



JESUS' DEITY REVEALED • JESUS AND LAZARUS • JOHN 11:1-44 •

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## MAIN POINT

Because Jesus is the victor over death and the giver of eternal life, we mourn with hope.

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## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**How do you handle times when you are forced to wait?**

**Have you ever felt like you were waiting on God? When? What did it feel like?**

Waiting is hard, but it's especially hard when you feel like you are waiting on God to move or act in a desperate situation. Sometimes it can feel like God is doing nothing, and as He is, the situation gets worse. But ultimately we can know that Jesus is the victor over death and the giver of eternal life. Not only can we wait for Him with expectation, we can wait—and even mourn—with hope.

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# UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 11:1-16.

**Although Jesus said that the sickness would not end in death (v. 4), Lazarus did still die. Did Jesus misspeak? What might He have meant about the ultimate eternal life we are promised in Him?**

**The sisters probably expected Jesus to come by the end of the second day. Instead, they had to wait two more days, not knowing when or if He would come at all. What may have been going through their minds during those long days? What might they have questioned about Jesus?**

Jesus' raising of Lazarus strengthened people's faith in God, and in Jesus as the Son of God. Lazarus's death was not the end of the story. Instead, God received glory through the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Furthermore, Jesus' performance of this miracle led ultimately to Jesus' own death, followed by His resurrection and our opportunity to enter a restored relationship with the Father.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 11:17-37.

**What does Martha's response to Jesus' questions indicate about her understanding of His power over death? In what way was her understanding incomplete?**

**Can you think of a time when God's plans and timing turned out to be better than your own?**

**What are the dangers of expecting and demanding that God act according to our own understanding?**

**How can we ensure our understanding of Jesus' teaching about life after death is complete?**

**Why did Jesus ask Martha to believe in Him before He gave her a miraculous physical reason to believe?**

Jesus put Martha to the test by asking, "Do you believe this?" (v. 26). Her faith apparently was steady and growing, but she may not have understood the full impact of Jesus' words. Her answer in verse 27 shows that she believed Jesus was the Christ (the "Anointed One" or Messiah) and also the Son of God. While so many others of Jesus' day denied His identity as the Messiah, Martha strongly confessed her faith in Him.

**While Martha engaged Jesus in a theological debate, Mary fell at his feet. What is the significance of that difference? What does it indicate about the way they saw in and believed about Jesus?**

**Why do you think Jesus wept? Might He feel the same sorrow over the pain we experience today?**

Jesus had told His disciples (v. 4) and Mary (v. 23) that He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead so that they would believe. But instead of going directly to the tomb, Jesus chose to seek out Mary and weep with her. This tells us something very important about Jesus and what He came to do. In weeping with Mary, Jesus demonstrated personal care for her. More importantly, He communicated to her that He too hates death and is going to do something about it.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 11:38-44.

**How did Jesus involve human obedience in Lazarus' raising from the dead? How was being raised from the dead different than an eternal resurrection—a promise to never die?**

Jesus intentionally chose to involve those around Him in the miracle. Still bound by grave garments, Lazarus came out of the tomb. Jesus told the people to take off the grave clothes and let him go. Many of those who had come to visit Mary saw what Jesus did and put their faith in Him. Jesus exercised power—not for His own glory, but that people might believe and be saved. What Jesus did was designed to cause people who observed the sign to place their faith in Him and receive the eternal and unending life only He can give.

**What proves Lazarus was really dead? How is this similar to the spiritual deadness all people are in before establishing a relationship with Christ? In what way do we all need a resurrection?**

**How can we maintain hope in God’s goodness, sovereignty, and love, even when our situations aren’t so dramatically resolved on earth? How can God be glorified as we place this trust in Him?**

At times we pray in crisis situations and do not see a change in circumstances. But this does not mean the Lord loves us any less than He loved Lazarus’ family. It may mean He wants to bring glory to God through the way we handle our circumstances and the way He intervenes within them—according to His own timing and plans. Ultimately, He will make everything right, working all things for our good as we trust Him who is the Resurrection and the Life no matter what happens, overflowing that hope and faith into our relationships with others.

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## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**How does it impact you to know that the God of the universe personally identifies with your pain and hurt in this life?**

**What can we learn from Jesus’ example in terms of demonstrating love to those who are mourning?**

**What, if any, limitations have you been placing on God's ability to work in your most difficult life situations?**

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## PRAY

Thank God for sending Jesus to taste our pain, suffering, and sin. Thank Him for the resurrection through which Jesus overcomes sin and death on our behalf. Pray that we would learn to mourn over the things that Jesus mourns over and grow to be more like Him.

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## COMMENTARY

JOHN 11:1-44

11:1-3. John chose to record at least seven miracles that prove Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. In the first six, we have seen His power over the physical aspects of life, including the human body, the natural elements, time and space, and even food and drink. But in each case Jesus also demonstrated that His purposes went beyond the physical to the spiritual. Now the Lord revealed His power by reaching beyond life and touching death and the afterlife—territory that belongs only to God. The perfume-anointing described in verse 2 is further developed in Matthew 26 and Mark 14, although John mentions it just to identify the relationship among these two sisters, their brother, and Jesus.

11:4-6. Of course, God was glorified through Jesus' resurrection, but He was also glorified through His death. Any crisis that brings glory to God is good. If God is glorified in illness, it is good, as difficult as this is for our human minds to grasp. The Lord's words, "this sickness will not end in death," show us how much more deeply He was thinking than the disciples. They could never have imagined that Lazarus' physical death would end and he would actually walk out of the grave after several days. God was glorified through the

resurrection, but also in the death. The faith and hope Lazarus's death evoked in the sisters occupies a significant portion of this chapter. It appears the four days that passed between the death and raising of Lazarus find their starting point just before the Lord left for Bethany. That allows two days after the original message for the intended delay, and two days for the trip.

