over against the Sadducean party, incorporating many of the leading clerics of the day, which trenchantly denied the resurrection of the dead (*cf.* Mk. 12:18–27), Martha, like the Pharisees, believes that God will not leave his own to pass for ever into oblivion. Lazarus will rise when the messianic kingdom dawns at the general resurrection on the last day (24).

Jesus' remarkable reply, *I am the resurrection and the life*, is a culmination of the unfolding revelation in the preceding chapters. Jesus has been revealed as the giver of life, in a number of ways. Materially, he gives life to water, making it wine. Spiritually, he offers the new spiritual life of the kingdom of God to Nicodemus, and the life which springs up within a person satisfying all thirst, to the woman of Samaria. Physically, he imparts life to a dying boy, a long-standing physical paralytic, and a man born blind. He is the good shepherd who has come to give life 'to the full' (10:10). The life he brings is primarily 'eternal life' (literally 'life of the age'), the life of the long-awaited kingdom of God. Jesus now fills out these claims to their fullest proportion. **The life he gives is nothing less than the indestructible life of the resurrection, the very life of the deathless God himself. Moreover, it is his gift here and now. Martha believes in some such life at the distant horizon of history when the Messiah eventually appears. Jesus invites her to reshape her hope radically.** Resurrection life which triumphs over death is not confined to the distant future, but is present here and now in him who is the Resurrection, the embodiment of the promised life and salvation of God. To believe in Jesus means that death lies defeated. True, there may be a moment of physical dissolution (*though he dies*, 25), but in fact that will not be 'death', the elimination of hope and the reduction of existence to a mere shadowy beyond. For the believer, the present reality is the eternal life of God received through faith in Jesus. **Can Martha rise to that level of faith?**

Perhaps not fully. Yet she can affirm that Jesus is the Messiah, the *Son of God, who was to come into the world* (27). *Son* here may simply represent a messianic title. Readers of this gospel will know by this time that the title has new depths of meaning in terms of Jesus' unique oneness with the Father, in his mission and person (see the comment on 1:49; on *come into the world*, see the comment on 1:19).

Jesus then invites Mary to meet him. She responds with haste (29), followed, it would appear, by a number of her sorrowing friends (30–31). Mary's demeanour is less composed than Martha's. Her greater sense of spiritual intimacy with Jesus (*cf.* Lk. 10:39, 42) may have given her a greater freedom to share her deepest feelings. Prostrating herself before Jesus (32), she utters the same regret as Martha, *Lord, if you had been here ...*, and bursts into tears (33), a response which is immediately echoed in the mourning friends who have accompanied her (33).

Jesus' reaction is profound, and in some degree surprising. *He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled* (33). Jesus is not remote from the sufferings of his fellow humans. The fact that he is one with us in humanity means that he is one with us in agony. So *Jesus wept* (35); paradoxically, the shortest text in the Bible is one of its most eloquent. **(The tense is aorist, expressing a definite action, hence 'Jesus burst into tears'.)** John's point in verse 33 is that the tears were not the professional tears of the hired mourner or of the inwardly detached spectator. Jesus is one with us in our need; he feels our pain; he lives our experience from the inside; his tears at that moment authentically expressed the emotion of his heart.

The further and somewhat unexpected element in John's description of Jesus' reaction is in the verb in verses 33, and 38, translated *deeply moved* in the NIV. This word (*embrimaomai*), when used outside the Bible, can refer to the snorting of horses; applied to human emotion it invariably speaks of anger! We may cite Schnack-enberg, 'The word, *embrimasthai* ... indicates an outburst of anger, and any attempt to interpret it in terms of an internal emotional upset caused by grief, pain or sympathy is illegitimate.' Thus G. R. Beasley-Murray offers in translation: 'Jesus ... became angry in spirit,'¹⁴⁴ and D. A. Carson suggests: 'He was outraged in spirit ...'. B. B. Warfield



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comments forcefully: 'What John tells us, in point of fact, is that Jesus approached the grave of Lazarus in a state, not of uncontrollable grief but of inexpressible anger. True, he did also respond with tears (35), but the emotion which tore his breast and clamoured for utterance was just rage.' Once again in this gospel, as at the cleansing of the temple (2:15), we encounter the 'wrath of the Lamb'.

What caused Jesus' anger at this moment? Among the suggestions that have been offered are that he is annoyed that the miracle of the raising of Lazarus is thus thrust upon him, or that he is angry at the hypocritical grief of the mourners around Mary who do not really enter into her pain. More plausibly, Jesus' anger is related to the unbelief expressed in the uncontrolled grief of Mary and her friends. 'The one who always does what pleases his Father (8:29) is indignant when faced with attitudes which are not governed by the truths the Father has revealed.' This is well said and may be the truth of it, though if it is, it carries the most sobering implications for our response to God. For if even our grief in the face of acute personal loss, seemingly legitimized by Jesus' own tears, is sufficient to arouse the violent anger of the Son of God then the implications for his assessment of other areas of our Christian lives are sombre indeed. For this writer this interpretation is accordingly too harsh.

Can we not see here the presence of another dimension? B. B. Warfield articulates it memorably: 'The spectacle of the distress of Mary and her companions enraged Jesus because it brought poignantly home to his consciousness **the evil of death**, its unnaturalness, its "violent tyranny" (Calvin). In Mary's grief he sees and feels the misery of the whole race and burns with rage against the oppressor of men. It is death that is the object of his wrath, and behind death him who has the power of death, and whom he had come into the world to destroy. Tears of sympathy may fill his eyes, but that is incidental—his soul is held by rage, and he advances to the tomb, in Calvin's words, "as a champion who prepares for conflict".' Like the farmer in his parable, Jesus can pronounce this verdict: 'An enemy did this' (Mt. 13:28). That enemy he has come to slay.

The watching Jews respond with two observations. They take Jesus' reaction as indicative of the depth of his love for Lazarus. He is a true friend; he weeps at his passing (36). That was true, of course, but, as we have noted, the factors operating at this moment are profounder than mere human affection, worthy as that may be. Their other observation was to wonder at the apparent helplessness of Jesus before this tragedy. He had seemed able to cope with all other eventualities; could he not somehow have prevented this? (37). **Is this then the limit of Jesus' power?** Some trials he can deal with, some sicknesses he can cure, some human tragedies do indeed yield to his word of power, but there are others concerning which we sadly conclude that 'he could not'. Were that to be the case then all our hopes are finally vacuous. A 'so far ...' Saviour is in the end no Saviour at all.

On the first reaction the Jews are right, though their understanding is superficial. On the second, they could not be more wrong! Jesus proceeds immediately to demonstrate how wrong they are, and how wrong every other has been over the centuries who has set limits to the possibilities and power of Jesus Christ.

c. The raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:38–44)

Arriving at the tomb, Jesus, again visibly swept by a tempest of anger, commands its opening (39). Martha, clearly unable to rise to this ultimate challenge to faith, remonstrates with Jesus. The soul has departed (the Greek lacks a masculine reference; there is no longer a 'he' there), the body is putrefying (39). Jesus reminds her of his promise (cf. 4), presumably repeated to the sisters, **that all this would end in the glorifying of God**. Jesus' first sign at Cana was the beginning of the revelation of the glory of God in him. Here in the seventh sign that glory is manifest in its fullest and most authentic manner. Truly here we can echo John's own witness, 'we have seen his glory' (1:14).

A vocalized prayer to the Father follows (41–42). In making it Jesus recognizes that its purpose is for those standing by. He himself is in such constant communion that his prayer is his life. In all his thoughts he stands constantly in his Father's presence. In the confidence deriving from that position he can express thanks that his petition for the raising of Lazarus, like all his petitions, is truly heard.

These verses teach a number of lessons about prayer. Here is its *focus*—*Father*. The title is constantly on Jesus' lips, but it has a peculiar force in this setting. We cannot forget his astonishing invitation, 'When you pray, say: "Father ..."' (Lk. 11:2). Here also is the *confidence* of prayer—you always hear me. True, this is spoken by the sinless Son of God, but let the struggling soul take heart. He is a God defined by his alertness to our cries. 'O you who hear prayer ...' (Ps. 65:2). 'Does he who implanted the ear not hear?' (Ps. 94:9).

