

# I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

## JOHN 11:1-44

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### UNDERSTANDING HIS WORD

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1. Many commentators note the difference in form and structure in chapter 11 from the rest of the Gospel. Instead of a narrative followed by a discourse on its meaning, here in chapter 11 we have a narrative interspersed with elements of dialog that explores its significance.
2. In this episode, we see Jesus as Lord over death, before whose Presence death must depart, and the place of faith in our relationship with Him. This is the last of the “signs” in John’s Gospel, and the most stupendous of the miracles wrought by Jesus. It is a fitting climax to the series of God-glorifying “sign-acts” of Jesus.
3. What stands out here is that Jesus, who is heading towards death, resurrects a dead man. His life giving work becomes the occasion of His giving up His own life.
4. The story begins directly by introducing a person in dire need. Lazarus in Bethany is sick unto death. For the disciples, this was a temporary illness (11:12), but for Jesus this was a temporary death (11:14). The purpose of this illness that leads to death is to glorify God through the powerful and compassionate act of Jesus to raise Lazarus from death. The end of the story of Lazarus is the death of Jesus. It is in Christ’s death and subsequent resurrection that His promise, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die”* (11:25 & 26) becomes reality. This is the ultimate hope for the world.
5. The insertion of 11:5, *“Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus”* makes his action surprising, *“Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days”* (11:6). It appears Jesus knew Lazarus was already dead when news of his illness came to Jesus. Jesus did **not** set out for Bethany to give time for Lazarus to die. When Jesus arrived at Bethany, *“Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days”* (11:17). Since the Jews buried their dead immediately after their death, that would mean that when Jesus got the news of Lazarus’ illness four days earlier, Lazarus had already died (one day for the journey to and from Jesus, and the two days Jesus delayed going to Bethany).
6. Jesus calls His disciples to go with Him to Judea. The disciples were appalled, *“a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?”* (11:8). Though Lazarus was friend to Jesus and the disciples (*“**Our** friend Lazarus has fallen*

*asleep*" in 11:11), it was still not worth the risk of Jesus' life to go to see him. After all, Jesus had said the sickness will not end in death (11:4).

But, Jesus replied, *"Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light"* (11:9 & 10).

Although the Jews would still try to take Jesus' life when He returned to Judea, the time for His death (stumbles in darkness) had not yet come. Until then, it was daytime and He would not stumble (fall to the Jews).

7. In the ensuing conversation with His disciples, Jesus said *"Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him"* (11:11). Not realizing what was ahead of them in Bethany, the disciples tried to dissuade Jesus from going to Lazarus, rationalizing that *"if he (Lazarus) sleeps, he will get better"* (11:12). Jesus had to tell them bluntly that *"Lazarus is dead"* (11:14).

It was Thomas whose expression of blind devotion urged the rest of the disciples, *"Let us also go, that we may die with him"* (11:16). Thomas was saying more than he realized. Jesus was going to His death, but it would mean life for the world.

8. On arrival, Jesus finds out Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Three days were required by Jewish tradition to ensure the person was really dead. Their teaching states, *"The whole strength of the mourning is not till the third day; for three days long the soul returns to the grave, thinking that it will return (into the body); when however it sees that the color of its face has changed then it goes away and leaves it"* (*Gen Rab.* 100 [64a]). Lazarus having been four days in the tomb means he was certainly dead.
9. The proximity of Bethany to Jerusalem enabled many to come and console Martha and Mary. Martha, on hearing Jesus was coming went out to meet him, while Mary stayed home, either to host the other guests or to mourn.
10. Martha expressed her regret and faith at the same time: *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask"* (11:21 & 22). When Jesus indicated *"Your brother will rise again"*, Martha iterated her statement of faith, *"I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day"* (11:23 & 24).
11. Jesus makes His self revelation to Martha: *"I AM the resurrection and the life."* By this declaration Jesus is indicating He is the giver of life. Resurrection follows death. Wherever there is death, Jesus brings life. Wherever hope ends, Jesus can resurrect the hope of life again. However, His intervention is contingent on faith. *"He who believes..."* will receive life and light.
12. By faith, those who died in Christ will rise to eternal life: *"He who believes in me will live, even though he dies"* (11:25b). By faith, those who are living can receive eternal

life immediately: *"...whoever lives and believes in me will never die"* (11:26). The pivotal role of faith is underscored in Jesus' question to Martha, *"Do you believe this?"*

13. When told Jesus had arrived, Mary *"got up quickly and went to him"* (11:29). She expressed similar sentiments to Jesus as Martha had: *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died"* (11:32). Jesus noticed her deep grief expressed by her tears and He was *"deeply moved in spirit and troubled"* (11:33). German interpreters have translated the verse as *"He was angry in the spirit and distressed."* They contend that *"the word...indicates an outburst of anger, and any attempt to reinterpret it in terms of an internal emotional upset caused by grief, pain or sympathy is illegitimate."*

Perhaps Jesus was angry at the lack of faith, despite their creedal confession. They sorrowed *"like the rest of men, who have no hope"* (I Thess 4:13). In spite of all the signs and wonders Jesus had wrought among them, or His teachings, they mourned *"like the rest of men."*

14. At this, *"Jesus wept"* (11:35).  
The voice of doubt caused Jesus to be even more stirred in His spirit: *"Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"* Jesus, *once more deeply moved, came to the tomb.*" (11:37 & 38).



## APPLYING HIS WORD

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1. Be careful what you call impossible.  
*"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"* (Mt 19:26).  
We are squeezed into the world's mold of reasoning that is based on natural consequence of events. Our actions are based on rationale quite the opposite of our Christian confession.  
The disciples reasoned, *"If you are sick, then sleep will restore health. Why risk your life to go to Lazarus?"* *"But, if you're dead, then resurrection is eschatological. Life goes on. Let's move on."* The focus is on self and existential reality.

