

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, John 11:25 (ESV)

John 11:1-47 (ESV)

DISCUSSION:

- 1. Some have claimed that sickness is a sign of God's displeasure or punishment. Evaluate that idea in light of the story of Lazarus.**

WRONG. Jesus closest friends suffered illness and death. Jesus pleases the Father while suffering.

- 2. Sometimes God's delay is for the purpose of His deliverance. How was that true in this story? How have you seen it to be true?**

His delay was necessary so that the miracle might be indisputable, so that God could be glorified. Many times God's timing and final intent are far off my mark, but so much better.

- 3. Thomas gets a bad reputation sometimes. What good characteristics does he show here?**

He may be a doubter but he is determined. "Well, let's go with him so we may die with him." He's a pessimist, but one who will stick by you. His nickname was "Twin", speculation varies widely as to why that was but one commentator noted that Doubting Thomas is really the "twin" of us all....

- 4. Sometimes we are told to accept death as a "natural part of living," or as part of the "cycle of life." Is this a biblical teaching? Is this Jesus' response (v. 33, 38)?**

It sounds sort of biblical but it is not. Death is the final enemy and exists because of sin and the curse (1 Cor 15:54-57). When Jesus is face to face with it he is "*deeply moved*", [ἐμβριμώμενος (embrimōmenos) verb - Present Participle Middle or Passive - Nominative Masculine Singular. Strong's Greek 1690: From en and brimaomai; *to have indignation on, i.e. to blame, to sigh with chagrin, to sternly enjoin.*]

In other words: He's riled up! He's ticked off at the devil! He is indignant! Death is not natural. Death is NOT OK. It is a continual reminder of the brokenness of the world and it's need for His Return when he will make all things new.

- 5. What is a healthy and biblical view of death and dying? How does our belief in Jesus change our perspective on dying? Are there ways in which we sometimes approach death like a pagan?**

There are whole books written on this topic so we can't do it justice here. Our purpose is to get our class to thinking so they don't just accept the prevailing cultural view around us. Case in point: the modern funeral industry—we pickle people in formaldehyde and try to make them look alive in a fancy box in a fancy parlor—anything but admit that they are dead...but now I'm ranting. Anyway, we all need to try to think biblically about this topic.

Gospel of John
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In general: Death is not to be embraced or praised. But, in some sense it is welcome because as Paul says it is so much better to “be with the Lord.” Therefore when it becomes inevitable, we can start to act like pagans and cling to life regardless of how artificial or minimal it is, as if that’s all we had to look forward to. Wisdom is required, especially as we seek to interact with modern medicine, which pushes things in ways people of old could never have imagined.

Here’s an interesting thought: Cryogenics—freezing your body in the hopes that’s some scientist will solve all the problems of aging and resurrect you...in other words people paying big money in the hopes that *someone* will do what Jesus already did and promises to do again. The world longs for resurrection too!

6. What would have happened if Jesus had just said “Come Out!” in v. 43?

There would have been a lot of dead people walking around because the word of the Son of God is powerful!

7. What’s special about John 10:35? (Other than the fact that it’s great for Bible Bowl).

It shows the depth of Jesus’ humanity. He truly is all man and all God. Although he knows he is about to raise Lazarus from the dead, he feels for these people and loves them deeply.

8. We’ve discussed that the gospel of John is not always in chronological order. Assume for a minute that Mary’s actions with the perfume on Jesus’ feet (John 12:1-8) are *after* her brother’s resurrection. How might the events of Chapter 11 have reframed the value of that precious ointment in her mind? Have you ever had a major life event that dramatically reordered your priorities?

After all that who cares about a jar of nard! It’s funny how big life events make you realize how almost nothing matters and the only thing that lasts are the people.