Jesus' words also touch on the *style* of prayer. It was uttered for the sake of the crowd around. Not all prayer is to be private, even relatively spontaneous, as in this case. D. A. Carson appropriately comments, 'It is not foreign



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to the spirit of this passage to remark that public prayers, though like private prayers addressed to God, must be crafted with the public in mind.' Sadly, many who have the high responsibility of leading prayer in public worship are moved by the principle that, while to preach in public demands diligent preparation, to pray in public requires none, and such is even a mark of unspirituality. Undue formality in public prayers is certainly undesirable, but no less is the wordy rambling of those who give no prayerful preparation of heart and mind to the holy work of leading fellow sinners into the very presence of God.

Jesus' prayer also touches the *fruit* of prayer, which is faith. As God hears our cries and graciously grants our requests the result is the enriching of faith. In the remembering of God's past faithfulness our faith grows.

Finally, these words also represent a great *inducement* to pray. While our prayers are often hampered by the realization that our sins separate between us and our God so that 'he will not hear' us (Is. 59:2), that is never so with Jesus. Our great intercessor, who has gone into the presence of God for us, and who 'always lives to intercede' for his people (Heb. 7:25), is constantly heard in the heavens. He still says to the Father, *I thank you that you have heard me*. So our feeble requests, presented in his name, are gathered within the encircling arms of his great intercession, and placed upon the heart of the Father by him who ever lives to pray for us.

The prayer having been offered, the moment has arrived! Jesus cries, *Lazarus, come out!* (43) and, incredibly, *The dead man came out*. 'He speaks, and, listening to his voice, New life the dead receive ...' 'As the sheep hear the voice of the good shepherd when he calls them by name, and leads them out of the cramped sheepfold (10:3), so Lazarus is immediately drawn forth from the grave by the word of Jesus.'

The grave clothes still bind him. According to Jewish custom the body would not have been fully mummified, but rather wrapped round with a large linen cloth and tied at hands and feet with further strips. The head would have been wrapped in a separate face napkin to keep the jaw in place. So bound, a living person could still shuffle or hop, as Lazarus apparently now proceeded to do (44). Jesus orders his releasing (44). Lazarus is again among the living; death has been robbed of its prey. Faith in Jesus as the one sent by the Father and the embodiment of the resurrection life of God is attained (42). The Son has revealed the Father's glory and in that revealing has *himself received glory* as the one sent by the Father (40).

In that very triumph, however, lie the seeds of the coming 'defeat'. For the raising of Lazarus from the dead is the final provocation of Jesus' enemies (45–57), and the sealing of his own death at their hands. But in that too—in that above all—will the Father's purpose find fulfilment, and the Son bring the supreme glory to the Father by finishing the work he has been given to do.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is an astonishing miracle and, not surprisingly, has provoked considerable controversy. Those operating with a narrowly naturalistic view of the universe dismiss it out of hand as pure legend. Dead men do not rise in a closed universe; therefore Lazarus did not rise. Other critics, though coming to the same negative conclusion in the end, attempt to attribute some authenticity to the gospel material by suggesting that the story is an idealized 'write-up' of the parable of Dives and Lazarus in Luke 16. The recurrence of the name is certainly noteworthy, though Lazarus was not an especially uncommon name in first-century Palestine. Besides, there appears no reason why, in the period of oral tradition when the accounts of the deeds and teaching of Jesus were circulating widely, the name might not just as plausibly have become attached to the parable than the other way round. More generally, the radical revision of the material necessary to bring the incident into line with the parable is daunting. This is to say nothing of the implications for the integrity of the evangelist, and of the churches (who had many links with the first generation of 'eye-witnesses ... of the word' (Lk. 1:2). where this gospel was received and affirmed. In addition, the synoptic gospels recount at least two other cases where Jesus raised people from the dead (Mk. 5:21–43; Lk. 7:11–15), and the signs of the messianic ministry of Jesus reported to John the Baptist include the fact that 'the dead are raised' (Mt. 11:5; Lk. 7:22). **On the premise of the living Creator God** there can be no objection in principle to the authenticity of this account. Lazarus was raised.

The miracle is so striking a manifestation of the authority of Jesus that it fittingly appears in John's record as the seventh and last sign leading into the final climactic sign of the cross and resurrection. It is therefore right to pause and identify some of its more obvious implications.

(i) The shadow(s) of God's love

This derives from the experience of the sisters. Faced with the critical illness of their brother they inform Jesus of the situation, and then experience the anguish of Lazarus' death before ever Jesus appears on the scene. Their joint testimony is eloquent. 'If you had been here, my brother would not have died.' In fact, as the record makes



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abundantly clear, the sisters and Lazarus were deeply loved by Jesus (3, 5). Yet in love he withholds himself and allows them to pass through their hour of dereliction before he comes to them to meet their need. The reason for it is not hidden. 'I am glad ... so that you may believe' (15). 'It is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it' (4); ... *for the benefit of the people ... that they may believe* (42). The nature of the love of God for us is thereby revealed. It is not the love of an indulgent parent who gives in to every whim of the child. In the end that is not 'love' for the child but a form of self-love in the parent. Despite the massive propaganda to the contrary, our **Lord's purpose for us is not to make us happy, but to make us holy**. He loves us too much to leave us part-saved, part-remade, part-sanctified. He wills our holiness, and since 'suffering produces ...' (Rom. 5:3), we may expect him in his love for us to allow things in our lives which, in our self-centred pursuit of happiness, we ourselves would exclude. Yet even in the shadow of his love there is always mercy. Our sorrows are shared by him; he comes to us in our pain. The end of it all is not only his glory, which needs no further justifying, but also our good. 'There is no joy like the joy of holiness' (R. Murray McCheyne).

(ii) The sympathy of Jesus

This passage uncovers the fullness of Jesus' humanity as almost no other within the New Testament gospels, 'Sympathy' literally means 'feeling along with', and that is who this passage unveils to us—a Saviour who shares our feelings!

We live in a world swept by great emotions: pity, anger, joy, hatred, desire, rage, love, grief, regret ... At times our personal world is invaded by these storms, lifting us to heights of ecstasy, or more often plunging us into depths of agony. In such moments the familiar landmarks lose their power to direct us. We seem not even to know ourselves. But Jesus is there. He has been this way already; he understands.

'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for!
my flesh, that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul,
it shall be.
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man
like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever: a
Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee!
See the Christ stand.

From Saul, Robert Browning

(iii) The authority of Christ

In the raising of Lazarus the full implications of the union of the Son and the Father in the mission of God to the world become apparent. So absolute is the Son's commitment to the glorifying of the Father in that mission, that there is nothing which the Father will refuse him (41–42; 13:3; 17:2). Accordingly the Son is invested with all authority in heaven and earth. Nothing is withheld from him, not even the power of life and death.

In making reference to the Son's authority over death, however, we should note (as this story goes out of its way to make plain) that it includes his mastery of the processes of dissolution and decay. He is Lord of death in the *fullness* of its power. We try regularly to insulate ourselves from the repugnant aspects of death, the physical and mental destruction which it commonly entails. No-one who has watched a loved one changed almost out of recognition, before death has finally brought its welcome release, needs any further words of description. But the thrust of this story is that Christ's authority extends there also. That too we can bring to him. Our hope as Christians is a fleshly, bodily hope. 'My body also will rest secure, ... nor will you let your Holy One see decay' (Ps. 16:9–10). Christ's rule extends over the flesh, and his promise is nothing less than the renewing of all that he has made.

(iv) Hope in face of death



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Patently the loser in this story is death, and 'him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil' (Heb. 2:14). In this sense the story anticipates the resurrection of Jesus himself. Lazarus represents not merely the dead in general, but in particular the long-forgotten dead, those who have dissolved and disappeared, the decomposed. In the raising of Lazarus Jesus made good his claim, 'for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out' (5:28). The devil's power, though real, is limited. His reign in death (Rom. 5:17) is only temporary.

