

John 11 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

As we've said in previous studies, John wrote his gospel last, after Matthew, Mark, & Luke's were already in circulation.

John aimed his story of Jesus to fill in some details, concentrating on stories the others had left out.

And while the other 3 give more of a straight-forward chronology of Jesus' life & ministry, John is more concerned to center his narrative on certain miracles Jesus performed that reveal Who He is, as well as messages He gave that explained His mission.

This is what forms the content of chs. 1-11.

Chs. 12 thru the end of the gospel are John's account of the last week or so of Jesus' life.

So tonight, we come to the *last* of the miracles John's records - & a remarkable miracle it is!

I. THE SIGNS Chs. 1-11

X. A Dead Man is Raised 11:1-44

We covered this story Sunday, but had to just summarize most of it.

Tonight we'll dig deeper.

1 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.

There was a major highway that connected Jerusalem with the Jordan valley. [map]

It ran up over the Mt. of Olives on the east side of the city then down through the hills toward Jericho. [map]

Just shy of 2 miles along this highway as you went east, & just past the top of the Mount, was the village of Bethany.

Living there was Lazarus & his two sisters, Mary & Martha.

They were loyal friends of Jesus, & when He visited Jerusalem, it was at their house He stayed.

V. 2 is evidence John wrote his gospel years later.

The anointing he refers to he doesn't record until the *next* ch.

But Mary's reputation & this story about her was already well known.

As the story opens, Lazarus was gravely ill.

3 Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."

Martha & Mary knew that whatever Lazarus had come down with was life-threatening & sent an urgent message to Jesus.

He had recently left Judea & was staying with His disciples on the eastern side of the Jordan. [map]

The opposition of the Jewish leaders to Jesus was now out in the open, & everyone knew they'd set themselves to do away with Him one way or another.

So Jesus had left the region of their control & was camping out in the place where John the Baptist had based his ministry a few years before. This was about a day's journey from Bethany.

The sisters sent the message that Lazarus, the one Jesus loved, was ill. The word 'love' is the Greek word "phileo" and refers to the love of friends. Lazarus wasn't just an acquaintance – he was a *close friend* of Jesus'. There was a lot of history between them & the bond of loyalty was strong.

4 When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

Implied in the message of the sisters was that apart from healing, Lazarus would die.

Jesus replied to the messenger with the disciples looking on, that death would *not* be the end of this illness. Rather, God's glory would be brought out through it.

5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.

At first reading, this seems like a contradiction.

V. 5 – Jesus loved Martha & Mary – so → V. 6 He stayed put!?!?!?

That doesn't compute.

The word 'love' here is not 'phileo' as in v. 3; it's 'agapao' which speaks of the highest love.

Agape seeks the highest good of the one loved with no thought of what self will get in return.

If Jesus loved the sisters, why did He not respond to their request immediately?

He didn't because His love would not be made fully known to them if He *had* given them what they wanted.

They wanted healing for Lazarus; Jesus would give them something better.

You see, they *already KNEW* Jesus as Healer – they'd seen Him heal many times.

It was based on this knowledge that they sent the message to Him.

As their first words upon seeing Him in vs. 21 & 32 make clear – they had every confidence Jesus could heal Lazarus.

But Jesus wanted their knowledge & experience of Him to go farther than it had.

He wanted them to know Him as the resurrection & life.

And there was only one way that could be taught – through death.

The most important thing about any human being is their knowledge & experience of God.

We were created to *know* Him – not just to know *about* Him, but to actually *know Him*, to be in relationship *with* Him.

To know God as faithful, we are going to have to be tested so that we can see Him come through.

To know God as deliverer, we are going to have to know peril.

To know God as healer, we must endure illness.

To know God as the giver of peace, we'll have to find ourselves in the midst of

the storm.

To know God as strong, we'll have to be made weak.

And to know Him was the Resurrection, we'll have to be faced with the reality of death.

The people we honor & admire are not those who have lived sheltered & easy lives but those who've been sorely tried and come through stronger and more virtuous.

Trials will either makes us bitter or better.

What determines the difference is how the trial has revealed the power of God to us.

Take note that John doesn't put the emphasis on *Mary* here.

He says that Jesus loved *Martha*, & refers to Mary only obliquely, as Martha's sister.

Most Bible teachers you'll hear like to point out that Mary was commended for sitting at Jesus' feet while Martha was pre-occupied with service in the kitchen.

Mary is the one who anointed Jesus' feet in one of the most tender acts of worship in the entire Bible.

And as we compare the sisters, Martha sometimes come off as looking busy & harried, and missing out on the spiritual side of things while Mary was more in tune with the Lord.

That may indeed be the case – but it doesn't change the fact that Jesus loved Martha as much as He loved her sister.