9. What is Jesus’ ultimate purpose in bringing Lazarus back to life?

It’s not just to deliver him from death (he will die again). It is to prove that He is the son of God and that he has power over death. When He promises us resurrection, He can deliver.

the condition of the sinner's soul, for sin is a disease which has robbed man of his original health. The 'impotent man' (5:7), shows us that the poor sinner is 'without strength' (Rom. 5:6), completely helpless, unable to do a thing to better his condition. The multitude without any food of their own (6:5), witnesses to the fact that man is destitute of that which imparts strength. The disciples on the storm-tossed sea (6:18), before the Saviour came to them, pictures the dangerous position which the sinner occupies—already on the 'broad road' which leadeth to *destruction*. The man blind from his birth (9:1), demonstrates the fact that the sinner is altogether incapable of perceiving either his own wretchedness and danger, or the One who alone can deliver him. But in John 11 we have that which is much more solemn and awful. Here we learn that the natural man is spiritually *dead*, 'dead in trespasses and sins.' Lower than this we cannot go. Anything more hopeless cannot be portrayed. In the presence of death, the wisest, the richest, the most mighty among men have to confess their utter helplessness. Thus, this is what is set before us in John 11."¹

Lazarus' death 11:1-16

In this pericope, John stressed Jesus' deliberate purpose in allowing Lazarus to die, and the reality of his death.

11:1-2 "Lazarus" probably is a variant of "Eleazar," meaning "God helps."² The Synoptic writers did not mention him, which is probably why John identified him as Mary and Martha's "brother." These sisters appear in John's Gospel for the first time here, but they appear in all the Synoptics that preceded the fourth Gospel (cf. Matt. 26:6-12; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 10:38-42).

The "Bethany" in view is the one almost two miles east of Jerusalem (v. 18), not the one in Perea to which the writer referred earlier (1:28). John's further description of "Mary" in verse 2 alludes to the later event he would narrate in 12:1-8.

¹Pink, 2:154-55.

²Brown, 1:422.

Perhaps he believed that his original readers would have heard of this incident already (cf. Matt. 26:6-12; Mark 14:3-9), or he may have just been tying his two references to Mary together.

11:3 The title "Lord" (Gr. *kyrie*) was respectful, and did not necessarily imply belief in Jesus' deity. Obviously Jesus had had considerable contact with Lazarus and his two sisters, so much so that the women could appeal to Jesus' filial love (Gr. *phileis*) for their brother ("him whom You love") when they urged Him to come. They also believed that Jesus could help their brother by healing him (cf. v. 21; Ps. 50:15). They must have realized that Jesus was in danger anywhere near Jerusalem (v. 8).

"The verse now before us plainly teaches that sickness in a believer is by no means incompatible with the Lord's *love* for such an one. There are some who teach that sickness in a saint is a sure evidence of the Lord's displeasure. The case of Lazarus ought forever to silence such an error. Even the chosen friends of Christ sicken and die. How utterly incompetent then are we to estimate God's love for us by our temporal condition or circumstances! ... The Lord loves Christians as truly when they are sick as when they are well."¹

11:4 Evidently Jesus spoke these words to the messenger who brought the news of Lazarus' death, with a view to his repeating them to Mary and Martha (cf. v. 40). Jesus meant that Lazarus would not die in the final sense, though "this sickness" did prove fatal. Lazarus' soon death would give way to resurrection, and the revelation of Jesus "glorified" as God's "Son" (cf. 9:3). In this Gospel, God's "glory" is usually a reference to His self-revelation, rather than the praise that comes to Him from others (cf. 1:14-18; 5:23; 12:28; 17:4).² Ironically this miracle not only displayed Jesus' identity as

¹Pink, 2:159-60.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 406.

God's Son, but it also led to His death—which was the ultimate manifestation of His identity and glory.

"The purposes of a sovereign God in suffering are seen in three specific accounts in John's Gospel. With the healing of the infirm man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5), Jesus taught that sin may be the cause of suffering and sickness. In healing the man born blind, Jesus stated that the reason for the man's blindness was neither his sin nor his parents' sin, but that the work of God might be shown (9:3). And Jesus intentionally delayed his arrival at Bethany so that he and his Father would be glorified when he raised Lazarus from the dead (11:4)."¹

11:5-6 John dispelled any doubt about Jesus' true "love" (Gr. *agape*) for this family. His delay did not show disinterest but divine purpose (cf. 2:4; 7:3-10). His delay in moving toward Jerusalem, and His death, was entirely self-determined (cf. 2:3-4; 7:3-9).