Death is the universal fact, the final horizon that conditions all our human dreams and purposes. 'The paths of glory lead but to the grave'. Sooner or later every person experiences the numbing shock of bereavement and the long shadow it casts over the future. Humanly there is nothing to add. *C'est la vie*. Precisely at this point the realities of faith shine most brightly. Compare these two testimonies. The first is death as viewed by Lord Bertrand Russell, the witness of *unbelief*. 'There is darkness without, and when I die there will be darkness within. There is no splendour, no vastness anywhere, only triviality for a moment, and then nothing.' The second is the witness of *belief*, death as seen by Kohlbrugge, the nineteenth-century Lutheran theologian and preacher. 'When I die—I do not die anymore, however—and someone finds my skull, let this skull still preach to him and say: I have no eyes, nevertheless I see Him; though I have no lips, I kiss Him; I have no tongue, yet I sing praise to Him with all who call upon His name. I am a hard skull, yet I am wholly softened and melted in His love; I lay here exposed on God's Acre, yet I am there in Paradise! All suffering is forgotten! His great love has done this for us when for us He carried His cross and went out to Golgotha.' In Christ, through their faith in him, the dead are alive. Though the form and location of their existence is in most respects hidden from us, the reality of their continued life is sure.

Many Christians and people of goodwill can echo Martha's creed in verse 24, respecting her brother. 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.' But Christ takes us beyond that. We are not simply to believe that in some vague future moment those we have loved and lost awhile will be raised up with us. That is true, but it did not need the coming of Jesus to produce that conviction, as Martha's testimony makes clear (24). Jesus' coming means we can go beyond that conviction in two ways.

1. In the coming crisis of his ministry, his death and resurrection, which is foreshadowed here, a certainty of eternal life is attained which would not be possible without these great events.

2. Jesus makes the possession of eternal life a fact of present experience. Thus the Christian can be characterized, as the martyrs of Jesus in every age bear moving witness, by a radiant assurance of the life of glory begun here and now through faith-union with Jesus, 'the resurrection and the life' (25).

(v) The offer of Jesus

Christ as the Lord of life and death still invites the world to come to him. Death is inevitable for all of us, but Christ has won the victory over death, and shares that victory with all who repent and believe in him as their Saviour and Lord. To respond to Christ's invitation is to surrender our independence. But to 'die' in this sense is to begin to live. As for Jesus, so for us, death leads to resurrection. 'He is no fool who gives away what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose' (Jim Elliot). 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' (25–26).

d. The Sanhedrin's decision to have Jesus killed (11:45–57)

As is so frequently the case, Jesus' words and actions cause division. For 'many' of the friends of Mary (Martha's too, one would presume, though she is not mentioned at this point), witnessing the raising of Lazarus was the awakening of their faith in Jesus (45). Here is a faith related to a miracle which is not called in question. Perhaps its authenticity is indicated by the clear reference to believing *in him*. Their faith reached beyond the miracle worker to the Messiah and Saviour. *Some of them* (46), were less loyal friends and reported all in the ears of the Pharisees. While this might be construed positively as encouraging the Pharisees to revise their negative judgment of Jesus, that likelihood is probably not warranted by the text. The effect was to harden the opposition.

A meeting of the Sanhedrin was summoned (47). The Sanhedrin was the central court of the Jewish people at the time, operating under Roman jurisdiction. It was concerned with the political and religious life of Israel on a day-to-day basis and had absolute authority within the limits permitted by Rome (*cf.* on 18:31). Chaired by the high priest, it consisted of seventy or so members. It mainly comprised the Sadducean party, though the Pharisees were



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an important minority group. Various shades of theological opinion were reflected within it. Some of the more socially influential members were not especially religious.

They met in an atmosphere of alarm. Clearly their strategy of confronting Jesus, challenging his teaching, and trying to discredit him with the people, was getting them nowhere. The miracles were continuing unabated, now apparently including even the raising of the dead. Jesus clearly had much support among the masses, and that was likely to grow rather than diminish. **The outcome could well be an abortive popular rising which the Romans would speedily and ruthlessly put down, and in the process impose direct rule, with possible further desecration, if not destruction, of the temple. [ALL THAT WE HAVE WORKED SO LONG AND HARD TO GET]**

The language in which the views are expressed, *our place and our nation* (48), indicates that the overriding concern was not national but personal. Such developments would destroy the *status quo* by which they, the Sanhedrin, had power and privilege within the state. That simply could not be permitted. Thus the guardians of the sacred traditions of Israel were reduced to the level of political functionaries, to be met any day of the week in the parliaments and board rooms of the world. The primary issue is not one of principle but of expediency. Right has become equated with the avoidance of trouble and the preservation of their hold on power. Thus the cause of the living God, the glory of the age-old revelation from the patriarchs through the Red Sea and Mount Sinai, is all mortgaged in one sorry impassioned hour to save their political skins. The possibility that Jesus may in fact be authentic is not raised, even though the veracity of his miracles is universally conceded (47). That the common people for once might have a sound religious instinct is also left unconsidered. Jesus is a threat, a cancer on the body of the nation, that must be cut away if 'health' is to be recovered.

Paradoxically, by their attempt to preserve the *status quo* the Sanhedrin contribute to its overthrow, for the elimination of Jesus will in time become part of the political and social ferment which will finally bring upon their heads the very destruction they dread. But, through it all, the purposes of the God of their fathers will find new occasion and undreamed-of fulfilment. 'These small and frightened men, clothed in the robes of authority which are in fact only a covering for pitiful weakness, are the unwitting instruments of a mighty divine purpose.' The outcome of their deliberations is expressed by the high priest, Caiaphas, son-in-law of the still widely influential Annas (see comment on 18:13). Appointed to office in AD 18, Caiaphas continued until AD 36, when he was deposed at the same time as Pilate, the Roman procurator. *That year* (49) is probably 'that unique and special year'. John is well aware, like any other Jew of Palestine at the time, that Caiaphas was in office for much longer than a single year.

Caiaphas' proposal is a cynical one. Jesus has become a threat to their well-being and that of the nation as a whole. He must go. Much better *that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish* (50). While John often relates sayings which have deeper levels of meaning, leaving the reader to uncover the further significance, on this occasion he draws it out. In this saying Caiaphas is an unwitting prophet as well as a priest, for in it he proclaims the substitutionary death of Jesus. The model of the lambs slaughtered daily in the temple ritual to redeem the lives of the worshippers becomes the basis of the political strategy of the Sanhedrin. Jesus is to be offered up for the saving of Israel, one man for the nation. That was nothing less than the truth. And not just for Israel, for he will die as the sacrificial substitute for the sins of the world. Thereby the saving and uniting of the people of God among all the nations and in every age will be accomplished (51). 'The high priest fears for the destruction of the temple, but does not know that Jesus is himself the true temple and that though the Jews will indeed destroy that temple it will be raised up to become the place to which all the nations of the earth will come to worship, as the prophets had foretold.' The die is cast, *so from that day on they plotted to take his life* (53).

Jesus moves out of range to Ephraim, probably the modern village of Et-Taiyibeh, about twelve miles to the north of Jerusalem (54). He does not dread the Sanhedrin, but the timing of the critical confrontation will be in his hands, not theirs. And so the Passover arrives, the hour of crisis. The early worshippers enquire after him in his usual teaching sites around the temple area. Will he come to the feast (56)? And if he does, will the authorities succeed in their known commitment to eliminate him?

There is an atmosphere of tension in the air, as well there might be. As the pilgrims prepare to sacrifice the Passover lamb in commemoration of God's gracious liberation from slavery, so God's own true Lamb is prepared and ready at the Father's summons to offer himself in bloody sacrifice for the sins of the world. In that act he will win a new and everlasting freedom for his people, thereby fulfilling and rendering obsolete this and every Jewish feast till the end of time.



