

The Resurrection of Lazarus: John 11:1-44

Presented by Nancy Beale, January 21-22, 2025

Good morning ladies. On our first week of Bible Study, Jan Wright challenged us to find themes within the chapters of John. On the board I have written the five themes that I discovered while studying John 11:1-44; 1. His purposes are for the glory of God, 2. His ways are mysterious, 3. His delays are not His denials, 4. He is a personal Savior and 5. true salvation comes when you believe in the resurrecting power of Christ. You may want to write these down as this will be a great springboard for your discussion following my lesson.

John 20:31 says “These are written that ye may **believe**, that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God.” I believe John 11: 1-44 is a beautiful example of this verse. You will undoubtedly believe He is the son of God when you see His power displayed in the resurrection of Lazarus. And, you will see how God is glorified through the pain and suffering of this family. You will see how Jesus responds to Mary and Martha in a personal way. You will find yourself scratching your head in bewilderment at times, specifically in Jesus’ timing. His ways are mysterious as supported by Isaiah 55:8-9, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. And once you believe in Christ’s resurrecting power, you are ready to receive the true salvation He offers to us.

In order to apply this chapter to your own life, I ask that you put yourself in the story. I easily could do this as I have a sister and brother, Lois and Bob. It was not hard to imagine the heartache of the two sisters when their brother was dying. Think of what pain or suffering you may be experiencing right now, and see through the eyes of John how God displays His love in the midst of those tough times. As I was preparing this lesson last summer, I was recovering from a broken shoulder and reverse shoulder replacement. God opened my eyes to many lessons that applied to me personally through this study. I found

my faith growing and my trust in the timing of God becoming stronger. My prayer is that you too will grow in your faith as you now listen to the story of Lazarus' resurrection.

Let me set the stage as we begin John 11. We are in Bethany, a small village in Judea, approximately 2 miles southeast of Jerusalem. The edges of Bethany reach to the Mount of Olives and also border Bethphage, a suburb of Jerusalem. The significance of this town is Jesus often stopped here on his way to Jerusalem for rest and refuge and He even stayed there overnight during his final weeks of earthly ministry. It was the home of Jesus' beloved friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Bethany was also where we ended in chapter 10, when Jesus was accused of blasphemy and the Jews wanted to stone him, causing him to flee to Galilee. The account of the resurrection of Lazarus takes place between the Feast of Dedication which is in December and the Feast of Passover, in April just prior to Jesus' crucifixion. No doubt this miracle of Lazarus is a foreshadow of what is to come. As Michael Card states in his commentary, "It will be the miracle that will eventually lead to the cross."

When introduced to Mary and Martha, we are reminded of the familiar story in Luke 10: 38-42 of two sisters; Martha, who had a servant heart, busying herself in the kitchen, while Mary sat at the feet of Jesus. In John 11, Mary is further distinguished as the one who poured expensive perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair, an event that actually happens in John 12. No doubt Jesus thought Mary was making the better use of her time as Luke 10:42 substantiates. "Mary has chosen the good portion which will not be taken away from her. "

We are half way through the book of John and up to this point we have read of the 6 miracles John describes. These miracles showed the many dimensions of God's power. As described by Gene Getz in his Life Essentials Study Bible, **water was changed to wine**, demonstrating his qualitative power or his ability to transform things and lives, **healing the official's son**, demonstrating his power over distance; **healing the lame man**, demonstrating His power over time; **feeding the 5000**, demonstrating His quantitative

power, **walking on water** demonstrating his power over nature, and **healing a blind man**, demonstrating his power over human destiny. Yet, it was this 7th miracle in the book of John that became the turning point for Jesus' time on earth. It was this final miracle where Jesus demonstrates his power over death and emphasizes that he is the Messiah.

Let's now look at what is happening – Mary and Martha's brother Lazarus is sick and they call on Jesus to come. They have strong faith in the healing power of their beloved Jesus as they knew of His previous miracles. They felt confident that He would do something because they knew how much he loved Lazarus. They didn't tell him what to do, but they trusted he would do the right thing. John stresses Jesus' love for this family because he knows that what Jesus is about to do does not feel like love. Thus, the wrinkle in this story – when Jesus receives the word of his illness, he decides not to come right away. Matter of fact, he waits two more days. Are you scratching your head yet?