"Let *us* learn from this that when God makes us *wait*, it is the sign that He purposes to *bless*, but in His own way—usually a way so different from what *we* desire and expect [cf. Isa. 30:18]."²

"Friend, sometimes He allows our loved ones to die. We need to recognize that He has a reason, and His ways are perfect. Jesus never moves by sentiment. That is what spoils people and that is how parents spoil their children. He is motivated by love, and that love is for the good of the individual and for the glory of God."³

11:7-8 Jesus' decision to return to the Jerusalem area in Judea seemed foolhardy to the disciples, who reminded Him that the

¹Mark L. Bailey, "A Biblical Theology of Suffering in the Gospels," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 163.

²Pink, 2:164.

³McGee, 4:437-38.

Jews there had recently tried "to stone" Him (10:31, 39). They obviously did not yet appreciate the Father's protection of His Son until His appointed hour, or the inevitability of Jesus' death.

11:9-10 The Jews and the Romans commonly regarded the total daylight "hours" as "twelve," and the nighttime hours as the other "twelve." Literally Jesus was referring to the daylight hours. Metaphorically the daylight hours represented the Father's will. Jesus was safe as long as He did the Father's will. For the disciples, as long as they continued to follow Jesus, the "Light of this World," they would "not stumble." Walking "in the night" pictures behaving without divine illumination or authorization. Living in the realm of darkness (i.e., evil) is dangerous (cf. 1 John 1:6).

"When there is darkness in the soul, then we will stumble indeed."¹

"... men must not follow a supposed inner light, but accept Jesus as the light of the world (8.12; 9.5)."²

11:11-13 Jesus explained further why He needed to go to Bethany. "Sleep" was a common Old Testament metaphor for death (e.g., someone "slept with his fathers"; cf. Mark 5:39). However, the idea that people would awaken from this sleep, while revealed in the Old Testament (Dan. 12:2), was not the common perception of the outcome of death. Normally people thought of those who fell asleep in death as staying asleep (dead). Thus the disciples' confusion is understandable, as is John's clarification of Jesus' meaning.

Jesus' mention of "sleep" here should have reminded the disciples of Daniel 12:2, where Daniel wrote that "those who *sleep* in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt." It should have led them to ask, "Are *you* going to do what Daniel

¹Morris, p. 481.

²Barrett, p. 392.

wrote *God* will do in the future?" Earlier, Jesus had used this same word, sleep, to describe Jairus' daughter, whom He also raised to life (Matt. 9:24; Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52). Even though the disciples apparently failed to make this connection at the time, afterward they, and the readers of this account, could see that Jesus was claiming to do what God promised to do thereby signifying that He *was* God.

The New Testament writers commonly referred to death as "sleep" for the Christian, because his or her resurrection to life is a prominent revelation—and is sure (cf. Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 15:6, 20, 51; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

"In the Bible the word *sleep* is used of physical rest (Genesis 2:21-22), of laziness and indifference (Romans 13:11), of an unsaved condition (Ephesians 5:14), and of death (Daniel 12:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:14."¹

Pink pointed out seven things that the figure of "sleep" suggests: (1) Sleep is perfectly harmless. (2) Sleep comes as a welcome relief after the sorrows and toils of the day. (3) In sleep we lie down to rise again. (4) Sleep is a time of rest. (5) Sleep shuts out the sorrows of life. (6) One reason perhaps why death is likened to a sleep is to emphasize the *ease* with which the Lord will quicken us. (7) Sleep is a time when the body is fitted for the duties of the morrow.²

That Jesus was not teaching "soul sleep" should be clear from Luke 16:19-31. The doctrine of "soul sleep" is the teaching that at death the soul, specifically the immaterial part of man, becomes unconscious until the resurrection of the body. The story of the rich man and Lazarus, in Luke 16, shows that people are conscious after death and before their resurrection.³

11:14-15 Apparently Jesus was "glad" that He had not been present when Lazarus died, because the disciples would learn a strong

¹Ryrie, p. 160.

²Pink, 2:174-76.

³See *ibid.*, 2:155, for contrasts between the two Lazaruses.

lesson from his resurrection that would increase their faith. The *sign* that Lazarus' death made possible would be the clearest demonstration of Jesus' identity so far, and would convince many people that He was God's Son.

