



First Baptist Church At The Villages

Jesus: Seeing & Believing • Power Over Death • John 11:1-44 •

For Use by Groups 3/29 through 4/4/2020

MAIN POINT

Jesus' authority over death gives believers eternal hope.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

How many of you have lost a loved one to an illness? Could it have been prevented?

How do you think God was at work in the situation?

Anyone who's experienced the death of a loved one knows how traumatic this can be—so much so that even the strongest Christian might find him or herself asking, “God, I don't understand this—why did this happen?” As Christians, we know we live in a fallen world, one where death comes to all. But knowing doesn't make it easier. Every time death comes, we're reminded of the brokenness of the world, and our hearts cry out. But as Christians, we can have hope. We serve the One who has power over life and death itself.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read John 11:1-16.

If someone called you right now and said someone close to you was very sick, what would you do?

How is this different than what Jesus did here? Why did He do this?

The opening of this text is unusual. When Jesus received news that His friend Lazarus was ill, He didn't do what most of us would do. That is, He didn't rush to get to His side as fast as possible. Instead, He waited. This might seem callous, but His words in verse four help us understand His motives:

"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."

What is your reaction to these words? Why?

Read verse 11-14. Why do you think Jesus equated "sleep" with "death"?

Why does Jesus say He is glad they weren't present when Lazarus died? What did He want His disciples to learn from this event?

| Have a volunteer read John 11:17-27.

What stands out to you in Martha's response to Jesus' arrival? What is it about her words that tells us she trusts Jesus?

How can you cultivate a trust like she had?

When Jesus arrives at four days after Lazarus had died, Martha doesn't respond to Him with angry words—she expresses the truth. She knows that if He had been there, Lazarus would not have died, but "even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you" (verse 22). She trusted Jesus so completely because she knew He was from God. But her great faith would be greater still.

Why does she respond to Jesus' question about the resurrection by talking about "the resurrection on the last day"?

Imagine you were Martha. How would you react to Jesus' response: "I am the resurrection"?

What is important about her confession?

Jesus told Martha an important truth: He is the resurrection, and all that believe in Him live forever. Jesus made eternal life extremely personal by connecting it to Himself—it's something that can only come from a relationship with Him.

| Have a volunteer read John 11:28-37.

Why does Jesus weep? What does Jesus' example here tell us about mourning the loss of a loved one?

Although it's the shortest verse in the entire Bible, "Jesus wept" are two of the most complex words written. Jesus' reaction is a mix of grief over the death of His friend, anger at the brokenness of the world and joy at how the power and glory of God would be manifested in His next action.

| Have a volunteer read John 11:33-44.

What should we learn from the people's reaction to Jesus' command to roll away the stone?

How did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead?

Lazarus was dead, not just for minutes or hours, but days. His body had already begun to decay. There was no doubt that he was dead. But Jesus called out and told him to come out and what happened? He did, alive and well. In raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus performed the ultimate sign to tell everyone His identity—He showed them that He had power over life and death. They were at His command.

Read verse 45. How did the people respond to this final sign of Jesus' identity?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Think back to the time before you were a Christian. What do you think it would it have taken for you to believe in Jesus? Would any sign or wonder have been enough? Why?

Why can we trust these recorded signs of Jesus?

How can you use what you've learned to help others believe?

PRAYER

Close in prayer, thanking God for the signs Jesus performed during His ministry. Praise God for the amazing miracle Jesus performed, raising Lazarus from the dead. Give thanks that Jesus is still raising the dead today, giving spiritual life to those who are dead in their sins. Pray that God would continue to use this study to deepen your faith and that of every member of our church.

COMMENTARY

| John 11:1-44

11:1-3. John chose to record at least seven miracles that prove Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. In the first six, we have seen His power over the physical aspects of life, including the human body, the natural elements, time and space, and even food and drink. But in each case Jesus also demonstrated that His purposes went beyond the physical to the spiritual. Now the Lord revealed His power by reaching beyond life and touching death and the afterlife—territory that belongs only to God. The perfume-anointing described in verse 2 is further developed in Matthew 26 and Mark 14, although John mentions it just to identify the relationship among these two sisters, their brother, and Jesus.

11:4-6. Of course, God was glorified through Jesus' resurrection, but He was also glorified through His death. Any crisis that brings glory to God is good. If God is glorified in illness, it is good, as difficult as this is for our human minds to grasp. The Lord's words, "this sickness will not end in death," show us how much more deeply He was thinking than the disciples. They could never have imagined that Lazarus' physical death would end and he would actually walk out of the grave after several days. God was glorified through the resurrection, but also in the death. The faith and hope Lazarus's death evoked in the sisters occupies a significant portion of this chapter. It appears the four days that passed between the death and raising of Lazarus find their starting point just before the Lord left for Bethany. That allows two days after the original message for the intended delay, and two days for the trip.

11:7-10. The Lord and His disciples had probably been in Perea and had some distance to walk back to Bethany in the northeastern part of Judea. Death threats awaited there, and the disciples had serious reservations about the trip. Verses 9 and 10 represent the Lord's answer, though it does not seem to fit the context. Perhaps it was a proverb of the time, meaning duty is more important than haste. For Jews, the twelve hours of daylight would have been from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and perhaps Jesus emphasized that we have a full twelve hours, but no more. Each valuable hour should be used to glorify God.