Then there is the moment at which Jesus says to his disciples, let go back to Judea again. Refreshing your memory, they had just escaped Judea where he was about to be stoned. So, it begs the question, why would you choose to jeopardize your life and that of the disciples for that matter? This is the moment Jesus speaks in a figurative sense, asking aren't there 12 hours in a day? Here are two suggested explanations that helped me understand this better. First, Michael Card suggested the point of this statement was that His presence on earth was for a limited time. So, while the darkness of opposition is looming, Jesus is assuring them that there is still time to do the work of God in the daylight. Second, John Stott suggested the light of day represented walking in the wisdom of God, versus the darkness symbolizing walking in our own wisdom. He further warns us against overestimating the danger of returning to Judea. He drives home his point when he says journeys are always possible if the right time is chosen, one of the many times Jesus refers to following God's perfect timing.

Lazarus was most likely dead when Jesus received word, so His timing causes us to question His love. His delay did not line up with the relationship that he shared with these

ladies, yet, His delay was not His denial. There is supposition that He would be glorified more in this delay than had he come right away. This argument is supported by Jewish tradition which states a person was not completely dead until three days had passed. It was believed the person's spirit hovered over the body until after the third day, thus determining that they were completely dead by day 4. Had Jesus come right away, even with Lazarus dead, they may have believed Lazarus was not really dead and that Jesus was just healing him – not nearly as convincing an argument that He was the son of God! Jesus could have even healed him from a distance, but His delay was intentional and was motivated by His incredible love for Lazarus.

Jesus tells His disciples that our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep – I'm on my way to wake him up. Their response was 'if he is asleep, he will get well.' Sleep was synonymous with death. What he is saying is our soul is asleep to the world it has left and it wakes to the world it has entered. Alistair Begg defines it beautifully "Death is falling asleep in the arms of Jesus and waking up home."

There is a praise song whose words include "Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord". Have you ever had to wait for something to happen? I wanted to be healed right away, not in 6 months. Sitting on the sidelines, watching the rest of the world moving while I went through the healing process was not easy for me. A few of you witnessed my total breakdown when I came to Bible Study trying to open the door while carrying an umbrella and my Bible with one arm. My frustration level was at an all-time low. But, God's plans are not always in line with what we think is best. Mary and Martha wanted healing now, and Jesus wanted a resurrection so that He would be glorified, and so that His love would be displayed even more. It points to who Jesus is. In John Stott's commentary, we read Jesus' attitude to sickness is it provides a platform so that the works of God may be displayed in Him. What is true here at the level of physical illness can be extended to all the trials we face as Christian disciples. Perhaps you have a child who has walked away from the faith and you want them to come back now; or you have a need for a job or

better income now; or even you are in a broken relationship where you have done all you can but the other person refuses to forgive. Our natural response is to rebel against them as alien intruders which must be expelled from our lives as quickly and painlessly as possible, by every means available, including God's miraculous intervention. With hindsight, however, another perspective is possible. We offer our trials to God for Him either to remove or retain as he pleases, thereby bringing glory to his name and deepening our faith and possibly of others too.

Many of the Jews came to Mary and Martha to comfort them at the loss of their brother. This large group of mourners indicated this family was most likely one of prominence. At this point, Lazarus had already been buried. It was the custom to bury them on the first day as they did not have embalming fluid to preserve the body. Lazarus was covered in burial clothes and placed in a grave with a stone rolled in front. When Jesus arrived at this mourning gathering, Martha went out quietly to greet him. She said Lord if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. There is nothing to affirm or deny the tone of her statement. Was she angry, frustrated at Jesus' delay or at peace knowing Jesus would do the right thing? Quite frankly, if it were me, I might have a tone of sadness and maybe even a bit annoyed. Jesus responds to her with truth. Your brother will rise again. Martha claims to know this truth, but is mistakenly believing he is referring to the final resurrection when all believers are raised. Jesus then says in verse 25 one of the seven "I am" statements to Martha. He says "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." Jesus is clarifying he is not talking about a future resurrection, but the one here and now. Michael Card says Resurrection is no longer a matter of a time or a place, but a person. Our choice is to believe he is either a madman or the son of God. Our lesson is that Jesus stands before us TODAY. Christ can bring true life to us NOW. Jesus' response to Martha spoke to her personally. She needed a message of hope regarding those who die physically; if they are truly born again, they will never die spiritually. The

