

# The Gospel of John

## Lesson 16: The Death and Raising of Lazarus -- John 11:1-57

The message that reaches Jesus is short and full of trust: "Lord, he whom you love is ill." Mary and Martha know Jesus loves their brother Lazarus, and they assume, as we always do, that love will come running. But Jesus does something that has puzzled and even wounded readers for two thousand years. He stays where He is for two more days. By the time He arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has been dead and buried for four days, the tomb is sealed, and the mourning is in full cry. The sisters' words carry the ache of every delayed prayer: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

What we must see is that Jesus did not delay because He did not care. He delayed because He had something greater to give than what they asked. They wanted their brother kept from dying. Jesus intended to raise him from death, and in doing so to reveal something about Himself that a mere healing never could. To Martha, standing in her grief, He makes the staggering claim that lifts this whole story above a single family's sorrow: "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." He does not say He can perform resurrections. He says He is the resurrection. Death itself answers to Him.

And yet, in the most tender verse in all of Scripture, before He acts in power, He weeps. "Jesus wept." The One who knows He is about to raise Lazarus still stands at the tomb and lets the tears come. He is not pretending; He is moved, troubled, angry at the wreckage that death has made of the world He loves. This is the God we have, not a distant deity untouched by our pain, but One who enters fully into our grief, who weeps with us even when He holds the power to fix everything. He does not despise our tears. He shares them.

Then He prays, and He calls into the silence of the tomb, "Lazarus, come out." And the dead man comes out, bound hand and foot in graveclothes, and Jesus says, "Unbind him, and let him go." It is a preview, a foretaste of the morning when His own voice will empty every grave. This sign is the last and greatest before the cross, and it seals His fate, because the authorities decide that a man who raises the dead is too dangerous to live. Read this chapter and let it meet you wherever death has touched your life, with the One who weeps at the tomb and then calls the dead by name.

**Group Discussion:** Jesus deliberately waited two days before going to Lazarus, even though He loved the family (vv. 5-6). Why is it so hard to trust God's timing when He seems slow, and how does this story reshape the way we think about His delays?

**Personal Reflection:** Both sisters said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (vv. 21, 32). Where in your life do you carry a quiet "if you had been here, Lord," a disappointment with God's timing or absence, and how might this chapter speak to it?

*Read John 11:1–57*

## **Study Questions**

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

## **Now or Later**

Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 15:20–26, Christ the firstfruits and death the last enemy to be destroyed; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, grieving with hope and the dead in Christ

rising; Romans 8:28–39, God working all things for good and nothing separating us from His love; Hebrews 4:15, a High Priest who sympathizes with our weakness; Revelation 21:3–4, God wiping away every tear and death being no more.