"The disciples did already believe in one sense (ii. 11, vi. 69). But each new trial offers scope for the growth of faith. So that which is potential becomes real. Faith can neither be stationary nor complete."¹

11:16 This is the first reference in the Gospels to "Thomas" saying something. John described this member of the Twelve (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13) further as the one called "The Twin." The name "Thomas" evidently comes from the Hebrew *tom* and the Aramaic *toma*, both of which mean "twin." "Didymus" is the Greek equivalent of "Twin." We do not know for sure who Thomas' twin brother or sister may have been. Some commentators have suggested that "Didymus" was a name that Jesus had given to Thomas, indicating that faith and unbelief were "twins" in his nature.² Usually Peter was the spokesman for the Twelve, but here, as later, John presented Thomas as speaking out (cf. 14:5; 20:24-29; 21:2).

"We do not know whose twin he was, but there are times when *all of us* seem to be his twin when we consider our unbelief and depressed feelings!"³

Most Christians tend to think of Thomas as a *doubter* because of His unwillingness to believe in Jesus' resurrection later (20:24-29). However, here his devotion to Jesus—and his courage—stand out! He did not understand how safe or unsafe the disciples would be, going up to Bethany, since they were with Jesus—who was walking in obedience to His Father (vv. 9-10). Neither did Thomas understand that the death that Jesus would die, was a death that His disciples could not readily participate in with Him—at least not yet (cf. 1:29, 36).

¹Westcott, p. 166.

²See Trench, p. 427.

³Wiersbe, 1:335.

Nevertheless he spoke better than he knew. John probably recorded his well-intended challenge because it was a symbolic call to the disciples—to take up their cross and follow Jesus (cf. 12:25; Mark 8:34; 2 Cor. 4:10).

"Though he was lacking in intelligence, he was deeply attached to the person of the Lord Jesus."¹

The revelation of the resurrection and the life 11:17-29

The scene now shifts from the region near Bethany of Perea (1:28; 10:40) to the Bethany in Judea. Both towns became sites where people believed on Jesus.

11:17 There is some evidence that the later Jewish rabbis believed that the spirit of a person who had died lingered over the corpse for three days, or until decomposition of the body had begun. They believed that the spirit then abandoned the body because any hope of resuscitation was gone. They apparently felt that there was still hope that the person might revive during the first three days after death. Other scholars question whether this is what the Jews believed as early as this event.² In either case, the fact that Jesus raised Lazarus after he had been dead for "four days" would have left no question that Jesus had truly raised the dead. Customarily, the Jews buried a corpse the same day the person died, due to the warm climate and the relatively rapid rate of decay it caused (cf. Acts 5:5-6, 10).³

"Not only the rich, but even those moderately well-to-do, had tombs of their own, which probably were acquired and prepared long before they were needed, and treated and inherited as private and personal property. In such caves, or rock-hewn tombs, the bodies were laid, having been anointed with many spices, with myrtle,

¹Pink, 2:180.

²Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 411.

³Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:315.

aloes, and, at a later period, also with hyssop, rose-oil, and rose-water."¹

It is impossible to reconstruct an exact timetable of events day by day, though most commentators offered their views, all of which involve some speculation. We do not know exactly how long it took the messenger to reach Jesus, or how long Lazarus lived after the messenger came and told Jesus that Lazarus was dying (v. 3). We do not know how long it took Jesus to reach Bethany of Judea from where He was, either.

"... it was the practice to visit the grave, especially during the first three days."²

11:18-19 "Bethany" was about "15 *stadia*" (approximately one and three-quarters miles) east of Jerusalem. John implied that "many" family friends came from Jerusalem "to console" Mary and Martha. Prolonged grieving often lasting several days was customary in the ancient Near East.³ Therefore many people from Jerusalem either witnessed or heard about Jesus' miracle.

11:20 This picture of Martha as the activist, and Mary as the more passive of the two sisters, harmonizes with Luke's presentation of them (Luke 10:38-42).

11:21-22 Martha addressed Jesus respectfully, but probably not reverentially, as "Lord." Some readers of the story have interpreted verse 21 as containing a rebuke, but Martha's words there do not necessarily imply criticism. They at least convey Martha's great grief, and her confidence in Jesus' power to heal people. In view of verses 24 and 39, verse 22 probably does not mean that Martha believed that Jesus could raise Lazarus back to life.

More likely, Martha was reaffirming her personal confidence in Jesus that her severe loss had not shaken. Her words in both verses expressed what many others who had faith in Jesus also believed. Her words probably, however, reveal that she

¹Ibid., 2:318.

