

Dying to Live
The Lazarus Lesson
John 11

Introduction: The response of mankind to the fact of death begins often with denial. (See Elizabeth Kubler-Ross Stages of Death or Ernst Becker: Denial of Death) When this fails, we move in one of two directions: Either, Perverted Power Pleading (Faustus bargain with the devil) or the Perennial search for the fountain of youth. (see the Living section or Dr Oz). Both are illusional. The fact is that death is one for one. (Except for Enoch) We fear death because in a primal sense we should (Heb 2:14-15). It is not what was to be the norm of Gen 1-2. However, it is now the norm for mankind. But there is one who has tasted death and defeated death. He is the one who can give us life. He is the Son of God, the divine Logos, Jesus. In John 11 we see a foretaste of what Jesus can do and will do for all of His sheep as He validates and verifies His Person through His Power revealed in Resurrection.

Structure

John 10 is a long sermon- message

John 11 is a unique sign- miracle

Martha Cycle

Occasion Jesus comes (vv. 17, 20a)

Mourners (vv. 18–19)

Martha goes to meet him (v. 20b)

Martha says, “Lord, if you had been here”
(vv. 21–22)

Dialogue (vv. 23–27)

Mary Cycle

Occasion Jesus calls (v. 28)

Mourners (vv. 30–31)

Mary goes to him (vv. 29, 32a)

Mary says, “Lord, if you had been here” (v.
32)

Dialogue and action (vv. 34–44)¹

I. The Situation 11:1-22

A. The Physical Situation

1. (:2) Mary described as “the one who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair,” This event is not mentioned until later in 12:3. John expected his readers to be familiar with the story already. I think John assumed his readers were familiar with the other three gospels.

2. Jesus waits two days after hearing about the “sickness”. Some have suggested that the “therefore” (:6) indicates that Jesus deliberately waited for Lazarus to die. But we are told in 11:17,11:39 that when Jesus had reached Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days. So he may have

¹ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: a Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (Rev. ed.; Reading the New Testament Series; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2005), 177.

been dead already by the time the messengers reached Jesus. It may be that Jesus waited two days longer (:6) so that it would be unmistakably clear that a miraculous resurrection, rather than simply a resuscitation, had taken place.

B. The Relational Situation

Ministry was personal to Jesus not simply professional like the Pharisees
Jesus was the Good Shepherd. He loved the sheep. Jo.10

C. The Theological Situation

1. The Glory of God 11:4 (9:3)

2. The Light of the World 11:9-10

What is the “**light of this world**”? Literally it is the sun, but the reader of the Gospel would recall 8:12 and understand Jesus’ symbolic reference to **himself as the Light of the world**. Limited time left (12 hours in a day) until the Light will be withdrawn, and the one and who walks at night will stumble. (The departure of Judas is by night. 13:30). See Jo. 12:35!

II. The Sermon 11:23-27

A. The Theological Content

Note the significance in the use of “**ego eimi**” here (“I am” 6:35, 8:58). Jesus does not simply say that he **gives** resurrection and life, but that he **is** resurrection and life. **In him the life of the age to come, after the resurrection, is already present and available**. Jo 10:10 I came that you may have life and life abundantly.

B. The Personal Comment

“I have believed”

(Perfect tense: past act with continuing result)

“that you are the Christ, the Son of God, even he who comes into the world.”

* This fits with the Purpose statement of the Gospel of John 20:30

III. The Sign 11:28-44

A. The Scene : 28-40

:39 There is some later evidence (early 3rd century) of a rabbinic belief that **the soul hovered near the body of the deceased for three days**, hoping to be able to return to the body. But on the fourth day it saw the beginning of decomposition and finally departed (*Leviticus Rabbah* 18.1). If this belief were as old as the first century, it might suggest the significance of the four days, thus resurrection would be a first-order

miracle, an unequivocal demonstration of the power of God. It is not certain if the tradition is this early, but it certainly might be. (Hall Harris)

The fact of a stone in front of a cave for the grave indicates wealth. Also, might this foreshadow Jesus in his cave tomb (tomb of a wealthy Man? Isa. 53:9 Matt 27:57-60) and coming forth? Note also Matt 27:51-52 Tombs opened and dead raised. (Do not ask me who they are. I do not know who they are or if they die again and will be raised again.) Dt 29:29!

B. The Source :41-42

Jesus came to do the Father's Work and Will in the Father's Way Jo. 5:36-37,45 6:40

The Father raises the dead as with the Son (Jo. 5:21 Heb. 11:35, I Kg 17:22- 23, II Kg 4:35-36)

C. The Sign :43-44

Notice he still has grave cloths on. Jesus has his folded neatly Jo. 20:5-7 (Jesus will not need his again. Lazarus will)

IV. The Summary 11:45-53

A. Some Believe :45

(Connection to 10:42 "Believe in Him" 2:11,4:39,7:31,39,48,10:42)

B. Some Do Not Believe :46-53

1. The People- They do not care about the person or the truth :46

2. The Priest :47-53

(Jesus wept for Lazarus. Religious leaders only care for themselves)

-Historical and Cultural Reality

Some have held that the reference to Caiaphas being high priest "**that year**" betrays a lack of knowledge about Palestinian customs, since the high priest was appointed for life, and the statement in this verse sounds as if he were appointed to a yearly term of office. But the genitive phrase is better understood as a genitive of the time "during which" he was high priest. It was during that fateful year that Caiaphas was the high priest. (:47 Chief priests plural?)

-Spiritual Prophecy

Caiaphas is actually predicting and prophesying the ministry of Jesus as a propitiation and substitutionary sacrifice. (Isa 53:11-12, Rom 3)

If the devil or the high priest would have know what they were doing they would have never done it for it unleashed the power of God. But

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they did not see it coming. I Cor. 2:7-8

:52 (Who are the children not of the nation but who are scattered
abroad? Jo.10:16 Other Jews, Samaritans or Gentiles Eph 3:1-13)

- Human Predictability

They seek to Kill Him :53 (7:1, 8:59 10:39 Some believe and some
seek to kill Him)

Peter when asked by the Lord Jesus “Do you wish to leave also?” Peter
responded, “No Lord, where else can we go, you have the words of eternal life”
Jesus still has the words of eternal life. He can give life and give it abundantly
forever because He is the resurrection and the life.

Point to Ponder

Jesus’s Ministry is about People, it is Personal, Powerful and Prophetic.

The Curse of the garden is still operational but the Cure for mankind is
supernatural. We are still corrupt but He always has compassion and will provide
the ultimate cure. What a great and hopeful message for a lost and dying world.

It is still true. Jo 3:16