

I AM THE RESURRECTION

Jesus is sovereign over all creation.

Sample lesson based on LifeWay Explore the Bible Curriculum

Lesson Overview: John 11:1-54

JOHN 11:32-46

KEY VERSES

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live."

JOHN 11:25

THINGS TO KNOW

- This section of the Gospel shows Jesus withdrawing from Jerusalem (11:1–12:11) and then returning to it for His triumphal entry, plus His final appeal to the people to believe in Him (12:12-50).¹
- The resurrection of Lazarus is the seventh and most powerful sign given by John to prove the deity of Jesus.²
- 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

OUTLINE

1. Response to Death
2. Reminder of True Faith
3. Resurrection Power on Display

SETTING THE STAGE

The ministry of Jesus began at a celebration of a man and woman getting married in Cana. Looking back, it seemed to be a simpler time when the greatest need was to have more wine to celebrate the bride and groom. Many miles have been traveled since that wedding in Cana, with lessons taught, people healed, and questions asked during the past three years of Jesus' ministry.

Clearly, at this point, Jesus was quite the polarizing figure. As we have worked through the book of John, we have learned about several signs intended to prove Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. However, the crowds often would turn into mobs. At the end of chapter 10, there was an attempt to capture Jesus and silence Him. John 10:39 tells us, *Then they were trying again to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.* The next verse tells us that Jesus departed across the Jordan River.

Everywhere Jesus went, there were those trying to pull Him in one direction or another. Some were trying to get closer to Him; others were trying to distance themselves. Yet, Jesus was focusing on the path ahead, knowing that though His hour had not yet come, it was getting closer with each step taken, lesson taught, and miracle performed.

John 11 begins as Jesus receives word that His friend, Lazarus, was ill and would likely die. While Jesus and Lazarus were friends, there was a more familial connection. Lazarus was Mary and Martha's brother, whom Jesus interacted with multiple times throughout His ministry. Clearly, this was not just a random acquaintance; Lazarus was connected to Jesus.

Upon hearing the news that His dear friend Lazarus was ill to the point of death, you would expect that Jesus would immediately go and heal Lazarus. However, Jesus did not drop everything and go see Lazarus. Jesus knew there was a greater purpose to this scenario than a sick man and healing.

JOHN 11:4-7 *When Jesus heard it, he said, "This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. ⁶ So when he heard that he was sick, he stayed two more days in the place where he was.*

After the intentional delay, Jesus and His disciples started the road trip to see Lazarus. It was a trip that would take them back to the region that had tried to capture Jesus and do Him harm.

Jesus, however, is not bothered by the threat of death and instead focuses on achieving a greater purpose. His delay and journey allowed God to be glorified in ways that even the disciples could not imagine.

INTRODUCTION

Death to many people immediately strikes fear or panic into their hearts and minds. That is because death has affected every person to some extent. To some, it brings to mind their greatest fear. To others, it elicits memories of lost loved ones or painful moments of saying goodbye too soon. For some, it forces us to reckon with what comes next. No matter who you are, the idea of death brings an emotional response. Many times, death culminates with a funeral service at which the deceased is honored, celebrated, remembered, and finally laid to rest. A funeral service can represent finality, or a funeral service can be seen as a celebration of a well-lived life and graduation to a greater reward. The difference is the presence of a relationship with Jesus. There is still grieving involved; that grief is understandable, but that grieving is for those still living, not for the person who has joined Jesus.

In our text, we will see the immediate responses of people who have lost someone they loved. We will see how they grieve, and then we will see how their grief is redirected and reframed. We will see how death for the believer is not final because Jesus is the Resurrection for those who believe.

1. RESPONSE TO DEATH

JOHN 11:17-22 *When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem (less than two miles away).¹⁹ Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother.²⁰ As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, but Mary remained seated in the house.²¹ Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died."²² Yet even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."*

In practical terms, Jesus was too late. Not only was Lazarus dead, but he had been in the tomb for four days. Mary and Martha knew as well as any that Jesus had the power to heal. He had healed numerous strangers that He had never met before. Jesus had healed those who were mere bystanders and unnamed by the gospel writers. But Lazarus, Mary, and Martha were friends. These were people that were close to Jesus. And yet Jesus was too late, and grief had settled in.

There were "many Jews" who had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them. This is not unlike what happens in our community; when someone dies, family and friends gather around to offer comfort and typically bring food. It was no different in the first century.

Before Jesus entered the home, Martha went out to meet Jesus with a heavy heart. Her words seem like words of blame, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died." One can almost imagine her saying these words with tears running down her cheeks and a finger pointing toward Jesus. But the grief was laced with faith. Martha did not doubt that Jesus had the power to prevent Lazarus from dying. But Martha also had faith in more than what

was practical or physical. Do not miss her faith expressed in verse 22, *"Yet even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."*

Jesus understands her grief as He understands our grief. It is real and does not need to be denied or ignored. Grief is a God-given emotion we need to experience in times of loss. Jesus knew that grief was necessary, but it was not grief without hope.