²Ibid., 2:323.

³Cf. *ibid.*, 2:320-21.

believed that Jesus' power was limited by *distance*. And yet, Jesus had healed both a centurion's servant and a nobleman's son at a distance *by His spoken word*.

11:23-24 Jesus' response was also typical of Him. His words had an obvious literal meaning, but they were truer than anyone present realized at the moment. This is typical of John's ironical style, in which he used words with double meaning.¹ Jesus offered Martha comfort, based on the Old Testament assurance that God would resurrect believers (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; cf. John 5:28-29). Martha, as the Pharisees, believed this Old Testament revelation, though the Sadducees did not (cf. Acts 23:7-8).² The "last day" refers to the end of the present age as the Jews viewed history, namely, just before Messiah would inaugurate the new kingdom age (cf. 6:39-40, 44, 54; 12:48).

"When we find ourselves confronted by disease, disappointment, delay, and even death, our only encouragement is the Word of God."³

11:25 Jesus proceeded to make another of His "I am" claims. He meant that He would personally effect "resurrection," and provide eternal "life" (cf. 5:21, 25-29). He wanted Martha to think about the *Person* who would do the resurrecting, rather than the event itself. Jesus' own power raises people to life, just as Jesus' own Person satisfies people spiritually like bread satisfies physically, and *He Himself* is, therefore, the essential element in "resurrection." Without Him there is no resurrection or life. This was really a double claim. Jesus meant that He is "the Resurrection" (overcomer of death), and that He is also "the Life" (sustainer of life). This is clear because He dealt with the two concepts of "resurrection" and "life" separately in the discussion that followed.

Whoever "believes in" Jesus "will live" spiritually and eternally, even if he or she dies physically (cf. 5:21). Jesus imparts

¹Barrett, p. 395.

²See Josephus, *The Wars ...*, 7:8:7, for evidence that many first-century Jews believed in the immortality of the soul.

³Wiersbe, 1:334.

eternal life to those who believe in Him. *He Himself* is the "life" in the sense that He is the source and benefactor of each believer's ongoing spiritual existence. Whereas He will effect "resurrection" after death, for those who believe and die physically, He bestows eternal "life" during one's earthly lifetime, and it begins for the believer at salvation, before he or she dies physically.

"When you are sick, you want a doctor and not a medical book or a formula. When you are being sued, you want a lawyer and not a law book. Likewise, when you face your last enemy, death, you want the Savior and not a doctrine written in a book. In Jesus Christ, every doctrine is made personal (1 Cor. 1:30)."¹

11:26 Furthermore, every living person who "believes in" Jesus will "never" experience eternal (spiritual) death (cf. 8:51; Rev. 20:6). This is another promise of salvation, but also of eternal security. Robertson translated "shall never die" as "shall not die for ever."²

Jesus then asked Martha to affirm her faith in Him, as the One who will raise the dead and who now gives eternal life. He was questioning her faith in *Him*, not her faith in doctrines. She had already expressed her faith in the doctrine of the resurrection (v. 24). Jesus was claiming to do what Daniel prophesied that God would (Dan. 12:1-2).

11:27 Martha confessed that she did indeed believe that Jesus was the resurrection and the life. Her answer focused on His person, not just on the teachings of Judaism (cf. 20:28, 30-31). That she truly understood and believed what Jesus revealed about Himself is clear from her reply. She correctly concluded that if Jesus was the One who would raise the dead and impart spiritual life: He must be the Messiah. She clarified that what she meant by "Messiah" was not the popular idea of a revolutionary leader, but the biblical revelation of a *God-man*

¹Ibid., 1:336.

²Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:200.

whom God had promised to send from heaven (cf. 1:9, 49; 6:14; 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:2, 7). This saving faith first rested on facts about Jesus that were true, but then Martha went on to place personal trust in Him to fulfill His claims.

Martha's confession of faith is a high point in the fourth Gospel, as Peter's was in the first Gospel (cf. Matt. 16:16). This is the clearest expression of saving faith thus far in this book. Doubtless John recorded it because it advances his major purpose of convincing his readers that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so they might obtain eternal life by believing in Him (20:31). Martha used the same words to describe Jesus as John used in his purpose statement for this Gospel: "The Christ" and "the Son of God."

