

The Gospel of John, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 16: The Death and Raising of Lazarus

John 11:1-57

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

John 11 records the climactic sign of the Gospel, the raising of Lazarus, and it contains the fifth great “I am” saying: “I am the resurrection and the life.” Doctrinally, this chapter reveals Jesus’ authority over death itself, His full deity (He is the resurrection, not merely one who performs them), and it serves as a preview of the final resurrection of all who believe. It also shows the mystery of God’s timing and purposes in suffering, and it sets in motion the plot to kill Jesus, with Caiaphas’s unwitting prophecy that one man should die for the people. The heaviest doctrinal block belongs at Question 9, with significant weight at Question 3.

At the same time, this chapter is among the most pastorally tender in all of Scripture. It meets the universal experience of grief and the universal disappointment of God’s seeming delays. “Jesus wept” reveals a God who enters our sorrow rather than standing aloof. The teacher should let the chapter comfort the grieving, validate honest wrestling with God’s timing, and ground the hope of resurrection in the person of Christ.

So aim at both: a firm grasp of Jesus as the resurrection and the life and Lord over death, and a heart that trusts Him in grief, brings honest disappointment to Him, and rests in the hope of resurrection. The disciple we are forming faces death and loss anchored in the One who weeps with us and calls the dead by name.

Question 1

Student Question:

Jesus said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (v. 4). What does this teach about God’s purposes even in the hardest things we face?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus interprets Lazarus’s illness before the family can: “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (v. 4). Lazarus would in fact die, but death would not be the end of the story; God’s glory would be.

Draw out the teaching about God’s purposes in hardship. Jesus does not promise that the family would be spared pain; Lazarus dies and the sisters grieve deeply. But the hardship has a purpose beyond what they can see: the glory of God and the deepening of faith. God is at work in the very things that look like defeat.

Be careful and honest. This does not mean every hardship has an obvious explanation or that we should offer glib reasons for others' suffering. Jesus gives this interpretation by divine knowledge; we often walk by faith without it. But the principle stands: God can be working His glory and good even in our darkest experiences, including the ones that look like His absence (Romans 8:28).

Apply it pastorally. Help students hold their hard things within the larger frame of God's purposes, without pretending the pain is not real. The point is not to explain away suffering but to trust that God is at work in it. Ask students how it changes their perspective on a current hardship to believe God may be glorifying Himself through it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's purposes of glory and good even in hardship (John 11:4; Romans 8:28).
- Suffering that is real yet not the end of the story.
- Walking by faith without always being given the explanation.
- God at work in what looks like defeat or absence.

Discussion Prompts

- What does verse 4 teach about God's purposes in hard things?
- How can we trust God's purposes without explaining away pain?
- How might God be at work in a current hardship of yours?

Question 2

Student Question:

Both Martha and Mary said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (vv. 21, 32). When have you felt that God showed up too late, and how have you wrestled with that disappointment honestly before Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up the sisters' identical, aching words: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (vv. 21, 32). It is the cry of disappointed faith, faith that believed Jesus could help, wrestling with why He did not come sooner.

Validate the honesty. Notice that the sisters bring their disappointment directly to Jesus. They do not stuff it down or pretend; they say it to His face. This is healthy. God invites honest lament; the Psalms are full of it. Bringing our "if you had been here, Lord" to Him is an act of faith, not a failure of it.

Help students name their own version. Many carry a quiet disappointment with God, a prayer that seemed to go unanswered, a timing that felt cruel, a season when He seemed absent. Often

we hide this from God and from others, fearing it is unspiritual. Naming it honestly before Him is the first step toward healing.

Point to how Jesus responds. He does not rebuke the sisters for their words; He weeps with them and then acts in power beyond what they asked. God can be trusted with our honest disappointment. Ask each student to name a quiet “if you had been here, Lord” they carry, and to bring it honestly to the One who weeps with us and works beyond our asking.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest lament as an expression of faith, not a failure of it.
- Bringing disappointment with God directly to Him.
- God inviting honest wrestling (the Psalms).
- Jesus responding to lament with compassion and power.

Discussion Prompts

- When have you felt God showed up too late?
- How honestly have you brought that disappointment to Him?
- What “if you had been here, Lord” do you carry right now?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus declared, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live” (vv. 25–26). What is Jesus claiming about Himself, and why does He say He is the resurrection rather than merely that He performs resurrections?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

To Martha, Jesus makes the fifth great “I am” saying: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (vv. 25–26). This is the doctrinal heart of the chapter’s claim about Jesus.

