

Exegetical Notes, John 11:1-44 “Jesus Raises Lazarus”

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John 11:1-44

Verses 1-7

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.)

³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷ and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

- The main characters in this story are a man named Lazarus (who was sick and died.) and his sisters, Mary (who anointed Jesus’ feet with perfume. See 12:1-4) and Martha (see also Luke 10:38-42.) We know that Jesus visited in their home and that he loved them.
- When Lazarus became ill, his sisters sent word to Jesus. Their expectation is unclear as it is not stated in the Scripture, but clearly they anticipated that Jesus would do something to help their brother.
- However, after noting to his disciples that Lazarus’ sickness would not lead to death but would show the glory of God at work through him, Jesus did nothing. He remained where he was for two more days and then announced that he was going to Bethany, the village where Lazarus and his sisters lived.

Verses 8-16

“But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?” ⁹ Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. ¹⁰ It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”

¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

¹² *His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.”* ¹³ *Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.*

¹⁴ *So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead,”* ¹⁵ *and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”*

¹⁶ *Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”*

- Jesus’ disciples objected to his decision to return to Judea, the province where Bethany was located, because it was there, in the temple in Jerusalem that the religious leaders had attempted to stone Jesus. (See John 10:31 and 39.)
- Jesus responded to their concerns with a two-pointed proverb. 1. He told them that there was time enough to do what needed to be done; and 2. That there was no danger for those who walked in the light of day but only for those who walked in the darkness of night. He meant that he needed to do what he was going to do and that he need not fear doing it.
- He then told them that Lazarus was asleep and that he was going to Bethany to awaken him. Jesus meant that Lazarus had died and that he was going to Bethany to restore him to life, to raise him from the dead. However, the disciples had no context for understanding resurrection from the dead. So they assumed that Jesus meant that Lazarus was simply sleeping. They assumed that sleep would be good for him and help restore his health. So Jesus told them bluntly that Lazarus was dead and that he was going to Bethany to raise him from the dead.
- Thomas, one of Jesus’ disciples, said to the rest of the disciples that they should all go with Jesus expecting to die with him. His response indicates that he, and possibly all of the other disciples, still did not understand what Jesus had said or that he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead.

Verses 17-27

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ *Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,* ¹⁹ *and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.*

²⁰ *When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.*

²¹ *“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”* ²² *But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”*

²³ *Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”*

²⁴ *Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”*

²⁵ *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”*

²⁷ *“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”*

- By the time Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been buried for four days. This is absolute proof of his death. He was truly dead.
- Because Lazarus was a prominent man among the Jews and his home was close to Jerusalem, many mourners had come to his home. There was a large crowd present to witness what Jesus did.
- When Martha heard that Jesus was, at last, arriving at their home, she went out, without her sister, to receive him. She reproved Jesus for not coming quicker, “Lord, if you had come, he would not have died.” But she also professed her great faith that Jesus could still, somehow, help, “I know that God will give you whatever you ask.”
- Jesus assured her that Lazarus would “rise again.” Martha believed in the resurrection of the dead at the last day and said she believed that Lazarus would rise again then.
- Jesus proclaimed then that he was “the resurrection and the life. That those who live and believe in him will live even if they die, and that those who live and believe in him will never die.” He asked her if she believed these things.
- Martha became the first one in the Bible to confess her belief in Jesus as Israel’s Messiah.

Verses 18-37

After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² *When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*

³³ *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked.*

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

³⁵ *Jesus wept.*

³⁶ *Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”*

³⁷ *But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”*

- Martha then went and told Mary that Jesus had come and wanted to see her. Mary immediately got up to go to the place where Jesus was waiting. The mourners who were there saw her quick departure and assumed that she was going to Lazarus’ tomb to mourn, so they followed her. Thus, Mary and a crowd of others came to the place where he was waiting for her.
- When Mary came to Jesus, she repeated the words her sister had spoken to him, “Lord, if you had come, he would not have died.” And Jesus asked her to take him to Lazarus’ tomb. There, moved by Mary’s mourning and that of the others, Jesus wept, too. Jesus’ reaction caused some of the mourners to remark at his deep love for Lazarus, but others criticized him for not coming sooner to prevent Lazarus’ dying.

Verses 38-40

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ *“Take away the stone,” he said.*

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

⁴⁰ *Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”*

- At Lazarus tomb, Jesus requested that the stone be rolled back to open the grave.
- Assuming that Jesus wanted to enter the tomb to see Lazarus’ body, Martha reminded Jesus that Lazarus had been dead four days and that his decaying body would now smell badly.
- Jesus reminded her of the promise that he had spoken to her earlier (see verse 23.) He told her that she was about to see God’s power set free!

Verses 41-44

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.” ⁴² *I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”*

⁴³ *When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”*

⁴⁴ *The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.*

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

- The stone was rolled back from the tomb's door. Jesus prayed to God thanking him for hearing him and for giving him the privilege of showing God's power to the people gathered there. He then called Lazarus to come out of the tomb.
- Lazarus hopped out of the tomb, for his hands and his feet were still tied up in the grave clothes when he came out of his tomb, alive!
- Jesus ordered them to set Lazarus free.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Jesus Raises Lazarus*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)