11:28 Martha's reaction is another good model. Having come to faith in Jesus herself, she proceeded to bring others to Him, knowing that He could help them too (cf. 1:40-45; 4:28-29). As Andrew had done (1:41-42), Martha brought her sibling to the Savior. She described Jesus to her sister as "the Teacher," as they both had known Him best. She did it "secretly," in order to enable Mary to meet with Jesus privately. Jesus had expressed interest in Mary coming (had been "calling for" her to come) to Him, and Martha became the agent who brought her to Him. Rabbis did not normally initiate contact with women, but Jesus was no ordinary rabbi.

11:29 Mary responded to Jesus' invitation to come to Him. This does not mean she became a believer in Jesus right then. Nevertheless it seems clear that she did trust in Him at some time, as Martha did (cf. Matt. 26:6-12; Mark 14:3-9).

The revelation of Jesus' compassion 11:30-37

The emphasis in this pericope is on Jesus' compassion in the face of sin's consequences.

11:30-32 Mary's physical response to Jesus was more emotional than Martha's had been, perhaps reflecting her temperament. Again we find Mary at Jesus' "feet" (cf. Luke 10:39). Her words were identical to Martha's (v. 21). She "met" Jesus in a public place

"where Jesus was" outside "the village," whereas Martha had talked with Him privately. This probably accounts in part for Jesus' different responses to the two women.

"Mary is found three times in the Gospel record, and each time she is at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39; John 11:32; 12:3). She sat at His feet and listened to His word; she fell at His feet and poured out her sorrow; and she came to His feet to give Him her praise and worship. Mary's only recorded words in the Gospels are given in John 11:32, and they echo what Martha had already said (John 11:21)."¹

"In Luke 10, at Christ's feet she owned Him as *Prophet*, hearing His word (v. 39). Here in John 11 she approaches Christ as *Priest*—that great High Priest that can be 'touched with the feeling of our infirmities,' who shares our sorrows, and ministers grace in every time of need. In John 12:3 Mary, at His feet acknowledged Him as 'King'—this will appear if we compare Matt. 26:7, from which we learn that she *also* anointed 'the head' of the rejected King of the Jews!"²

11:33 The phrase "deeply moved" translates the Greek word *enebrimesato*. It invariably describes an angry, outraged, and indignant attitude (cf. v. 38; Matt. 9:30; Mark 1:43; 14:5). These emotions mingled in Jesus' spirit as He contemplated the situation before Him. John also described Jesus as "troubled" (Gr. *etaraxen*). This is another strong verb that describes emotional turmoil (cf. 5:7; 12:27; 13:21; 14:1, 27).

Though John's Gospel emphasizes Jesus' deity, it also includes several unique statements about His humanity: He was "wearied from His journey" (4:6); He was "deeply moved" and

¹Wiersbe, 1:336.

²Pink, 2:197.

"troubled" (here); He wept (11:35); and He thirsted on the cross (19:28).

Jesus was angry, but at what? The context provides some help in identifying the cause of His anger. Evidently as Jesus viewed the misery that death inflicts on humanity and the loved ones of those who die, He thought of its cause: sin. Many of "the Jews" present had come from Jerusalem, where Jesus had encountered stubborn unbelief. The sin of unbelief resulted in *spiritual death*, the source of eternal grief and mourning. Probably Jesus felt angry because He was face to face with the consequences of sin, and particularly unbelief.

Other explanations for Jesus' anger are that Jesus resented being forced to do a miracle (cf. 2:4).¹ However, Jesus had waited to go to Bethany so He could perform a miracle (v. 11). Another idea is that Jesus believed the Jews' mourning was hypocritical, but there is nothing in the text that indicates that the mourners were insincere. Others believe that John meant that Jesus was profoundly "moved" by these events, particularly the attitude of the mourners who failed to understand His Person.² Another view is that it was the unbelief of the Jews and Mary that provoked His indignation.³

11:34-35 "Jesus wept" (Gr. *dakryo*, lit. shed tears; cf. Isa. 53:3). His weeping doubtless expressed outwardly the sorrow that contemplation of sin and its consequences produced in His heart. Jesus' "tears" are proof of His compassion for fallen humanity (cf. Luke 19:41). He could not have been weeping over the loss of His friend Lazarus, since He was about to restore him to life. Likewise it is unlikely that He was just weeping compassionately with Martha and Mary, since He was about to turn their grief into rejoicing. Nevertheless empathy undoubtedly played some part in Jesus' weeping.