Stress the difference between performing resurrections and being the resurrection. Martha had a future, distant hope: “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day” (v. 24). Jesus brings the resurrection into the present and into His own person. He does not merely have the power to raise the dead; He is the resurrection and the life. Life and resurrection are located in Him.

Draw out the claim to deity. Only God is the source of life. By identifying Himself as the resurrection and the life, Jesus claims to be that source. He is not pointing to a power He wields from outside; He is declaring that life itself resides in Him (compare 1:4; 5:26). This is a divine claim.

Apply it to hope. Because Jesus is the resurrection and the life, the believer's hope is not a vague optimism but a Person. Death does not have the final word for those joined to Him; "though he die, yet shall he live." Help students see that their hope in the face of death rests on who Jesus is, not on their own strength or merit.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- "I am the resurrection and the life," the fifth great "I am" saying (John 11:25).
- Jesus as the source of life, not merely the worker of resurrections.
- The claim to deity in locating life itself in Himself (John 1:4; 5:26).
- Resurrection hope grounded in the person of Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- What is Jesus claiming about Himself in verse 25?
- Why does He say He is the resurrection rather than that He performs them?
- How does this ground your hope in the face of death?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jesus asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" (v. 26). He asks each of us the same. How would you answer Him honestly today, and where does your belief need to grow?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After His great claim, Jesus turns to Martha with a direct, personal question: "Do you believe this?" (v. 26). The doctrine becomes a demand for personal response. It is the question He puts to every reader.

Help students feel the personal force. It is one thing to affirm the resurrection as a doctrine; it is another to answer Jesus' face-to-face "Do you believe this?" about Him. Martha answers with a confession of who Jesus is: "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God" (v. 27). Belief in the resurrection is inseparable from belief in the One who is the resurrection.

Invite honest answering. Ask students how they would answer Jesus' question today, honestly. Do they truly believe that He is the resurrection and the life, that death is not the end for those in Him? For many, belief is real but mixed with doubt, especially when grief is fresh. Honesty is welcome.

Press toward growth. Wherever their belief stands, the call is to grow. Ask each student where their belief in Christ as the resurrection most needs to deepen, perhaps in the face of a specific fear of death or a recent loss, and to bring that to Him. The same Jesus who asked Martha invites honest faith and grows it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The personal demand of Jesus' question, "Do you believe this?" (John 11:26).
- Belief in the resurrection inseparable from belief in Christ Himself.
- Honest faith, even when mixed with doubt, welcomed by Jesus.
- The call to grow in belief.

Discussion Prompts

- How would you answer Jesus' question, "Do you believe this?" today?
- Where does your belief in Christ as the resurrection need to grow?
- What fear or loss most tests that belief right now?

Question 5

Student Question:

The shortest verse in Scripture says, "Jesus wept" (v. 35). What does it reveal about God that Jesus wept at the tomb even though He was about to raise Lazarus?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

"Jesus wept" (v. 35), the shortest verse in the Bible and one of the most profound. The One who knew He was minutes away from raising Lazarus still stood at the tomb and let the tears come. He was "deeply moved" and "greatly troubled" (vv. 33, 38).

Draw out what this reveals about God. Jesus is not a stoic, distant deity untouched by human pain. He enters fully into the grief of those He loves. His tears are real. This tells us that God is not indifferent to our sorrow; in Christ, He weeps with us. The incarnation means God knows grief from the inside.

Address the puzzle. Why weep when He was about to raise Lazarus? Because the power to fix a situation does not cancel the appropriateness of grief over the brokenness death has caused. Jesus weeps at the wreckage death has made of the world, even as He prepares to undo it. His tears honor the genuine evil of death.

Apply it to comfort. Help students see that their tears are not unspiritual and that God does not stand aloof from them. The God who will one day wipe away every tear (Revelation 21:4) first enters into our weeping. Ask students how it comforts them to have a Savior who weeps, and how this might shape the way they sit with others in grief.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus' real grief revealing a God who is not aloof from our pain (John 11:35).
- The incarnation meaning God knows sorrow from the inside (Hebrews 4:15).
- The appropriateness of grief even where power to fix exists.

- The God who weeps with us and will one day wipe every tear (Revelation 21:4).