Martha was a worker. Mary was a worshipper. Both served the Lord in the manner that they were wired for, and Jesus received both of them.

What Martha needed to learn was that Mary's way of expressing her love for Jesus was to sit at His feet.

Mary needed to realize Martha's way of expressing love was to serve.

7 Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

8 The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?"

In ch. 10, Jesus had made a clear & bold claim to being God. The response of the leaders was to take up stones to kill Him for what they considered blasphemy.

The disciples were surprised Jesus would want to go back to the very place He'd recently left because it was so dangerous.

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 one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

In the ancient world, work was done during daylight hours. No one worked at night.

So it became a common idiom to link work with light and night with rest. Jesus knew the time left for His mission was running out.

While He still had time, He had to be faithful with what the Father had set before Him.

And there was an important piece of business in Bethany that had to be taken care of.

11 These things He said, and after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.” 12 Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.” 13 However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep.

The reason the disciples didn't understand what Jesus was saying was because the word “sleep” had not been used metaphorically of death until this time.

It was Jesus' use of it here that began the Christian usage of the death of the believer being likened to sleep.

So when Jesus said Lazarus was sleeping – the disciples assumed he was recovering & rest was part of the healing process.

But Jesus knew Lazarus had died & that He would go & raise him from the dead.

Looked at from the perspective of what was to come, Lazarus *was* merely sleeping.

And this is why the death of believers is called in the NT as sleep – because one day, at the command of the Lord, we will rise.

Death is a comma, not a period.

14 Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. 15 And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.”

That they may believe what? That He has power to raise the dead!

16 Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”

When Jesus spoke this – Thomas didn't have a clue what He was talking about.

What He did understand were only select parts -

14 Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. - let us go to him.”

Thomas thought Jesus was being fatalistic & maybe a bit depressed because His friend had died.

Jesus was going to go back to the sisters to console them – but by doing so, would be apprehended by the authorities & executed.

Thomas is rallying the disciples to a courageous loyalty to stick with Him to the bitter end.

Thomas is often referred to as “*Doubting*” Thomas because he wasn't with the disciples when Jesus first appeared to them after the resurrection.

When he returned & they told him Jesus had appeared, he said he couldn't buy it, & wouldn't unless he saw the nail-prints in His hands.

What he says here doesn't present him as a doubter. His loyalty to Jesus was strong.

17 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days.

It's a day's trip from Bethany to where Jesus was on the east side of the Jordan.

The messenger took a day getting *to* Jesus; v. 6 tells us He waited 2 days, then a day back would mean 4 days since the sisters had first sent word.

That means Lazarus had died not long after the message was dispatched.

Even if Jesus had left immediately upon receipt of the message, He wouldn't have made it in time. So why did He wait 2 days before setting out?

He waited because it was a popular belief at that time, something the rabbis taught, that a person's soul hung out around their body for 3 days following death.

It was thought that if enough prayers were offered by enough righteous people, and the person who'd died had lived an especially holy life, they could rise from the dead.

But with the sundown of the 3rd day, the soul was forever barred from re-entering the body.

Jesus waited till the 4th day so that when He raised Lazarus, there would be no attributing it to chance or any other cause than His power.

18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. 19 And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

The household of Lazarus appears to have been a notable & well connected family.

They were the center of special feasts held in honor of Jesus as would be fitting for someone of their social stature, but here we read that being near Jerusalem, some of the leaders had come to mourn Lazarus' passing.

20 Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house.

It was probably the messenger who'd first gone to Jesus who alerted her.

He'd made the return trip with Jesus & the disciples and as they neared Bethany, he ran ahead to tell Martha Jesus was on His way.

Jesus knew as soon as He entered Bethany a crowd would gather. So He waited outside of town in a secluded place where Martha went & found him.

21 Now 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 of God, God will give You."

As we saw this last Sunday; we can take v. 21 as either a rebuke, or a statement of her abiding faith in Jesus.

Because of what she says in v. 22 – we should probably take it as an affirmation of faith.

She's not being critical of Him coming late, but is instead saying that she

KNOWS IF He'd been there, Lazarus *would* have been healed.

But now that it's too late for Lazarus, maybe He can heal her aching heart.

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

Of course, Jesus means that Lazarus will rise *shortly* – but Martha takes His words to be typical words of comfort, offered up to a grieving friend.

24 Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the

resurrection at the last day.”

Like most Jews of her day, Martha believed in the general resurrection of the dead at the end of History. She thought Jesus was referring to that.

To get an idea of what’s going on here, let’s say one of your loved one’s dies & Pastor Charley comes over to the hospital.

He comes into the room where you & your family are gathered round the bed.

And he says, “You’ll see your loved one again.”