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19. Anointing at Bethany (12:1–11)

In this chapter John permits us to feel the tension building as Jesus leaves his retreat at Ephraim and begins his final march on Jerusalem. It is just over a week before the Passover will begin (1) and Jesus chooses to break his journey at Bethany. The scene of his recent supreme act of vindication by the Father, it will provide him with further encouragement as he prepares for the fearful trial ahead. So Jesus *arrived at Bethany* (1).

A public meal is held in his honour, with Martha, predictably, among the servers, and Lazarus among the guests (2). **Thus Jesus' public ministry, which began for John at the wedding feast in Cana, moves to its close with another social occasion at Bethany.** The mood, however, is strikingly different. At Cana, Jesus and the disciples had attended in the anticipation of their newly launched mission, the bringing of the sparkling new wine of the kingdom to the tired, insipid waters of Judaism. The mood was buoyant, even exuberant. Here the tone is significantly different. Dark, heavy clouds are massing on the horizon; there is a burden in the heart of Jesus. The celebration is muted. The talk is of burial rather than renewal.

Yet even here the note of optimism is not excluded, for this *is* a celebration. We cannot entirely lose the perspective of hope expressed in the meal, and its promise of the coming day when those from north and south, east and west will sit down together in the kingdom of God. Lazarus' presence is also significant, the symbol of Jesus' ministry in its divine authority. But, as always, it was a 'sign spoken against', and so before the account is completed we will learn of plotting against Lazarus too (10–11).

The warm conviviality of the meal is interrupted as Mary comes up behind Jesus as he reclines in the customary manner, his head close to the low central table where the food was laid. In an act of moving devotion she approaches Jesus and, breaking open a bottle of very expensive perfume, anoints his feet (3). Nard is an oil-like perfume extracted from the root and spike of the nard plant, grown in India; definitely not one of the lower-quality brands sold at the Bethany supermarket!

This incident has parallels in the other gospels. Luke describes an anointing which has only partial points of contact and is viewed by many as an account of a different incident much earlier in Jesus' ministry (Lk. 7:36–39). Matthew and Mark, however, appear to be describing the same event (*cf.* Mt. 26:6–13; Mk. 14:3–9). The most obvious point of seeming contradiction concerns which part of Jesus' body Mary anoints. John speaks specifically of the feet, Matthew and Mark of the head, of Jesus. In fact, as D. A. Carson points out, the amount of nard used was considerable and hence the anointing was likely to have extended beyond either the head or the feet. Significantly in Matthew's and Mark's accounts, Jesus refers to Mary's having anointed his 'body' for burial (Mt. 26:12; Mk. 14:8).

Mary's using her hair to wipe Jesus' feet (3) echoes the earlier incident Luke records, and may even be in conscious imitation of it, since the earlier act is likely to have been retold among Jesus' followers. A woman unbinding her hair was regarded as most unseemly, so Mary is clearly moved by deepest feelings of loyalty in being willing to brave the inevitable social disapproval. The effect on the atmosphere is immediate and pervasive as the whole house fills with the fragrance of Mary's deed, both physically and emotionally (3).

Not all are pleased, however. The synoptic writers refer to the indignation of 'the disciples' at the wasteful extravagance of Mary's action. John focuses on the ringleader of the discontent, Judas (4). 'Judas is the type of man who has money on his mind all the while. He views everything from the aspect of pecuniary value.' He is referred to as *Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him*, reflecting no doubt 'the shocking force of hindsight'.

The value of the perfume was indeed enormous, equivalent to the total annual salary of an average or above-average wage-earner (5). And now it was all gone, in a society where the evidences of abject poverty were on every hand and starvation never far from the door for most households. Some degree of sympathy with Judas is, at first sight, not entirely misplaced. There are certainly no grounds for the assumption that in his place we would not have shared his reservations. But Judas has deeper and darker motives. As the treasurer of the disciple band he apparently was not above helping himself from the revenues in his charge (6). The value of this perfume would certainly have given him rich pickings. John's implication is that this pilfering had already become a settled trait in Judas and perhaps throws some light on his betrayal of Jesus, which, when all is said and done, was for a significant monetary price. Avarice had already, apparently, invaded his soul. **Before ever there was a betrayal of Jesus' person there was a betrayal of Jesus' trust.** Judas' acting as treasurer would certainly have been with the approval of Jesus, if not by his direct appointment. Presumably he had some aptitude in this area, since clearly others might have been chosen, like Matthew, with a proven experience of monetary affairs behind them. Possibly



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because 'Temptation commonly comes to us through that for which we are naturally fitted', the task was given to Judas, and with it the trust of his colleagues and above all that of Jesus. And he woefully, and wickedly, betrayed it.

Jesus defends Mary—it was intended (7). There was a divine purpose in her deed, the preparation of Jesus' body for the day of his burial! With this utterance the atmosphere must have chilled considerably. But Jesus spoke truly, for if the timing of the incident at *six days* before the Passover is noted (1), then, exactly one week from that Saturday evening, Jesus' body, anointed for a second time, would lie in the cool and silence of a tomb in a Jerusalem garden. The Greek of verse 7 is somewhat unclear. The NIV's *It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial*, however, appears to reflect the sense well enough. See Matthew 26:10: 'Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me.' It is impossible to know to what extent Mary understood the significance of her action. Commentators divide and clearly dogmatism is out of place. Our view will appear below.

You will always have the poor among you (8) has occasioned comment. Two extremes are to be avoided in interpretation. On the one hand Jesus is *not* teaching that giving to the poor has no place in a disciple's financial obligations. The very existence of the alms bag among a group whose leader professed to have 'nowhere to lay his head' (Lk. 9:58), and whose material legacy was only the clothes he wore to execution, speaks powerfully to every follower of Jesus of the obligation of sacrificial giving to the less fortunate. 'The poor you will always have with you, and you can [and should] help them any time you want' (Mk. 14:7). On the other hand Jesus is certainly not minimizing the centrality of his personal, self-sacrificing mission for the sins of the world. It is his all-consuming consecration to that costly mission which brings Jesus to this feast, as Mary perceives, and for which perception she is commended (7). The cross must control every aspect of the disciple's life, including alms-giving. Jesus is not presenting us with the competing loyalties of 'spiritual' versus 'material' giving. It is a prime case of both/and, rather than either/or, with each at the proper occasion, and all in the light of the cross.

The real challenge presented in Jesus' statement, however, is motivational. Our giving to the poor, or for the preaching of the gospel, is finally sterile if motivated in either case from a desire to attain merit before God. What Jesus brings is the radically new motivation of gratitude. His journey to Jerusalem to offer himself for lost sinners brings those who have despaired of earning God's favour the free gift of salvation. Those saved by his grace become his debtors, in gratitude making available for his service all they possess. 'Devotion to Jesus and gratitude for his sacrifice will lead in fact to a service of the poor (which will always be needed) in a manner quite different from a legally required almsgiving. It will be in fact part of the fragrance of the gospel which is destined to fill the whole world.'

In the following verses we note the two-edged effect of the miracle of the raising of Lazarus. For many it brought new and persuasive grounds for believing (11). For the chief priests it extended their 'hit list', as Lazarus also becomes a target of their prejudiced minds (10). This illustrates well the uncontrollable reality of sin. Once we surrender to expediency as the rule of action, we are in the grip of a current which will sweep us on without mercy. First Jesus must die, then Lazarus, later Stephen, and then James. It has been rightly observed that he who would sup with the devil had best ensure he is supping with an exceedingly long spoon. 'Everyone who sins' becomes 'a slave to sin' (8:34).

This action of Mary represents a model for service of Jesus in every generation. It is in the **first place** the fruit of a *humble spirit*. To anoint Jesus' feet she assumed a posture of subservience. Significantly, Mary is mentioned three times in the gospels and always in association with Jesus' feet. Thus she 'sat at the Lord's feet' (Lk. 10:39), to listen to his teaching; she 'fell at [Jesus'] feet' (Jn. 11:32), to indicate her dependence; now she anoints Jesus' feet to express her devotion. True service for Jesus springs from a whole-hearted commitment to him as Lord. The feet of Jesus is where service for him begins.