11:7-10. The Lord and His disciples had probably been in Perea and had some distance to walk back to Bethany in the northeastern part of Judea. Death threats awaited there, and the disciples had serious reservations about the trip. Verses 9 and 10 represent the Lord's answer, though it does not seem to fit the context. Perhaps it was a proverb of the time, meaning duty is more important than haste. For Jews, the twelve hours of daylight would have been from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and perhaps Jesus emphasized that we have a full twelve hours, but no more. Each valuable hour should be used to glorify God.

11:11-16. Jesus returned to the subject at hand and used a common New Testament euphemism for death—the word “sleep” (see Matt. 9:24; 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:20; 1 Thess. 4:14). After having told them the sickness would not be unto death, Jesus then said clearly, Lazarus is dead. Not only that, but we learn the delay that allowed the death of His friend would work for the benefit of Jesus' disciples. They were on their way south to Bethany. This trip would take them through Jerusalem.

11:17-20. Their arrival in Bethany occurred at least four days later. In the cultural ostentation of Jewish funerals, the mourners, the spices, and the procession still lingered. This was a popular family in the small town of Bethany, so Lazarus' funeral was a major event. But none of the Lord's followers—not the disciples and not the sisters—yet understood how Jesus is our life, as He was to Martha.

11:21-24. Here we have one of the great conversations of the Bible. We already know the personalities of these women, so we are not surprised that Martha charged out to meet Jesus while Mary stayed at home. Her words to the Lord almost take the form of a mild rebuke: if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Yet she hinted at resurrection by adding, God will give you whatever you ask. Knowing her faith, Jesus responded, Your brother will rise again. Martha, Mary, and all these Jewish mourners responded in human fashion to death and sorrow, defeat, and abandonment. According to their words, Jesus should have been there to prevent Lazarus's death. If He were really

God, He would have prevented physical death because that is God's job. They treated death as the end of life, the final defeat, a sign that God had deserted them. But He had not.

11:25-27. Jesus said, "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." Does that mean spiritual life beyond the grave as many interpreters have suggested? The context seems to demand an emphasis on physical death and physical life—in other words, bodily resurrection. Verse 26 seems to indicate that whoever is still alive and believing at the time of the Lord's return will never die. Martha did not grasp the entirety of this theology, but nevertheless placed her foothold of faith directly in Jesus' affirmation of His messiahship. She was not completely without faith. She still believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and that He might still be able to do something, although she did not really know what. She understood only two categories of life: physical life on earth and some future life at a resurrection. In her mind, Lazarus had neither of those at the moment. She did not think there was anything Jesus could do about His death.

Jesus said future resurrection was impossible without Him. Martha (as well as Lazarus) had no hope without Him in the picture. He also said that real life (life that extends beyond death) is possible only through Him. A person attains it no other way. This life is both spiritual (will live, even though He dies) and eternal (will never die), and it comes only to those who believe in Jesus. It appears to the casual reader that Martha had climbed on board theologically and would no longer have any question about what Jesus could do. Yet a few minutes later she heard Jesus call for the removal of the stone and objected, Lord, he's already decaying It's been four days (v. 39). Again Martha reminds us of ourselves—willing to verbally proclaim biblical truth without applying it in our lives.

11:28-32. How interesting that Mary's opening line was identical to Martha's, although she had not heard Martha speak and there seems to be no indication in the text that the women had discussed their reaction to the Lord. Martha engaged in theological debate; Mary fell at His feet.

11:33-37. Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. This suggests anger over sin and death which could cause such agony in Bethany. The word "troubled" seems to emphasize agitation, perhaps over the grief of the sisters. When Jesus approached the tomb, He could no longer control himself and wept. John used a different word than the word he chose to describe the weeping of Mary and the Jews. Perhaps the intent was to show that Jesus' tears emerged for a different reason— not grief over Lazarus; He had that situation

well in hand. Surely the same unbelief and theological ignorance that prompted His anger also produced His grief.

11:38-40. The emotional intensity deepened as Jesus approached the tomb, deeply moved. Since Martha had raised the protest, the response of verse 40 may be directed primarily at her, though it certainly established a general principle—one that we have repeatedly observed throughout this Gospel: Believing is seeing. To the sisters in their grief, the disciples in their bewilderment, and to all who seek faith for life at any age since this dramatic event, Jesus calls for faith first and sight later.

11:41-42. The power of Jesus is also seen in His prayer. The purpose of the prayer was to create faith in the hearts of those standing around Lazarus' tomb wondering what would happen next. Here we get a glimpse into the relationship of the Trinity, and particularly the Father-Son relationship within the Godhead. What exactly did Jesus mean when He said to the Father, "I said this, so they may believe You sent Me." Jesus' mission was to bring people to faith and John was mission- focused throughout this entire book. The unbelieving crowds of mourners heard Jesus' rhetorical question of verse 40, watched Him, and heard Him pray openly to the Father. We learn later that many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what He did believed in Him (11:45).

11:43-44. Through this miracle we also see that Jesus is our power. How interesting that John should tell us Jesus called in a loud voice, for surely it was not necessary for that call to reach the ears of Lazarus. Perhaps He intended it for the crowd of mourners. Regardless, this is one of the great dramatic scenes of the Bible, but we must be careful using the word "resurrection" to describe it. In one sense, Lazarus did experience resurrection because he came back from the dead. But New Testament "resurrection" refers to a return to life in a state of immortality so that one never dies again. That was the pattern of the resurrection of Jesus, of course, but not that of Lazarus who would die again. Let us just recognize the limitations of resurrection performed in biblical times as compared with that promised to believers in a future day (see 1 Cor. 15; 1 Tim. 6:16).

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## READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

John 13:1-17