You say, “Oh, I know, one day, we’ll all be reunited in heaven.”

But Charley says, “Ah, no – I mean, you’ll see your loved one in a couple minutes because he/she’s going to come back.”

25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

In v. 22 Martha said . . .

Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.

What Jesus said in vs. 25 & 26 is His answer to her confession of faith.

He would do *far more* than comfort her grief by taking away the pain.

He would remove its cause by restoring her brother to life.

And He would do so because He IS the very thing she’d confessed belief in – the Resurrection.

It was understood that when the Messiah came He would liberate humanity from the Curse.

How He would do it wasn’t understood, but that He WOULD do it was sure.

Here Jesus makes it clear that He’s the Messiah Who’s come to break the bondage of sin & conquer death.

The liberty He brings is received by believing *in Him*.

Since faith in Him is the crucial issue, He asks if she believes.

27 She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

She makes clear her confidence that He is the Promised One – the Redeemer Who’s come to reverse the Fall.

28 And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, “The Teacher has come and is calling for you.” 29 As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him.

Martha enjoyed a private audience with Jesus & wanted her sister Mary to have the same joy so she told her on the sly that Jesus was just outside of town waiting for her.

30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. 31 Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, “She is going to the tomb to weep there.”

When Mary got up to go meet with Jesus, she didn’t slip away with the same care

Martha had.

She just got up & went out in a hurry, & the mourners who were gathered in her home assumed she was going to the tomb to mourn there & followed her.

32 Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Same words as Martha’s – & it makes us wonder if the sister’s hadn’t been saying the same thing to each other over & over again the last couple days.

33 Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. 34 And He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.”

As we saw on Sunday, the word “groaned” translates a Greek word that refers to a sound of extreme indignation & anger.

What’s Jesus so angry at? Mary – for her lack of faith?

No – He’s furious at the devil, at sin & death for all the sorrow it has brought through time.

How many billions of times has this same scene been replayed throughout history – where a man or woman would be crushed over the death of a loved one?

As Jesus stands there – the wrongness of death comes home to Him with renewed force & He is outraged!

When He asks where the tomb is, they lead Him to the place. And when they arrive -

35 Jesus wept.

The word speaks of the kind of weeping that is great sobs.

36 Then the Jews said, “See how He loved him!” 37 And some of them said, “Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?”

Of course He could – but if He had, then a greater and more important lesson would have been lost & our hope would not have the same ground & substance to stand on.

38 Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.

This was the typical arrangement in that time.

They would set the body in such a tomb until it decayed into just bones, then they would gather the bones into a box called an ossuary and set that in the tomb, while a new body was placed on the bed. [tomb slide – ossuary slide]

The roller-coaster of emotions we see in Jesus here – anger, sorrow, anger, shows us His humanity.

Even knowing He would raise Lazarus from the dead, still He’s going through the throes of emotion.

Remember this when you are grieving over the loss of a loved one & the

enemy tempts you with the thought God doesn't care.
He does – so much so that He took on humanity so He could experience what we feel when a loved one dies.

39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead,

And being the practical one, as she always was -
said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

Indeed there would.

40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" **41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this*, that they may believe that You sent Me."**

This prayer was offered up for the benefit of those standing around.

Jesus was not now praying for wisdom on what to do or the power to do it.

Those prayers had already been offered.

This was simply a prayer of *thanksgiving* that a corner was about to be turned in redemptive history – & humanity was about to be given new hope.

43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" **44 And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."**

Be careful how you picture this.

Lazarus didn't *float* out. He awoke in the confines of the tomb, wrapped in the grave clothes, & emerged in his own strength from the tomb.

Jesus had to tell the stunned & shocked observers to go & help unwrap him!

Now, a couple things – in John 5:25-29, Jesus said that the hour was coming & now was when those in the grave would hear His voice & come forth into life.

Then He went on to speak about the final resurrection at the end of time.

He said that it was His voice that would speak the command to rise.

It was here at the tomb of Lazarus that the proof of what Jesus said was made clear.

And it's why in v. 43 He said - "Lazarus, come forth!"

If He'd simply said, "Come forth!" *All* the dead would have risen, as they will in the Final resurrection.

Also, while Lazarus rose from the dead, his was not a resurrection; it was a *resuscitation*.

His old body was merely brought back to life; it wasn't changed into an immortal body as will take place for all believers in the resurrection.

Lazarus ended up growing old & dying after this.

But the lesson his rising taught was clear – Jesus has the power to raise the dead.

Here's something for you to ponder on your own –

Once Lazarus was raised from the dead, Jesus told those looking on to help him out of his grave-clothes.

It's not fitting that someone who's alive should be clothed in garments of death.

How pitiful if Lazarus had stayed wrapped in his burial clothes, bounding around Bethany for the next 20 years!