Secondly, Mary shows a *perceptive heart*. Although the full significance of her action is possibly hidden from her, it was 'right' because she perceived something of the mind of Jesus. Despite the festive nature of the occasion Mary senses his *true* spirit, and feels in her own soul the chill of the dark waters in which Jesus must soon be immersed (Lk. 12:50). The secret of Mary's insight is an open one. She 'sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said' (Lk. 10:39). Here is the path to the heart of Jesus, open to all disciples. As we make it a priority to spend time at Jesus' feet listening to his Word (and it needs the whole Bible to interpret his Word) we begin to attune with Jesus' mind and discern how, where, and in what ways we can serve him. The encouragement of this incident is that our acts of devotion genuinely 'serve him'. Within the wonder of God's condescension to us in Jesus Christ is his ability—the Almighty who has need of nothing (Acts 17:25)—to allow us to minister to him in ways which bring



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delight to his heart, and further his cause in the world. Hence to Mary is given the surpassing privilege, a 'share in the consecration of Jesus to the royal service of his passion by which the saving sovereignty of God will be won for the world'.

Thirdly, Mary's was a *timely act*. It was *intended* (7) that the perfume be kept for this moment. Had she kept it for another time the opportunity would have passed. Life is full of uncertainties; we 'do not even know what will happen tomorrow' (Jas. 4:13f.). So 'as we have opportunity, let us do good' (Gal. 6:10), or, in Jesus' own words, 'We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work' (9:4, RSV). William Barclay tells the poignant story of Thomas Carlyle and his remorse at failing to appreciate his long-suffering wife while she was alive. 'If only I could see her but once more, were it but for five minutes, to let her know that I always loved her. She never did know it, never.'¹⁶⁰ *Now* is the time to serve Jesus.

Fourthly, Mary's action was *sharply criticized*. There is a note of realism here. While Jesus may approve, others may not—even among the inner circle of Jesus' disciples. The opposition *may* arise from hearts which follow this present world, like Judas, and for whom our Christian work and ministry seem a sheer waste. It also may arise, however, from fellow-disciples, possibly rebuked by our spirit of sacrifice, or with their own agendas for our time, talents or treasure. We need fortitude in serving Jesus.

Fifthly, perhaps the most notable quality of Mary's action was its *extravagance*. It was an amazingly generous gift (even if the family was relatively wealthy, as the number of mourners from Jerusalem [11:19], and the expensiveness of the perfume, would suggest). Mary, however, gave it away; poured it all out for her Master.

There is a prudence which is rightly part of the Christian mindset. Extremes and extravagances do not often work the will of God, perhaps because they are often fed, not by genuine devotion, but by ego factors in the Christian or church concerned. Nonetheless Jesus merits the richest treasures of our self-giving. It is possible to become so circumspect and balanced in our Christian profession that we lose touch with the extravagance of a heart like Mary's. In the service of Jesus there is indeed a 'time to keep', but there is also 'a time to throw away' (Ec. 3:6), for the glory and honour of him who is worthy of all our love and devotion.

Finally, Mary's service was *fruitful*. *The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume* (3). The synoptics record Jesus saying in assessment, 'wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told' (Mk. 14:9). Thus a simple act of devotion has become a light to multitudes in every corner of the earth. Sincere service of Jesus, however much it may be opposed, has a capacity to touch and bless other lives, a capacity which is missing from acts of merely legalistic piety. Others will be blessed when we serve Jesus; perhaps, as in Mary's case, far beyond our dreams. For what is done for Christ, however humble, becomes part of the indestructible. 'Anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward' (Mk. 9:41). 'Let nothing move you as you busy yourselves in the Lord's work. Be sure that nothing you do for him is ever lost or ever wasted' (1 Cor. 15:58, JBP).⁴

10

Why Jesus Wept

Raising Lazarus from the Dead

John 11:1–44

God can do anything. But that doesn't mean it's always easy on Him.

What happens to the moral strength of people who are immersed in a technology-driven culture that prizes and provides user-friendly, instantaneous access to user-focused products and experiences? When remote controls can adjust the conditions in our lives at the push of a button, we develop an aversion to hard work. When drive-up windows and online ordering allow us to acquire things we want quickly, we develop an aversion to waiting. When we can create our own playlists or online radio stations so we can listen only to the music we want to hear, when all the people in our households can watch or record whatever shows they're interested in, we don't have to be adaptable or deferential. When airbags—literal or metaphorical—surround us to minimize the effects of accidents or negligence, we don't have to face painful consequences. And speaking of pain, when a pill or an ointment exists for almost any ache or discomfort, we become conditioned to avoid pain and characterize it as an unfair intrusion.

⁴ Milne, B. (1993). [*The message of John: here is your king!: with study guide*](#) (pp. 156–180). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.



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I once spoke with a ninety-seven-year-old church member who had just had eye surgery the day before. She was quite a lady, all four feet, eleven inches of her. When she was a young girl, her family migrated from Texas to Kentucky in covered wagons to be sharecroppers. Hunger, blisters, and tattered clothes defined her growing-up years. I asked her, “Miss Flora, have you had any pain since the surgery?”

She smiled almost as if I had asked a silly question. “No,” she replied. “No pain. It hurts quite a bit, but no pain.” At that moment I realized we came from different planets. In her world, physical discomfort (“hurts quite a bit”) didn’t even qualify as pain.

I don’t want to be one of those curmudgeons who go on and on about what’s gone wrong with the world. But let’s acknowledge this: when we live in a world where so much comes so easily, we tend to become morally weaker people—people who find it hard to choose to do what’s right when it requires long waiting or difficulties.

Just as physical muscles grow weak with lack of use, so do moral muscles. Think of a barbell. If a few generations ago people could lift a hundred pounds of waiting, today we can hardly bear ten pounds of it. The problem is character and faith development for Christians requires struggle and patience. But we find these hardships intolerable in a comfort-oriented culture.

This comes as no surprise to the Lord. He understands our weakness and is not stymied by a culture that fails to shape character. No matter the times or seasons of history and cultures, He has one character development tool He always uses effectively: desperation.

Desperation moves people to do what their moral strength can’t. As I look back over my life, I am convinced that no significant change, no substantive improvement, no shedding of sin would have occurred apart from desperate moments. Our Lord knows how to bring all of us to that point for our good. “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years. . . . *He humbled you, causing you to hunger* and then feeding you with manna . . . to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:2–3).

“God causes us to hunger and then feeds us” should be an axiom of our faith. To people going through times of hungering, it may not seem very loving. But God’s plan is to make us desperate for Him and everything that really matters, to move us when we lack moral power. With this in mind, let’s turn to Jesus’ miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead.

This miracle is famous not only for being the most astounding miracle of Jesus’ public ministry but also for containing the Bible’s shortest verse: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). Our “fresh eyes” task is to try to understand what made Jesus cry.

Who Knew What When?

The Jews who observed Jesus’ tears drew this conclusion: “See how he loved him!” (v. 36). They assumed He was grieving over Lazarus’s death. Of course, that was a natural assumption, because people weeping over the loss of Lazarus surrounded the tomb. Many scholars believe Jesus felt deeply troubled and angry at death itself, even though He knew He was about to undo the death of Lazarus. Perhaps. But I think we should consider another possibility. It requires tracking back through the narrative and charting the main characters involved, where they were located, and what they knew as the events unfolded. “Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (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.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, ‘Lord, the one you love is sick’” (vv. 1–3).

These three verses introduce four main characters: Lazarus, Mary, Martha, and Jesus. (Of course, there are the messengers, but they are not identified and play no significant role in the narrative, except to deliver the message.) Where were the main characters located? Lazarus, Mary, and Martha were in the village of Bethany. Where was Jesus? We can’t be entirely sure of the location, but He was apparently some distance from Bethany. Most scholars assume He was about a day’s walk away.

Scripture then brings a few more people into the story: “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.’ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, ‘Let us go back to Judea’” (vv. 4–7).



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Who are the new characters? The disciples. And where were they? They were with Jesus. We now have all the characters identified. Let's create a simple diagram and group the characters together according to where they were located.