Martha had just testified to Jesus' deity (v. 27), and now Jesus' tears witnessed to His humanity.

¹Barrett, p. 399.

²Morris, p. 494.

³Jamieson, et al., p. 10:53; Barrett, p. 398.

Jesus wept three times, according to the New Testament: (1) here, (2) over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), and (3) in Gethsemane (Heb. 5:7).

- 11:36-37 The Jewish onlookers interpreted Jesus' angry tears in two ways. They took them as evidence of Jesus' great love for Lazarus. They did reflect that, but not as the Jews thought. Jesus was not weeping because death had separated Him from His friend. The Jews also wrongly concluded that Jesus' tears reflected the grief He felt over His supposed inability to prevent Lazarus from dying. This deduction revealed unbelief, as well as ignorance, of Jesus' Person. Jesus' healing of the man born blind had occurred several months earlier, but it had obviously made a strong impression on the people living in Jerusalem, since they referred to it now.

Lazarus' resurrection 11:38-44

Jesus proceeded to vindicate His claim that He was the One who would raise the dead and provide life (v. 25).

- 11:38 Jesus again felt the same angry emotion as He approached Lazarus' "tomb" (cf. v. 33). Tombs cut into the limestone hillsides of that area were common. Today several similar caves are visible to everyone. Normally a large round "stone" sealed the entrance against animals and curious individuals.
- 11:39 Even though Martha had confessed her belief that Jesus would raise the dead, she did not understand that Jesus planned to raise her brother immediately. Jesus had given her no reason to hope that He would. The Jews customarily wrapped the bodies of their dead in cloth, and added spices to counteract the odors that decomposition produced. They did not embalm them as thoroughly as the Egyptians did.¹

Interestingly Martha did not appeal to Jesus on the basis of the ritual uncleanness that contact with a dead body would create for the Jews. Perhaps she had learned that ritual uncleanness was not something that bothered Jesus. Her

¹Sanders, p. 274, footnote 1.

concern was a practical one in harmony with her personality as the Gospel writers presented it.

11:40-41a Jesus' reply summarized what He had said to Martha earlier (vv. 23-26). He viewed raising someone to life as an act that glorified God by revealing His Son. Martha's willingness to allow the removal of the stone testified to her confidence in Jesus. When the stone was away from the tomb's entrance, every eye must have been on Jesus to see what He would do.

11:41b-42 Jesus addressed God in prayer, characteristically, as His "Father." He spoke as though the raising of Lazarus was something that the Father had already decreed, which was true (cf. v. 11). His prayer was not a request for Lazarus' resurrection. Such a prayer would have glorified the Father. Rather it was a prayer of *thanksgiving* for what the Father would shortly do: "I thank You that You have heard Me." It had the effect of focusing attention on the Son as God's Agent (God the Father) in performing the miracle. Jesus' prayer also had the effect of drawing the onlookers into His intimate relationship with the Father, and proving that He really did do nothing independently of the Father (cf. 5:19-47; 1 Kings 18:36-37).

"... they [the people standing by] should thus understand that He claimed his power from above, and not from beneath; that there was no magic, no necromancy here."¹

Jesus' public prayer here is a good reminder that all leaders in public prayer should take those present into account when they pray. We should do so, not by "playing to the gallery" (cf. Matt. 6:5), but by voicing prayers that are appropriate in view of who is present.

11:43-44 The dead man heard the voice of the Son of God and lived, as Jesus had predicted (5:25, 28-29). If Jesus had not specified "Lazarus" by name, every dead person might have arisen at His command. Jesus probably "cried out" loudly to make clear

¹Trench, p. 445.

that this resurrection was not an act of magic. Wizards typically muttered their incantations and spells quietly (cf. Isa. 8:19).¹ Furthermore such a loud command emphasized Jesus' authority.

Elijah and Elisha also raised the dead, but they had to labor over these miracles. Jesus, in contrast, raised Lazarus with a word (cf. Gen. 1:3; John 5:28-29). He "called His own by name" (10:3) and did what Daniel prophesied that God would do (Dan. 12:1-2). Thus this "sign" signified that Jesus could raise everyone to life.