key word here is “believe.” In verse 27, Martha says “Yes, Lord, I BELIEVE that you are the Christ, the son of God, who is coming into the world.” We must join Martha in experiencing true salvation by believing in the resurrection.

Mary made the same statement, “if you had been here my brother wouldn’t have died.” Unlike Martha, Mary’s response was based more on emotions. She was crying, so Jesus met her on a different level. He was deeply moved and wept with her. Adding another dimension to his response was His anger. The obvious sadness was a response to the love he had for this dear family and witnessing their overwhelming grief. His anger surfaced as he knew that death was the result of sin. Our lesson is we all experience pain and suffering at some point in our lives. I mentioned a few just a moment ago. But what about you sisters? What burdens are you carrying today? What troubles seem hopeless? Are you close to giving up as you wait on God to respond to your cries for help?. Jesus meets us where we are, personally. In the midst of writing this, my friend Collette who recently lost her husband texted me that she was having a bad day. I met her where she was by picking up the phone and crying with her. Intellectually she knew the words Jesus spoke to Martha. She had the assurance of eternal life. What she needed was permission to cry, to express her sadness. She needed to believe out of Jesus’ love for her and her husband, He took him home where he would suffer no more. Our hope is in Hebrews 4:15 that says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.” We do not have a distant God, but one who lived a human life, one who knows pain and suffering, one who comes beside us in our time of need.

Looking at the tomb scene, we can picture an overwhelming sense of defeat and the impossibility of remedying the situation. Despite Jesus’ previous response to Martha giving her hope in the knowledge that he was the resurrection and the life; her humanity rears its ugly head after he says remove the stone. Martha says “Lord, there is already a stench because he has been dead four days.” Martha was setting limits on Jesus’ power over

death. What she was not realizing is that no one is too far dead that Jesus could not bring back to life. God is the giver of life and reflecting back to verse 4, 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.

In keeping with our personal Savior, we hear Jesus shouting, “Come Forth, Lazarus”. Had he omitted Lazarus’ name, all the dead bodies would have come forth – wouldn’t that have been a sight. There are so many examples of Jesus calling us by our name. In John 10:3 it says, **The sheep hear his voice and He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.** In Isaiah 43:1 it says, **Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are mine.** At the return of Christ, He will call us all by name – that’s how much we matter to Him. This is meant to fill our hearts with great hope and confidence. And, to know our name means he knows us. He knows our needs, our desires, our hurts, our weaknesses, our hopes, our joys and our troubles. This is why he can wipe away every tear and cause our weeping to cease, as he does with Mary – He is a personal Savior.

This story was told for the disciples to see the resurrection of Lazarus as a preparation for Christ’s resurrection which would occur in the near future. They would remember Lazarus resurrection and more easily believe that Christ had risen for the glory of God. It also presented for us a picture of our own resurrection. Repeating the same verse for emphasis, Jesus says in verse 25-26 “Whoever believes in me, though He die, yet shall he live and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” There were those standing around who did not believe; thus, they only saw a man coming back to life like a magic act. However, those who believed, see that the son of God was glorified. Jesus asked the disciples to remove the stone, so they would know the certainty of his death and the certainty of his resurrection. The raising of Lazarus was an answer to Jesus’ prayer. He thanked God out loud for the sake of the people. He wanted the people to know his relationship with His father. This was an opportunity to know God more. Belief in Jesus as the one who is sent from the Father is the very purpose of this miracle.