Jesus and the Disciples

Lazarus, Martha, and Mary

The thick black line represents the significant geographical separation between the two groups. Now let's fill in the diagram with what these people "knew" as the events unfolded.

So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the *one you love is sick.*"

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." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, *he stayed where he was two more days.* . . . "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"

Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."

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."

His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

So then he told them plainly, "*Lazarus is dead,* and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (vv. 3–16)

The passage indicates the disciples knew at least nine things, listed in the left column of the following diagram. In the right column, I list eleven things Martha and Mary knew, eight of which perhaps Lazarus knew, if he was conscious during the worsening stages of his sickness. Some of these things are not explicitly stated in the text but can be assumed based on the timing of events and the reaction of the sisters when Jesus finally arrived.

What the Principal Characters Knew

Jesus and the Disciples

Lazarus, Martha, and Mary

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lazarus was very sick. • The sickness would not end in death. • Jesus would be glorified in it. • He stayed put for two days. • Jesus would be heading into trouble by going near Jerusalem. • The disciples were worried for Him. • After initially misunderstanding what Jesus meant by "asleep," the disciples finally understood when Jesus told them plainly that Lazarus was dead. • Jesus was glad about that. • Something would happen to aid their faith. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lazarus was frighteningly sick. • Jesus loved Lazarus. • They had sent a message to Jesus, assuming He would come help. • If He got there in time, Jesus would save Lazarus (vv. 21, 32). • They were waiting. • Jesus had not come. • Waiting . . . • Jesus had not come. • Lazarus was dead. • Dead people stay dead. • They were grieved and disappointed over Jesus' apparent unresponsiveness. |
|--|---|



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A great value of making a chart is how it helps you condense the observations into a helpful summary. In this case, the summary statements below create a powerful contrast.

What the Principal Characters Knew

Jesus and the disciples knew everything would turn out for the good in a glorious way.	Lazarus, Martha, and Mary knew only that they had sent a request to Jesus and things had not turned out for the good because Jesus had not come in time.
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This summary diagram sparked an interesting realization about what might have moved Jesus to tears. Right away I realized that the thick black line represented not only a geographical barrier but also a “knowledge of God’s will” barrier. Lazarus, Martha, and Mary could not see over that barrier. Jesus had a plan to raise Lazarus, reveal His own glory, and build their faith. But Lazarus, Mary, and Martha did not know that.

And I thought, *That’s just the way it is when we pray.* We send our request up over the knowledge barrier that stands between some desperate situation we face and God’s undisclosed plan. We can’t see over that barrier, so we usually remain in the dark as we wait for God to show up somehow. We have to believe something is going on, that God is working all things out for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), but we rarely know what or when or how.

Something important happened in my life at that moment. I found myself bowing in my heart, surrendering to “the way it’s often going to be.” This story is not just a New Testament episode to be enjoyed. It’s a revelation of how God works most of the time, and that struck me as wonderfully okay.

I thought, *I really am okay with this.* I can be in the position of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary anytime over anything for the rest of my life, and I will be content knowing that on the other side, where my prayers can go but I can’t, I have a God who loves me and is working to show His glory and build my confidence in Him.

It Hurts to Be Lord

That was an interesting and life-settling thought, but it also led me to see with fresh eyes what may have been behind the tears in Jesus’ eyes. Stop and think:

- • Jesus told His disciples that Lazarus’s sickness would not end in death, but He did not tell the ones who needed to hear most. He kept them in the dark; they knew only that He hadn’t come and He hadn’t replied. Don’t you think Jesus knew what He was putting them through?
- • Jesus let Lazarus die. Jesus’ friends were waiting and waiting. Watching helplessly as their brother suffered and grimaced, then turned lifelessly gray. Don’t you think Jesus knew what He was putting them through?
- • When Jesus finally arrived, both sisters separately said to Him what they had undoubtedly spoken numerous times as they waited helplessly: “Lord, if you had been here . . .” Their sense of having been neglected by Jesus likely doubled their grief over their brother’s death. Their words have almost the same tone as the day the waves washed over the disciples, sinking boat and they screamed, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” (Mark 4:38). Don’t you think Jesus knew what He was putting them through?

Yes, He knew. So when He finally arrived and faced their grief and saw the disappointment in their tear-streaked faces, that’s when Jesus wept. The text specifically says it was that sight that caused Him to be “deeply moved in spirit and troubled” (v. 33), not necessarily the fact of Lazarus’s death but the degree of desperation He had chosen for Mary and Martha.

Of course, this is conjecture, as it always is when it comes to explaining emotions. But this hypothesis fits with what the Bible reveals about the Lord over and over again. Compassion for all of us weak and lost and helpless children fills His heart. He must do certain things to teach, train, discipline, and strengthen us in faith and character.



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The things He must do often leave us wondering, worrying, and waiting in desperation. It's necessary. And it hurts not just us but Him . . . probably even more.

Retrospective

As I look back on my life, I am certain God has superintended all that has happened to me—the directing of my path toward the fully good goals God chose—with the divine and judicious employment of desperation. This is how it always works. We move toward God by spurts and surges sparked at points of desperation brought on directly by Him, by His gracious sculpting of our circumstances, or by the magnificently intelligent use of our best and worst choices.

This is God's way of helping us choose His will without crushing our own. Through desperation He nudges our will to the very brink of making right choices but then steps back and leaves us right there so we can participate in the thrilling leap toward the right and good and eternal. "I am the resurrection and the life. . . . Do you believe this?" He asked Martha (John 11:25–26).

He does not pad our falls but lets us be broken. He does not rescue us until we feel helpless. He does not shine light in the daytime but lets the darkness settle in until we cry for illumination. It seems almost cruel to our modern ears that have been trained to believe parenting is all about protecting children from all pain. But letting children cry sometimes may be the most loving act of all. And God always knows when and why and how long to let us cry.

If we are to experience the fullness of life God makes available through the Holy Spirit, we must be desperate for it. There's no use in God offering a feast for which we have no appetite. But we can't make ourselves hungry on our own. Even this comes from God. He causes and allows our hunger to grow, our thirst to deepen, and our drives to intensify and remain unfulfilled until we reach a desperate point where only one right choice will feed our starving souls. God superintends our spiritual development through the ministry of desperation. Again I say, "He humbles us, causing us to hunger, then feeds us with manna" (Deut. 8:2).

But the insight we gain from the miracle of Lazarus's resurrection is that the Lord Jesus' own sorrow ignites when He takes us deep into desperation. What love! I believe that was what was going on inside Jesus at the edge of Lazarus's tomb and resurrection. He wept for how He made them weep. And that helps me love Him even more.

20/20 Focus

1. This chapter suggests that the geographical distance between Jesus and Mary and Martha and their lack of understanding about what was going on symbolize what is often our experience in prayer. How often do you think this happens? Is it that way 90 percent of the time? Sixty? Forty? Is that always by God's choice?
2. Is there ever value in *not* knowing what God has in process while He's answering our prayers?
3. It is immensely difficult for people in our instant-gratification world to wait patiently. What other habits of Christian maturity are made difficult by the habits and expectations our modern culture creates?
4. Perhaps your parents said to you, "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you." Did that mean anything to you then? I mentioned it helps me to know that Jesus weeps when He has to let us hurt. Does that help you? Why or why not?

Lord, I have to admit, I would always like to know what's going on. It's very hard to believe You're working everything out for good when I can't see You working at all. But I know that's when I have to trust Your words in Scripture. So help me keep declaring in the darkness, "You will never leave me nor forsake me. You are the light of my life. Peace that passes understanding will guard my mind in Christ Jesus." Then help me wait patiently for You, Lord. I offer my waiting as an act of worship. Amen.

Vision Check



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It's a paradox. Creativity flows out of grunt work and rigorous effort. Jazz musicians practice before they improvise. As this chapter suggests, to get fresh insights into Scripture, you sometimes need to do grunt work like making charts to organize observations and textual data.

