

John 11:1-57

II. Jesus Reveals Himself to the World (1:19-12:50)

Q. The Seventh Discourse – The Good Shepherd (10:1-21)

R. Titles and Works (10:22-42)

S. The Seventh Sign – The Raising of Lazarus (11:1-57)

In chapter eleven, we are introduced to three people for the first time in the Gospel of John: sisters Mary and Martha, and their brother, Lazarus. While Mary and Martha are also mentioned by name in Luke 10:38-42, their brother isn't mentioned anywhere else in the Gospels.¹ As the chapter opens, Lazarus is simply *sick* (vv. 2-3). We don't know how long he's been sick, but we do know that Jesus is going to take His good ol' sweet time getting out to Bethany to see his friend. He *stayed two more days* where He was (v. 6), and it almost sounds purposeful! Indeed, by the time He arrives, Lazarus is not only dead, but he's been dead for four days (v. 17)!

Why would Jesus wait so long to see one whom he loved (vv. 3, 5, 35)? All of the signs and miracles that He had performed, surely this would've been a simple "fix!" Both Martha and Mary expressed their expectations: *Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died* (vv. 21, 32). They knew of His power, but it was coupled with an *if*. They limited Jesus' ability to their perception of what was humanly possible, and not to the boundless power of God. The clues were there all along that God was going to use this tragedy for greater purposes (cf. 9:1-4):

- *This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it* (v. 4). God's power goes beyond what we believe is possible. If He only worked to the extent of our expectations, how would He ever astound and amaze us? How would He put His glory on greater display?
- *Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up* (v. 11). The disciples assumed that Jesus was speaking of a nap, or a rest that would help Lazarus recover, but John adds (as he often does) that Jesus was indeed speaking *of his death* (v. 13; cf. 1 Cor 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess 4:13-15).
- When the disciples still don't quite grasp what's going on, *Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead"* (v. 14). He then adds *I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe* (v. 15). Jesus is really messing with our modern sensibilities here! How dare He say that He was *glad* He was *not there*?! Yet, His purposes are greater than ours!

Martha was first to greet Jesus upon His arrival.² In v. 22, we still see some hope expressed in her words. In response, Jesus informs her that her *brother will rise again* (v. 23), which Martha understands to mean that Lazarus will be resurrected *at the last day* (v. 24). This leads into the next of Jesus' *I am* statements in the Gospel: *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?* (vv. 25-26) There's quite a bit to unpack here!

¹Most people find it unlikely that Mary's act of worship mentioned in 11:2 and detailed in 12:1-3 is the same act of the anonymous woman of Luke 9:36-50.

²Mary, for her part, *remained sitting at home* (v. 20). And really, who could blame her for not wanting to see the Person who could've healed her brother had he only come sooner?! Yet, Pickering notes well: "Since Jesus acted deliberately, it is clear that the Plan involved making the sisters go through that emotional suffering. We need to fix firmly in our minds that belonging to Jesus does not mean a free ride – we too may suffer precisely because of the outworking of God's Plan. After all the discussion is over, we have two options: rebel or submit" *The Sovereign Creator Has Spoken*, 219.

First, Jesus is *the resurrection and the life*. It is through His person and work that people are resurrected unto eternal life. There is no other way except through Him (cf. 14:6). Second, the resurrection is obtained through believing in Him. We once again have the sole prerequisite for eternal life: belief. From the moment we believe, even *though we may die*, yet we *shall live*. Third, note the simplicity of the call to believe the Gospel: *Do you believe this?* As I had mentioned last week, let's not complicate the Gospel! Generally speaking, if a five-year-old can't understand it, it's too complicated!

With that, Jesus and the sisters head to the tomb (v. 34), where Jesus weeps (v. 35).³ The word is different than the one for *weeping* in v. 33, perhaps suggesting that Jesus wasn't mourning over Lazarus as much as the responses of the others. The Jews once again make a remark about Jesus' power: *Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?* (v. 37) The answer, as a matter of fact, was a most assured *yes!* So certain was that *yes* that even death couldn't keep this man in the grave! Jesus commands the stone to be rolled away. Martha protests that there's going to be a significant stench by this point (v. 39). Yet, Jesus responds by pointing back to an earlier statement that they were about to *see the glory of God* (v. 40). Jesus prays to the Father, an action He specifically does for all who were within earshot (vv. 41-42). After praying, Jesus *cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"* (v. 43), and out Lazarus came wrapped head to toe in *graveclothes* (v. 44).

From there, the Jews' reaction was mixed. Some *believed in Him* (v. 45) while others *went away to the Pharisees* to tattle on Him (v. 46). *The chief priests and Pharisees gathered a council*, expressing great fear that Jesus was about to start a revolution, causing the Romans to *come and take away both our place and the nation* (vv. 47-48). As a result, *from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death* (v. 53). Jesus steered clear of the city until it was time for the week leading up to His death. And, indeed, next week, we already arrive at John 12, the passage detailing the Triumphal Entry.

³Fun fact: This is not the shortest verse in the Bible. While it's the shortest verse in the English Bible, the shortest verse in the original Greek would be 1 Thessalonians 5:16, which has fourteen letters. John 11:35 has sixteen. Even then, chapter and verse divisions aren't original to the Hebrew and Greek and thus have no real significance.