Discussion Prompts

- What does it reveal about God that Jesus wept at the tomb?
- Why would He weep when He was about to raise Lazarus?
- How does a weeping Savior comfort you?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus entered fully into the grief of this family before He acted in power (vv. 33–35). How does it comfort you to know that Jesus enters into your grief rather than standing at a distance, and how might this shape the way you comfort others?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up the comfort of Jesus' tears and turns it toward the students' own grief and their care for others. Before Jesus acted in power, He entered the family's sorrow: He was deeply moved, He wept, He stood with them at the tomb.

Help students receive the comfort. In their own grief, they have a Savior who does not merely observe from a safe distance but enters in. Whatever loss they carry, Jesus is not indifferent to it. He draws near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18). This is balm for those who have felt alone in their sorrow.

Draw out the implication for comforting others. Jesus comforted not first with explanations or solutions but with His presence and His tears. Often the most Christlike thing we can do for the grieving is not to fix or explain but to be present, to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). The ministry of presence imitates the Savior at the tomb.

Press for application. Ask students how it comforts them that Jesus enters their grief, and how this might reshape the way they care for grieving people in their lives. Encourage them to resist the urge to offer quick fixes and instead to offer presence, as Jesus did, before any words.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ entering our grief rather than standing at a distance (John 11:33–35).
- God drawing near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18).
- The ministry of presence over quick fixes (Romans 12:15).
- Comforting others in the pattern of the Savior at the tomb.

Discussion Prompts

- How does it comfort you that Jesus enters your grief?

- How might this reshape the way you comfort grieving people?
- Where could you offer presence rather than answers this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Before raising Lazarus, Jesus prayed aloud, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me,” so that the people “may believe that you sent me” (vv. 41–42), and then called, “Lazarus, come out” (v. 43). What does Jesus’ power over death reveal about His identity, and how is this sign a preview of the final resurrection?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Before the miracle, Jesus prays aloud, not because He needs to persuade the Father, but “on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me” (v. 42). Then He cries, “Lazarus, come out,” and the dead man comes out (vv. 43–44). The voice of Christ summons the dead from the grave.

Draw out what this reveals about His identity. Power over death belongs to God alone. By calling a four-days-dead man out of the tomb with a word, Jesus demonstrates that He is the Lord of life and death, the divine “I am” who is the resurrection and the life. This is the climactic sign of the Gospel, sealing the case for who Jesus is.

Show how it previews the final resurrection. Earlier Jesus said that “an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out” (5:28–29). The raising of Lazarus is a foretaste of that day: the same voice that called Lazarus will one day call all the dead. Lazarus’s resurrection is a preview, though Lazarus would die again; the final resurrection is to life that never ends.

Apply it to hope. The believer’s hope at the graveside of a loved one, and at the prospect of their own death, rests on this: the voice of Christ empties tombs. Help students anchor their resurrection hope in the demonstrated power of Jesus. Ask how this sign strengthens their confidence in the resurrection to come.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus’ power over death revealing His deity (John 11:43–44).
- The climactic sign sealing the case for who Jesus is.
- Lazarus’s raising as a preview of the final resurrection (John 5:28–29).
- Resurrection hope anchored in the demonstrated power of Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- What does Jesus’ power over death reveal about His identity?
- How is this sign a preview of the final resurrection?

- How does it strengthen your hope in the resurrection to come?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus said, “Unbind him, and let him go” (v. 44). Lazarus was alive but still wrapped in graveclothes. Where might Christ be calling you to let go of old graveclothes, habits or fears or shame, that no longer fit the new life He has given?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up a vivid detail. Lazarus comes out alive but still bound: “his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go’” (v. 44). He was given new life, yet the graveclothes of death still clung to him until they were removed.

Draw out the picture for the believer. When Christ gives us new life, the old graveclothes do not always fall off automatically. Habits, fears, shame, and patterns from our old life can still cling to us, no longer fitting who we now are in Christ. Part of growing in Christ is having these graveclothes removed.

Apply it gently. Many believers are truly alive in Christ yet still wrapped in things that belong to the grave: an old shame they cannot shake, a fear that still binds them, a habit from their former life. Christ’s word over them is “unbind him, and let him go.” The new life calls for laying aside what no longer fits.

Press for specifics. Ask each student what graveclothes Christ may be calling them to let go of, an old identity, a besetting fear, a shame they keep wearing, and what it would look like to be unbound from it. Note too that Jesus involves the community (“unbind him”); often we need the help of fellow believers to be freed from old graveclothes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- New life in Christ that still calls for laying aside old graveclothes (John 11:44).
- Habits, fears, and shame that no longer fit the new life.
- The community’s role in helping one another be unbound.
- Ongoing transformation as part of resurrection life.