Your final challenge in this book is, appropriately, a tougher one. Read through Acts 13–21 to chart Paul's missionary travels. Simply list the destinations and what made him choose each one. After you've filled in the chart, make your observations and see whether you can draw any conclusions and learn any lessons from Paul's decision-making process. Then hop on dougnewton.com or the Fresh Eyes app to compare your discoveries with mine.⁵

Lazarus of Bethany

Lazarus of Bethany, the brother of **Mary** and **Martha**, is mentioned by name only in the fourth Gospel, at the time that **Jesus** raised him from the dead (John 11:1ff.). Luke mentions Mary and Martha but never mentions their brother by name or otherwise (Luke 10:38ff.). Mary was the woman who had anointed Jesus' feet with perfume and wiped them with her hair (John 11:2), and it may have been through her that Jesus met Lazarus. While little is told about Lazarus, it is apparent that they were friends (John 11:5). Some scholars believe that Lazarus may have been the young man whom Jesus told to sell all his possessions and give to the poor, and he could not (Matt. 19:16ff.).

The most spectacular of all Jesus' miracles was the raising of Lazarus. The raisings of **Jairus's** daughter (Mark 5:22ff.) and the son of the widow at Nain (Luke 7:11ff.) took place immediately after their deaths, while that of Lazarus was after he had been dead four days. While one might argue that the first two were not really dead but only comatose, there can be little question that Lazarus was dead.

John reports that the word of this miracle shocked his enemies to the point that they were ready to kill Jesus (John 11:53), and it was unquestionably one of the most important events in Jesus' ministry short of the passion itself. This immediately raises the question of why such an important event is not mentioned by any of the other three evangelists. Some believe that the story is a fiction, having grown out of the parable of **Lazarus and Dives** (in which Jesus said that they would not believe even if one returned from the dead). This, however, does not account for the presence of Mary and Martha in the story. It is also possible that the others had not heard of it, but this is unlikely. A reasonable explanation is that **Matthew, Mark, and Luke** chose not to tell the story during the lifetime of Lazarus, because his very existence was a threat to the enemies of Christianity, who would be happy to see him dead.

In the novel *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Nikos Kazantzakis presents an entirely different view of Lazarus. In his account Lazarus is restored to life but retains the ravages of four days' decay in order to demonstrate the unimportance of life in this world compared to everlasting life with God. He is then murdered by fanatics. While this is out of the mainstream of Christian theology, it is certainly not inconsistent with it. It presents a fascinating image to contemplate.⁶

LAZARUS

His Name Means "God Helps"

His Work:

Lazarus was the brother of Martha and Mary, the family who hosted Jesus in their home when he traveled through Bethany.

His Character:

Little is known about Lazarus other than that he was one of Jesus' close friends.

His Sorrow:

Lazarus had a terminal illness and eventually succumbed to it.

⁵ Newton, D. (2018). *Fresh eyes on Jesus' miracles: discovering new insights in familiar passages*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

⁶ Losch, R. R. (2008). In *All the People in the Bible: An A–Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture* (pp. 256–257). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.



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His Triumph:

Very few have had the experience of hearing Jesus' voice from the tomb. Lazarus was such a person.

Key Scripture:

John 11

Monday HIS STORY

"Mary...Martha." The words that squeezed through Lazarus's parched lips were barely audible. "Bring me some water."

The voice was quiet, but Mary and Martha, the sisters of the sick man, were on the alert. Hearing his request, they rushed to Lazarus's bedside. Carefully lifting his head, they gently poured cool water into his mouth.

Lazarus swallowed hard, laid his head back, and looked at them. It was a look of gratitude for their kindnesses, but it was also filled with resignation. Lazarus was about to die, and he knew it. Although he had bravely challenged death, the ravages of his illness had prevailed.

Once more he gathered enough strength to speak. "Go...bring Jesus," he whispered.

Martha jumped to her feet and ran from the room. But Mary did not move, staying on her knees beside the bed and tenderly holding her brother's hand.

Over the next few hours, Lazarus could hear people coming and going from his room, but he could not open his eyes or speak to them. He simply didn't have the strength. As he lay there, the intensity of his pain quietly subsided. He felt completely calm. Lazarus slowly paged through his memory bank and saw the faces of his lifelong friends. He reminisced about the good things, and his heart was filled with a deep sense of joy and gratitude.

And then everything became unfocused. Murky. Like a book slowly closing, the memories ended. The noises of the busy people around him faded into silence. Lazarus drifted off.

"Your friend Lazarus is very sick, my Lord," the messenger gasped. He had hurried from Bethany to Perea, on the other side of the Jordan River, where Jesus was teaching. "He may die very soon."

The disciples gathered around Jesus to comfort him. They knew of the Master's intimate friendship with Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. Staying in their home was customary when Jesus was in Bethany. Certainly he would be crushed by the news of his friend's impending death.

"He's not *that* sick," Jesus responded. His words weren't rude, but his frankness shocked everyone. The disciples' faces flushed with embarrassment. The messenger stood aghast. *How could he say that?* they all wondered. *He's not been to Bethany for weeks.*

Jesus thanked the messenger for the information and sent him on his way. "We'll travel to Bethany the day after tomorrow," he said to the disciples. They couldn't believe that Jesus wouldn't drop everything to hurry to his ailing friend. But after almost three years of being with Jesus, they had learned not to question his judgment.

"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, and I'm going to wake him up," Jesus announced to his disciples as they prepared for the trip to Judea two days later.

"But Master, if he's only sleeping, then he'll get better," they answered.

"No," Jesus said. "That was just a figure of speech. What I mean is that Lazarus is dead." And then he added, "And for your sakes, I'm glad that I didn't go earlier. This is going to be a big faith experience for you."

The disciples scratched their heads in wonder. Just when they thought they had Jesus figured out, he surprised them again.

Many hours later as they walked along the Jericho road, the disciples could see the village of Bethany in the distance, tucked up against the foot of the Mount of Olives. When they reached the outskirts, they stopped for a drink. Someone recognized Jesus and ran into town with the news that the Master had arrived.

Martha was the first to hear the report. She rushed to see Jesus. "Lord, if you had been here a few days ago, Lazarus would not have died." Then she said, "But I know that it's not too late for you to ask God to bring him back."

"Lazarus will rise again," Jesus said with a smile.

"That's not what I mean," Martha replied, a hint of frustration in her voice. "I *know* he'll rise again in the last day. I'm talking about *now*."

"I'm the resurrection and the life," Jesus said evenly. "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." Jesus looked directly into the woman's eyes. "Do you believe this, Martha?"



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“Yes, Lord,” she said, an unfamiliar twinge of emotion touching her voice as she spoke.

Martha turned and hurried back to her house. She wanted to tell her sister that the Master had come. When Mary heard the news, she ran with all her might and fell at Jesus’ feet. “O Lord,” Mary sobbed, “if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t be dead.”

Jesus tenderly reached down and put his hand on Mary’s head. Then scanning the grieving crowd, Jesus asked, “Where’s his body?”

“Come this way,” someone volunteered, leading Jesus and his disciples to the burial site.

As Jesus walked toward the tomb, he was filled with overwhelming emotion, a strange mixture of pain over the loss of his friend and the depth of bereavement these people had over Lazarus’s untimely death. Jesus also felt sorry for these people who were without any hope.

In a few minutes, Jesus was standing in front of the tomb. He asked for the stone that sealed the crypt to be rolled away.

Out of nowhere, semiconscious thoughts went racing across Lazarus’s mind. *Was that a voice? Is someone calling me? I must get up to see who needs me.*

Slowly he opened his eyes. Lazarus had never experienced such blackness in his life. The pungent smell of perfume flooded his senses. *Something is over my face*, he thought. He tried to remove it, but he could not move his hands. His body was wrapped tightly from head to foot.

Lazarus took a deep breath, sat up, and struggled to his feet. The dank floor sent a shiver through his bare feet and up his spine. He shuffled in the direction of the voice he had heard. A balmy glow surrounded his cold body—he could see light through the cloth over his face. Lazarus was standing in the afternoon sunlight. He had never felt such warmth.

The sounds of people speaking to each other could be heard all around. Some were whispering, some were gasping, and others were shrieking with delight. “Unbind him,” a familiar voice said. “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

Lazarus’s heart raced with anticipation.