"While our Lord used different methods to perform His miracles of healing, his method of raising the dead was always the same. He called to them and spoke to them as if they heard Him. Do you know why He did that? Because they heard Him! I think that when He returns with a shout, every one of us [believers who have died] will hear his own name because He will call us back from the dead."²

The Jews did not wrap their dead so tightly in their grave clothes that Lazarus would have had difficulty doing what John wrote that he did: "came forth."

"The corpse was customarily laid on a sheet of linen, wide enough to envelop the body completely and more than twice the length of the corpse. The body was so placed on the sheet that the feet were at one end, and then the sheet was drawn over the head and back down to the feet. The feet were bound at the ankles, and the arms were tied to the body with linen strips. The face was bound with another cloth ... Jesus' body was apparently prepared for burial in the same way (cf.

¹Morris, p. 498.

²McGee, 4:436.

19:40; 20:5, 7). A person so bound could hop and shuffle, but scarcely walk."¹

While there are similarities between Lazarus and Jesus' resurrections, we must also remember their significant differences. Lazarus came to life only to die again later, as a mortal, whereas Jesus arose never to die again, as an immortal. Lazarus arose with the same physical body that went into his tomb, but Jesus arose with a spiritual body that could pass through solid objects (1 Cor. 15). Thus Lazarus' resurrection was only a pale anticipation of the resurrection of Jesus that was to come. Nevertheless it was the greatest of Jesus' signs.

"If Jesus Christ can do nothing about death, then whatever else He can do amounts to nothing [cf. 1 Cor. 15:19]."²

This miracle illustrated Jesus' ability to empower people with new life (cf. 14:6). He had previously brought Jairus' daughter, who had been dead a very short time, back to life from her bed (Matt. 9:25; Mark 5:42; Luke 8:55). Then He had raised the widow of Nain's son, who had been dead probably about one day, from his bier (Luke 7:15). But Lazarus had been dead four days and was in his grave. There could now be no doubt about Jesus' ability to raise the dead. Physically He will do this for everyone at the resurrections yet future. He will raise Christians at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:16), Old Testament and Tribulation saints at the Second Coming (Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:4, 6), and unbelievers at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:5). Spiritually Jesus gives life to all who believe on Him the moment they trust in Him (5:24).

"... the resurrection of Lazarus therefore is an acted parable of Christian conversion and life."³

"In some respects the story of Martha and Mary prepares the reader for the challenge to believe in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. His intentional delay also reveals that God often

¹Carson, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 418-19.

²Wiersbe, 1:334.

³Barrett, p. 395.

uses suffering as an opportunity for divine intervention, even though it is difficult in such situations to believe."¹

"Just as the preincarnate Word gave physical life and light to humankind in creation (1:2), so Jesus as the Word Incarnate gives spiritual life and light to people who believe in Him."²

There are many questions that John's account of this miracle leaves unanswered that tantalize our imaginations, such as what Lazarus reported to his friends. These things the evangelist deliberately avoided in order to focus the reader's attention on Jesus.

"The miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead authenticated Jesus' authority to grant eternal life to those who believe in Him. In raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus was also demonstrating the validity of His own claims that He would rise again, and that He had the power and authority to do so. This miracle also illustrates Jesus' claims that He will raise people at the eschatological resurrection."³

2. The responses to the raising of Lazarus 11:45-57

Again Jesus' words and works divided the Jews (cf. 6:14-15; 7:10-13, 45-52; 10:19-21).

The popular response 11:45-46

Even this most powerful miracle failed to convince many that Jesus was God's Son. "Many" who had come to console Mary "believed in Him," but the depth of their faith undoubtedly varied. A faith based on miracles is not the strongest faith, but John viewed it as better than no faith at all (cf. 2:23).⁴ John's reference to "Mary," rather than to "Martha and Mary," may imply that these people had greater affection for Mary. Alternatively, they may have viewed her as needing more emotional support than her sister (cf. v. 19). Other observers of this miracle "went to the Pharisees." The

¹Howard, p. 77.

²Harris, p. 178.

³Stephen S. Kim, "The Significance of Jesus' Raising Lazarus from the Dead in John 11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:669 (January-March 2011):62.

⁴Morris, p. 500.