Discussion Prompts

- What old graveclothes might Christ be calling you to let go of?
- What would being unbound from that look like?
- Who in the body of Christ could help you be freed from it?

Question 9

Student Question:

This is the climactic sign of the Gospel, and it provokes the final crisis: some believed, but the leaders resolved to kill Jesus, with Caiaphas saying it was better for one man to die for the people (vv. 45–53). How does this chapter both reveal Jesus as the Lord over life and death and set in motion His own death, and what does it teach about how the same truth that saves some hardens others?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it holds together two things the chapter places side by side: the climactic revelation of Jesus as Lord over life and death, and the way this very sign sets His own death in motion. Many “believed in him” (v. 45), but the leaders convened the council and resolved to kill Him (vv. 47–53).

Draw out the irony and the providence. The greatest sign of life, raising a dead man, becomes the trigger for the leaders to plot Jesus’ death. They reason, “If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come” (v. 48). The clearest evidence of who Jesus is hardened them rather than softening them. The same truth that drew some to faith drove others to murder.

Highlight Caiaphas’s unwitting prophecy. He says, “it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish” (v. 50), meaning it cynically. But John tells us he prophesied without knowing it: Jesus would indeed die for the people, and not for the nation only but to gather God’s scattered children into one (vv. 51–52). God was sovereignly working His saving purpose even through the schemes of those who opposed Him. The Lord over life and death was moving toward laying down His own life.

Draw out the doctrine of how truth divides. The same gospel that saves some hardens others; the same sun that softens wax hardens clay. This is a consistent biblical reality (compare 2 Corinthians 2:15–16). The issue is not the evidence, which was overwhelming, but the response of the heart. Pride, fear of losing power, and unwillingness to submit turned a resurrection into a death warrant.

Bring it to honest reflection. Help students see that encountering the truth about Jesus is never neutral; it either softens us toward faith or hardens us in resistance. The leaders had every reason to believe and chose instead to protect their position. Ask students where they sense the truth of Christ calling for a response in them, and warn gently that resisting clear truth hardens the heart. The Lord who raised Lazarus went willingly toward His own death to save us; the fitting response is faith and surrender, not the self-protective hardening of Caiaphas.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus revealed as Lord over life and death in the climactic sign (John 11:43–44).
- The same sign setting in motion His own death (John 11:47–53).

- Caiaphas's unwitting prophecy and God's sovereignty over evil schemes (John 11:51–52).
- The same truth that saves some hardening others (2 Corinthians 2:15–16).
- The heart's response, not lack of evidence, determining faith or hardening.
- Christ moving willingly toward death to gather God's scattered children into one.

Discussion Prompts

- How does this chapter both reveal Jesus' power and set His death in motion?
- What does Caiaphas's prophecy show about God's sovereignty?
- Why does the same truth soften some hearts and harden others?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over this chapter, from the delay, to the tears, to the empty tomb. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you to trust Him as the resurrection and the life, even in the face of death and loss?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers the whole chapter, the delay, the tears, and the empty tomb, into a single call: to trust Jesus as the resurrection and the life in the face of death and loss. This is the formation the chapter aims at.

Help students see the full picture of trust. Trusting Jesus as the resurrection means trusting Him in the delay (when He seems slow), in the tears (when grief is real), and in the hope (when death seems final). The chapter holds all three together, and so must a maturing faith.

Make it concrete. Ask each student to name one specific way Jesus is forming them to trust Him as the resurrection and the life, perhaps in facing their own mortality, in grieving a loss with hope, in bringing a disappointment to Him, or in resting in the resurrection to come.

Close in hope. The same Jesus who wept at the tomb and called Lazarus out is the resurrection and the life, and He will one day call every believer from the grave to life that never ends. Let students leave anchored in that hope, able to face death and loss not without tears, but without despair, trusting the One who has conquered the grave.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Trusting Christ as the resurrection in the delay, the tears, and the hope.
- A mature faith that holds grief and hope together.
- Resurrection hope grounded in the person and power of Christ.
- Concrete, specific formation as the goal of the lesson.

Discussion Prompts

- How is Jesus forming you to trust Him as the resurrection and the life?
- Where do you most need that trust in the face of death or loss?
- How does the hope of resurrection change the way you grieve?