He had a duty commensurate with the gift Jesus had given him to set aside the signs of death and to live the life he'd so graciously been given.

We who've been born again & entered new life through faith in Christ need to lay aside the sin & death stained garments of our past & embrace the new life that is ours in Christ.

But take note that Jesus told those who'd *witnessed* the miracle to help Lazarus get loose from his grave clothes.

As Christians, we need to love & serve one another to the end that we help one another lay aside the sins of our past and press into our new lives in Christ.

Y. The Plot to Kill Jesus 11:45-57

45 Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. 46 But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. 47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs.

"It's clear now that we've been wrong to resist Him & fail to place our faith in Him as Messiah and Son of God. Let us go to Him now in Bethany & ask if He will forgive our blindness & hardness of heart & take us unto Himself as disciples."

This is the only rational & *sane* response to something as remarkable as raising someone from the dead.

And here is WHY it had to be *Lazarus* that was allowed to die – He was someone well known to the Jewish leaders.

He wasn't some nobody they'd never heard of. This was a guy they knew & when news of his death came, they took it at face value.

They couldn't just dismiss the report of his rising from the dead as made up – the news of his death was well established. So would be his rising.

Their own words reveal the fact that they can't duck the truth of what happened in Bethany.

47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. 48 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."

There it is – there's the reason for their conspiracy against Jesus – they don't want to lose their position as rulers!

As insane as it sounds – there are people who will sell their soul & their eternity for some passing, earthly prize. Foolish, foolish, foolish!

49 And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to

them,

Before we look at what He said, I have to point out the really sarcastic way John describes Caiaphus.

After just showing the rulers willing to trade their eternity for a temporary worldly position, he shows just how *silly* the bargain was.

In the OT, the high priest was a life-time appointment, and was passed from father to eldest son on the high priest's death.

But by Jesus' day the office of high priest was the plumest job in all Israel, so the Romans had exerted control over who served as high priest.

If a priest wasn't doing their bidding, they removed him & installed one more to their liking.

John calls Caiaphus the high priest "that year" – showing what a mockery the priesthood had become.

[Caiaphus said] "You know nothing at all, ⁵⁰ nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." ⁵¹ Now this he did not say on his own *authority*; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵² and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.

Expressing the sentiment of the rulers that Jesus was dangerous and threatened their position, Caiaphus urged them to stop talking and take action.

He said that Jesus must die, and not the whole nation.

What he *meant* was that it would be better for Jesus to be killed than an insurrection rise around Him and call down Rome's fury.

Even though Caiaphus was driven by petty political considerations, John says his words were actually correct – Jesus *did* need to die on behalf of the nation.

His death would bring salvation so that others need NOT die.

⁵³ Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death.

Their conspiracy had just been talk before; now it turned to actual hard plans to kill Him.

⁵⁴ Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim, and there remained with His disciples. ⁵⁵ And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. ⁵⁶ Then they sought Jesus, and spoke among themselves as they stood in the temple, "What do you think—that He will not come to the feast?" ⁵⁷ Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command, that if anyone knew where He was, he should report *it*, that they might seize Him.

This is it – the end has come. The rulers are determined now to execute Jesus.

Knowing this, Jesus left Jerusalem, and went north into the hilly region of

Bethel.

There He waited till the Passover, which would be the time He would return and complete His mission.

CONCLUSION

Look at v. 40 – Martha has just cautioned against removing the stone from the tomb because of the smell.

40 Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”

Question: Was Lazarus’ rising from the dead *dependent* on Martha’s faith? Is that what Jesus is saying here?

Not at all. It was His raising Lazarus from the dead that *gave birth* to our faith in Him as the resurrection & life.

Nothing is going to stop the work of God from being done.

Nothing is going to hinder His plan from unfolding.

But what *we* can miss out on is seeing God’s glory as it unfolds.

It’s faith in Christ that opens our eyes to His work around us.

The unbeliever looks at the orange, red, & golden sky as the sun sets over the Pacific on an August evening.

All he sees is a bunch of colors & says – “Nice sunset.”

The believer see the same sunset and says, “How awesome God is to paint the sky with such gorgeous color!”

The unbeliever attributes the colors to the prismatic refraction of light as it spreads through the atmosphere.

The believer understands that light breaks up into different frequencies that paint the sky with such beauty – and wonders at the incredible creativity of God who would care enough to give us beauty in something as simple as a sunset.

Jesus was going to raise Lazarus, whether or not anyone believed.

Faith is what allowed Martha & Mary to see God’s glory in their brother’s rising.

Faith is what changed them.

There were people there that day who say Lazarus rise – but because they didn’t have faith, they did not see God’s glory in his rising.

Nothing changed for them.