JOHN 11:23 *"Your brother will rise again," Jesus told her.*

Five words of hope in a time of grief. Martha heard these words and believed these words. In fact, the theology of Martha is accurate in her response to these five words.

JOHN 11:24 *Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."*

She understood the eternal and not just the temporary. But in this setting, amid grief and hope, Jesus proclaimed yet another I Am statement.

JOHN 11:25-26 *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. ²⁶ Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

The group of friends offering comfort were still inside the house. Her sister Mary was still inside her house. Stories and memories of Lazarus were shared with laughter and tears inside the house. But in an intimate moment between Jesus and a grieving sister, it was outside that Jesus spoke life-changing words of truth. *I am the resurrection and the life.* Jesus said with boldness, confidence, and comfort that He is the overcomer of death and the sustainer of life. ⁴

But then the conversation gets even more personal when Jesus asks if she believes these words. And Martha, perhaps wiping away a tear and taking a deep breath, makes a proclamation of her own that is bold, confident, and comforting.

JOHN 11:27 *"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world."*

We often celebrate Peter's confession of faith when he told Jesus, "you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 16:16). But Martha, in her grief responding to death, makes the same bold confession of faith. After this statement, she went to tell her sister Mary that Jesus was outside.

JOHN 11:32-37 *As soon as Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and told him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died!" ³³ When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, he was deeply moved in his spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you put him?" he asked. "Lord," they told him, "come and see."³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Couldn't he who opened the blind man's eyes also have kept this man from dying?"*

Jesus' response to Mary's grief is important. It shows us that He recognizes our grief and He Himself also feels those feelings. This emphasizes the fact that He is very much a man. Not only is He troubled by her grief and sadness, but He Himself has these same feelings of sadness which we see in verse 35 when we are told that Jesus wept. While this is the shortest verse in the Bible, its importance does not match its size. Warren Wiersbe says, "Our Lord's weeping reveals the humanity of the Savior. He has entered into all of our experiences and knows how we feel. In fact, being the perfect God-Man, Jesus experienced these things in a deeper way than we do. His tears also assure us of His sympathy; He is indeed "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3)" ⁵

Jesus' response to this situation, both in His recognition of their grief and His expression of His own grief, shows His humanity. The people who were around even commented on this when they said, "*see how He loved him?*" This is an important distinction because it differentiates our Lord from other gods and religious leaders at the time. Where in Greek mythology, the gods were often cold and distant. ⁶ This picture of Jesus shows us a Savior who truly does empathize with us in every way, from being tempted in the desert to feeling loss, grief, and anger. This is important for us to realize as we are following Jesus.

When we see this scene unfold, I think it is easy for us to read it and take it as a narrative fact. We recognize that Jesus got sad and even showed that emotion. However, I think it is larger than that fact. Jesus knew what would happen next and still took time to grieve. He knew this was not the end for Lazarus. Jesus knew that shortly after this, He was going to call Lazarus out of his grave, and he would live, and yet, Jesus grieved. This should also give us hope and comfort when we grieve over our loved ones. We can recognize that this is not the end, but there is still a place to grieve and feel that emotion. We recognize Jesus' power in this situation, but we also recognize His humanity on full display.

2. REMINDER OF TRUE FAITH

JOHN 11:38-40 *Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ "Remove the stone," Jesus said. Martha, the dead man's sister, told him, "Lord, there is already a stench because he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"*

As we progress into the text, we see that Jesus was not only emotionally affected by Lazarus' death, but He was moved into action. He made His way with Mary and Martha, along with the onlookers and supporters, to the tomb. Tombs were often cut into limestone, making a cave in the side of a rock wall. A stone was placed over the entrance. ⁷ Jesus commanded that the large stone be removed, bringing up an opportunity for faith to be tested. Martha, who had initially professed her faith in Jesus, was the first to balk at this test. She declares that because of the length of time he had been dead, there would already be a stench in the tomb. This speaks to the fact that the decomposition of Lazarus' body would have already begun because it had been four days. It is understandable why she felt that way; the typical belief was that there was

no coming back after three days. Here they are on the fourth day, and Martha is responding based on the general understanding of the time.

Jesus uses her response as an opportunity to spur Martha and the onlookers to have true faith in Him. He reminds them of a message He had spoken just a few short days before. That true faith relies on the promises of God, which release the Power of God. That if you believe He has the power to heal, do not stop short and believe too small. Jesus urges her to believe in Him so that she would see the glory of God. Jesus was fully capable of this miracle without the faith of Mary or Martha. But if they did not believe it, they would, in turn, miss the glory of God.⁸

As we pull back from that verse and ponder it in our own lives, we need to ask, “do we find ourselves in the position to see the glory of God?” “Do we truly believe that Jesus is who he says he is and can do what He says He can do?” Martha had heard this message just days before, yet she was doubting. The question for us is how we will respond when we find ourselves in a situation where our faith is tested. When we lose that job or when that family member gets sick. When facing financial hardship and situations like these, will we lean into the power of Jesus and trust Him to lead us through it? Or will we revert back to the understanding of the day, thinking we can handle this on our own and do what needs to be done?