You may ask how can love allow death. Jesus' love allowed His own death. Love is doing whatever you have to do to help people see and treasure the glory of God as their supreme joy. Love gives us what we need most – not healing, but what gives us the fullest and longest joy – seeing, admiring, and marveling at the glory of God in Jesus Christ. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in HIM. In your notebook under Thoughts for Reflection, Dave Powlison is quoted as saying “Your hope is either in the one person who has defeated death, who is the resurrection and the life, or your hope is in something which may be a perfectly good thing, but is not good enough and will perish with you. “

As I went through my recovery from shoulder replacement, I kept a journal entitled the Goodness of God. In it I kept track of the many things I learned as a result of this accident. I saw the many ways God provided for me, such as a wonderful husband to meet all of my physical needs, neighbors who helped in the area of housekeeping, the many cards, flowers, calls and prayers on my behalf – just to name a few. My worst fear was not being able to play the piano again. I had so many engagements ahead of me that promised to be cancelled if I could not move my arm and fingers. But, God's timing was perfect and short of missing a month of rehearsals for our Gwynedd Estates Chorus program, I was able to fulfill all of my scheduled engagements. Even in the midst of recovering, God provided a next-door neighbor who was a pianist. She happily took my place for the month I was unable to play. My neighbor is not a believer, but God opened doors for me to share my faith with her. God's love was poured on her as I showed my appreciation and showed her my entry in the “Goodness of God” journal where I described her as one of God's angels in my life.

Many of you know we have a beach house in Ocean City. The OC Tabernacle is a half a block from our home and I have often been known to say I would love to play there someday. Even one of my dear friends prayed with me two years ago for God's will to prevail. Well, that opportunity became available as their pianist became very ill. I was called on to play on July 14th, followed by the rest of the summer. This was nothing short

of a miracle. Not only did God heal my arm and fingers, he gave me the desire of my heart. To God be the glory!!!

Hudson Taylor, a missionary to China said, "Trials afford God a platform for his working in our lives. Without them I would never know how kind, how powerful, how gracious he is. And, Joni Eareckson Tada, a paraplegic expresses "I do not care if I am confined to this wheelchair provided from it I can bring glory to God. While we may feel daunted by the heights of devotion reflected in these quotations, we can all make a beginning in our present pains by offering them consciously to God for his using.

I am going to break tradition and end with the song, The Goodness of God. I have asked Joy/Joyce to help me lead while I play. LADIES, in our darkest moments, God is at work. If you remember nothing else, the resurrection of Lazarus is your own resurrection from whatever trial you may be experiencing. I am going to repeat the five themes and ask that you apply them to your personal trial. 1. His purposes are for the glory of God (in your trial). 2. His ways are mysterious (in your trial) 3. His delays are not his denials (in your trial) 4. He is a personal Savior (and he will respond to you personally in your trial) and 5. True salvation comes when you believe in the resurrecting power of Jesus Christ (giving you the strength and hope to endure in your trial).

Let this song be your prayer and praise to our great God. And, imagine Lazarus' two sisters singing these words as a symphony of praise for the great things He has done.

"The Goodness of God"

*I love You, Lord, For Your mercy never failed me. All my days, I've been held in Your hands.
From the moment that I wake up, Until I lay my head, Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God*

Chorus: *And all my life You have been faithful, And all my life You have been so, so good.
With every breath that I am able, Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God*

*I love Your voice, You have led me through the fire, And in darkest night You are close like no other.
I've known You as a Father, I've known You as a Friend. And I have lived in the goodness of God,*

Repeat Chorus

*'Cause Your goodness is running after, it's running after me.
Your goodness is running after, it's running after me
With my life laid down, I'm surrendered now, I give You everything
'Cause Your goodness is running after, it's running after me, oh-oh. (2x)*

Repeat Chorus

Tag:

*Oh, I'm gonna sing of the goodness of God, I'm gonna sing, I'm gonna sing.
'Cause all my life You have been faithful, And all my life You have been so, so good.
With every breath that I am able, Oh, I'm gonna sing of the goodness of God,
Oh, I'm gonna sing of the goodness of God.*