Tuesday **A LOOK AT THE MAN** ***Memoirs of a Dead Man***

The story of Lazarus’s resurrection is filled with ironies.

We know where Lazarus lived—Bethany—and the names of his two sisters—Mary and Martha—but we have no record of a single word he spoke or even a mention of what he was like. We don’t know his occupation, who his parents were, or, if he was married, the names of his wife and children.

If it hadn’t been for his special friendship with the Savior, Lazarus’s death wouldn’t even have merited a footnote in the gospel account. Yet his story is one of the most well-known in all of Scripture.

When word reached Jesus that Lazarus was deathly ill, Jesus seemed unaffected—almost cavalier—about it. Of course, people bringing bad news to Jesus would have been a nonstop event during his waking hours, but Lazarus was his friend—his good friend. Jesus suggested that he and his disciples *should* visit Bethany—in two days!

Like a wife kindly taking her husband aside to challenge his bad manners, we can imagine the disciples suggesting that Jesus might want to reconsider his decision. “How will this look to the family?” they may have counseled.

“I’m doing this for you,” was Jesus’ perplexing response.

At the same time, the disciples were not eager to travel west to Bethany. No doubt, they would have to go through Jerusalem where, just a few days before, a handful of Jewish leaders had threatened to stone Jesus. He had said, “My Father and I are one,” and these people weren’t willing to accommodate a man who claimed to be equal with God.

Two days later the disciples were willing to take their chances. Helping a desperate friend like Lazarus was more urgent than any danger they may have encountered. As they reached the outskirts of Bethany, first Martha and then Mary ran to meet Jesus, reporting the news he already knew. Once again Jesus did not seem eager to help—at least not within Martha and Mary’s time frame.

Jesus asked where Lazarus’s body was entombed and made his way to the site along with a cadre of curious—and a few cynical—onlookers. At no point in this story, however, did he seem to be in a hurry.

Soon he arrived at the cemetery. Can you envision Jesus standing in front of his friend’s burial cave? It had been four days since Lazarus had died. His two sisters, now standing at Jesus’ side, were in a quandary. They were hoping for



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a miracle, but they were just as concerned about how much their decaying brother’s body would smell. The people who had come, standing behind Jesus and Lazarus’s sisters, completed the picture.

Everyone stopped talking as Jesus lifted his head to the heavens to pray. “Father,” he began, “I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you would. But for the benefit of these people standing here, I especially thank you for listening this time.”

People shifted nervously in their places, but no one spoke. Those in the back of the crowd craned their necks to see what might happen next.

“Lazarus, come out!” Jesus said in a voice much louder than anyone had ever heard him use. The living God had just spoken. If he hadn’t identified his friend by name, every crypt in the entire cemetery would have emptied.

And then Lazarus appeared. In his own time and with only the sound of his voice, the Messiah had brought a corpse to its feet.

The final irony was that the Savior raised Lazarus from the dead with his voice but didn’t speak the removal of Lazarus’s grave clothes. He certainly could have finished the job, but he didn’t. Instead, a man wrapped tightly from head to foot stood there in front of his own burial cave—and in front of everyone. “Take off the grave clothes and let him go,” Jesus ordered the gawking crowd.

The last act of this incredible miracle—the unbinding and releasing of the man—was left to his family and friends.

Wednesday

HIS LEGACY IN SCRIPTURE

Read John 11:1–6.

1. There is no scriptural record of Martha and Mary attempting to contact Jesus until their brother was almost dead. Why do you think they waited so long to contact the Savior? When have you been guilty of waiting too long to invite the Lord into your situation? Describe what happened.
2. When the messenger returned to Bethany after delivering the news to Jesus that Lazarus was dying, he certainly went to Martha and Mary with the report, “Jesus isn’t coming right away.” How do you think Martha and Mary felt about this? Have you ever been impatient while waiting for God to send you an answer? Describe your feelings.
3. Scripture gives us some clues as to why Jesus didn’t come right away. Why do you think he waited for two days before coming to Bethany?

GOING DEEPER

Read John 11:38–44.

4. Is it possible that Lazarus wasn’t happy about being resurrected? Why or why not?
5. What do you think Jesus had in mind by bringing Lazarus forth with the grave clothes still in place, then asking others to loose him and let him go?
6. Do you know someone who has been “healed” but is still bound up? What could you do to loose that person?

Thursday

HIS LEGACY OF PROMISE

Resurrection is certainly among the most astounding of all Bible miracles, perhaps eclipsed only in wonder by Creation itself. Although many accounts of supernatural events are recorded in the Bible, only eight resurrection stories are recorded. In each of these miracles—including Lazarus’s account—God’s timing was flawless.

The hope of every believer is founded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And this hope promises that all who come to the Savior in simple faith, confess their sins, and ask God’s Holy Spirit to fill them with his presence will be added to this number of souls that have been brought back from death to life. You and I do not know when this will happen for us or for our loved ones, but we have every assurance that God’s timing will, once again, be perfect.

Promises in Scripture

*I will lie down and sleep in peace,
for you alone, O LORD,
make me dwell in safety.*

—Psalm 4:8

Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.

—John 3:21



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Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

—John 11:25–26

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

—1 Corinthians 15:19

Friday
HIS LEGACY OF PRAYER

Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 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."

—John 11:43–44

Reflect On: John 11:38–42

Praise God: For his resurrection power.

Offer Thanks: For God's love for you, for calling you by name and redeeming you from darkness into the light of his glory.

Confess: Your complacency, your willingness to make the best of your "tombs" rather than daily abandoning them and walking into the light.

Ask God: To fill you with the same sense of wonder and gratitude that Lazarus felt as he stood in the mouth of his burial crypt. And ask him to show you others who need your hands to unwrap their "grave clothes."

Not many people are allowed the opportunity of living twice. Lazarus was one of those. His life was dramatically separated into two parts: preresurrection and postresurrection.

Spiritually, all are given the opportunity of living twice. Our experience can be divided into two parts: preconversion and postconversion. This was exactly what Jesus explained to Nicodemus one night. He called it being born again—a second birth. When we receive Christ, like Lazarus, we go from death to life, darkness to light, lost to found.

Prayer literally moves us from one sphere into the next. We leave the temporal and are transported into the spiritual. We get up from our places in the tomb and walk into the light.

So many of those who were with Jesus—disciples, friends—were profoundly impatient. They wanted Jesus to act on their timetable. Once we have confessed our sin and invited him into our circumstances, our greatest desire should be for his will to be done—in his time.

Father in heaven, thank you for your resurrection power. I want to rest in your sovereign hand. I want to be satisfied with your will on your perfect schedule. Please forgive me for my impatience, anxiety, and lack of faith in you and your plan for me. And I ask that you fill me with your Spirit and give me new life each day. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.⁷

Ephesians 1
Thanksgiving and Prayer

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love^[a] toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our

⁷ Spangler, A., & Wolgemuth, R. (2009). [Men of the bible: a one-year devotional study of men in scripture](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.



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Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

NLT

Paul's Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom

¹⁵ Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere,^[a] ¹⁶ I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, ¹⁷ asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom^[b] and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. ¹⁸ I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.^[c]

¹⁹ I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power²⁰ that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. ²¹ Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come.

Jesus Turns Water into WineNature [Jn 2:7-8](#)

Jesus Heals an Official's SonHealing [Jn 4:50](#)

Jesus Heals a Lame ManHealing [Jn 5:8](#)

Jesus Feeds 5,000 PeopleProvision [Jn 6:1-13](#)

Jesus Walks on WaterNature [Jn 6:19](#)

Jesus Heals a Man Born BlindHealing [Jn 9:7](#)

Jesus Raises LazarusResurrection [Jn 11:43-44](#)

Jesus Rises from the Dead [Jn 20:1-10](#)

Jesus Appears in a Locked RoomNature [Jn 20:19-23](#)

Jesus Appears in a Locked Room for ThomasNature [Jn 20:26-29](#)

Jesus Provides a Miraculous Catch of FishProvision [Jn 21:4-6](#)