The amazing thing about Jesus in situations like this is that we can trust Him. If He says it, He will do it. It is not up to us to ensure it happens; it is up to us to trust He can. He can and will use situations in our lives to challenge and grow our faith if we allow Him to do so. As we move to the final section of our text, we will see the fulfillment of that promise He made to Martha. A promise that He is still acting on in our own lives today.

3. RESURRECTION POWER ON DISPLAY

JOHN 11:41-46 *So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you heard me.”⁴² I know that you always hear me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, so that they may believe you sent me.”⁴³ After he said this, he shouted with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”⁴⁴ The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unwrap him and let him go.”⁴⁵ Therefore, many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what he did believed in him.⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.*

Immediately we see that Mary and Martha received the challenge of their faith, and they acted in obedience and faith to Jesus. Jesus requests the stone to be moved, and after initial hesitation, they open the tomb and step aside to watch Jesus. Did you catch it? It was subtle but substantial, “so they removed the stone” (vs. 41a). They removed the stone. It was an act of obedience that went against every practical and logical way of responding. Jesus wanted them to participate in this incredible miracle by acting on their faith.

Jesus then took the posture of prayer before the Father. Before He performed this miracle, He gave thanks and recognition to God. Jesus was confident in His relationship with God the Father.

The public nature of this prayer was more for the sake of Mary, Martha, and the onlookers.⁹

Following this prayer, Jesus calls out, “*Lazarus, come forth!*” Immediately upon the command, Lazarus emerges from the tomb. This is the seventh sign given by John to prove the legitimacy of Jesus. What could testify more to the divine nature of Jesus than to exhibit the power needed to raise someone from the dead?¹⁰ It is clear Lazarus had been dead; he is in his grave clothes, he is no longer dead, he is alive. The people witnessing this would have surely seen all they needed to see for faith. In addition, this scene was a direct foreshadowing of the future resurrection of the saints to fellowship and eternity with Jesus through His power.

This miraculous scene served as a catalyst. It was an energizer of faith for those who believed. This is a vastly different result compared to what it would have been if Jesus had come immediately upon hearing that Lazarus was ill. Jesus could have traveled and healed a sick person. But by intentionally delaying His response, Jesus raised a dead person to life.

And as is true even today, some saw Jesus perform a miracle and believed. Others were afraid. Then some were threatened and knew that Jesus had to be stopped once and for all. John 11:53 tells us, *So from that day on they plotted to kill him.*

CONCLUSION

This incredible miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead was not only for the family and friends gathered. It was to give a preview of what would happen to the One who had just performed the miracle.

This is a picture of what God would do as a Father to His Son a few days later at Golgotha. God could have rescued Jesus. God could have stopped the betrayal of Judas. God could have stopped the six illegal trials. God could have stopped the pain and humiliation of crucifixion. God could have stopped it all before Jesus took His last breath after saying the final words, “*It is finished.*” But God delayed. God watched the last breath taken by His Son. God watched His Son die. And God watched His Son be placed in the tomb. Jesus could have stopped it as well, but he was obedient to the Father unto death on the cross. Death won. Or so some thought. And God waited and waited and waited. Then on the third day, up from the grave, Christ arose from the tomb. Victory over death.

A victory that was experienced by Lazarus and a victory that we each experience as well through Jesus Christ. His death is our death; His resurrection is our resurrection. Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life!

As we face times of loss and grief, we are in good company. We do not have to be afraid, to be honest with Jesus, as was Martha and Mary. We can lay our hearts out before the Lord.

Ultimately, we follow a Savior who has the power to do what He says He can do. He was worth following then; He is worth following now. We can see this as an opportunity to lean into Jesus when facing hardship and grief. We can look at this example and use it to strengthen

our own faith in Jesus. We can look at this as solid evidence that Jesus has power over sin and power over death. We can experience His power over sin daily, and one day, that power over death will benefit each and every one of the saints. Because of that, we can have faith in Him, believe in Him, and see God's glory.

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¹ www.soniclight.com/john

² www.soniclight.com/john

³ Walvoord, John F. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2018.

⁴ www.soniclight.com/john

⁵ Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008.

⁶ Walvoord, John F. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2018.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Guzik, David. "Enduring Word Bible Commentary John Chapter 11." *Enduring Word*. Last modified November 30, 2022. Accessed January 10, 2023. <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/john-11/>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Dockery, David S. *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*. Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010.