11:11-16. Jesus returned to the subject at hand and used a common New Testament euphemism for death—the word "sleep" (see Matt. 9:24; 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:20; 1 Thess. 4:14). After having told them the sickness would not be unto death, Jesus then said clearly, Lazarus is dead. Not only that, but we learn the delay that allowed the death of His friend would work for the benefit of Jesus' disciples. They were on their way south to Bethany. This trip would take them through Jerusalem.

11:17-20. Their arrival in Bethany occurred at least four days later. In the cultural ostentation of Jewish funerals, the mourners, the spices, and the procession still lingered. This was a popular family in the small town of Bethany, so Lazarus' funeral was a major event. But none of the Lord's followers—not the disciples and not the sisters—yet understood how Jesus is our life, as He was to Martha.

11:21-24. Here we have one of the great conversations of the Bible. We already know the personalities of these women, so we are not surprised that Martha charged out to meet Jesus while Mary stayed at home. Her words to the Lord almost take the form of a mild rebuke: if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Yet she hinted at resurrection by adding, God will give you whatever you ask. Knowing her faith, Jesus responded, Your brother will rise again. Martha, Mary, and all these Jewish mourners responded in human fashion to death and sorrow, defeat, and abandonment. According to their words, Jesus should have been there to prevent Lazarus's death. If He were really God, He would have prevented physical death because that is God's job. They treated death as the end of life, the final defeat, a sign that God had deserted them. But He had not.

11:25-27. Jesus said, "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." Does that mean spiritual life beyond the grave as many interpreters have suggested? The context seems to demand an emphasis on physical death and physical life—in other words, bodily resurrection. Verse 26 seems to indicate that whoever is still alive and believing at the time of the Lord's return will never die. Martha did not grasp the entirety of this theology, but nevertheless placed her foothold of faith directly in Jesus' affirmation of His messiahship. She was not completely without faith. She still believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and that He might still be able to do something, although she did not really know what. She understood only two categories of life: physical life on earth and some future life at a resurrection. In her mind, Lazarus had neither of those at the moment. She did not think there was anything Jesus could do about His death.

Jesus said future resurrection was impossible without Him. Martha (as well as Lazarus) had no hope without Him in the picture. He also said that real life (life that extends beyond death) is possible only through Him. A person attains it no other way. This life is both spiritual (will live, even though He dies) and eternal (will never die), and it comes only to those who believe in Jesus. It appears to the casual reader that Martha had climbed on board theologically and would no longer have any question about what Jesus could do. Yet a few minutes later she heard Jesus call for the removal of the stone and objected, Lord, he's already decaying It's been four days (v. 39). Again Martha reminds us of ourselves—willing to verbally proclaim biblical truth without applying it in our lives.

11:28-32. How interesting that Mary's opening line was identical to Martha's, although she had not heard Martha speak and there seems to be no indication in the text that the women had discussed their reaction to the Lord. Martha engaged in theological debate; Mary fell at His feet.

11:33-37. Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. This suggests anger over sin and death which could cause such agony in Bethany. The word "troubled" seems to emphasize agitation, perhaps over the grief of the sisters. When Jesus approached the tomb, He could no longer control himself and wept. John used a different word than the word he chose to describe the weeping of Mary and the Jews. Perhaps the intent was to show that Jesus' tears emerged for a different reason— not grief over Lazarus; He had that situation well in hand. Surely the same unbelief and theological ignorance that prompted His anger also produced His grief.

11:38-40. The emotional intensity deepened as Jesus approached the tomb, deeply moved. Since Martha had raised the protest, the response of verse 40 may be directed primarily at her, though it certainly established a general principle—one that we have repeatedly observed throughout this Gospel: Believing is seeing. To the sisters in their grief, the disciples in their bewilderment, and to all who seek faith for life at any age since this dramatic event, Jesus calls for faith first and sight later.

11:41-42. The power of Jesus is also seen in His prayer. The purpose of the prayer was to create faith in the hearts of those standing around Lazarus' tomb wondering what would happen next. Here we get a glimpse into the relationship of the Trinity, and particularly the Father-Son relationship within the Godhead. What exactly did Jesus mean when He said to the Father, "I said this, so they may believe You sent Me." Jesus' mission was to bring people to faith and John was mission- focused throughout this entire book. The unbelieving crowds of mourners heard Jesus' rhetorical question of verse 40, watched Him, and heard Him pray openly to the Father. We learn later that many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what He did believed in Him (11:45).

11:43-44. Through this miracle we also see that Jesus is our power. How interesting that John should tell us Jesus called in a loud voice, for surely it was not necessary for that call to reach the ears of Lazarus. Perhaps He intended it for the crowd of mourners. Regardless, this is one of the great dramatic scenes of the Bible, but we must be careful using the word "resurrection" to describe it. In one sense, Lazarus did experience resurrection because he came back from the dead. But New Testament "resurrection" refers to a return to life in a state of immortality so that one never dies again. That was the pattern of the resurrection of Jesus, of course, but not that of Lazarus who would die again. Let us just recognize the limitations of resurrection performed in

biblical times as compared with that promised to believers in a future day (see 1 Cor. 15; 1 Tim. 6:16).