



IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

SERIES: JOHN (GOSPEL OF TRUTH)

LESSON: "LAZARUS, COME OUT!"

JOHN 11:1-44

AUG 15, 2021

MAIN POINT

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in him, though he die, yet shall he live. Everyone who believes in Jesus shall never die. Do you believe this? (Jn. 11:25-26)

JOHN CONTEXT

Every lesson's purpose: "but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

In our story today there are four main characters: Jesus, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. The four of them are close friends and the Bible describes Jesus' affection of them as dearly loved (11:5). Others are involved as sort of secondary characters: the disciples and a small Jewish crowd. The

story takes place in a town called Bethany, where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived. Bethany was 2 miles from Jerusalem (11:18).

From previous episodes in the Gospel of John, it has become clear there are many Jews who have attempted to stone or arrest Jesus (Jn. 5:18; 7:1, 25; 8:31, 40, 59; 10:31, 39). Thus, Jesus is sort of on the run (10:39). To escape, he went to a place across the Jordan River, which could have been 30 miles or more from Bethany. However, just because Jesus is “on the run,” does not mean he is scared or that he is going to alter God’s plan or purpose for him. Indeed, throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus acts knowing his Father is sovereign and in control. Even when the Jews appear to threaten Jesus, John often records why Jesus isn’t arrested. The most prominent reason given is simply because “his time had not come.” (Jn. 7:6-8; 8:20; cf. Jn. 12:23).

Our story begins with Mary and Martha sending word to Jesus that their brother, Lazarus, is ill. They request Jesus come so that he might heal him.

INTRODUCTION

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

Most if not all of us have prayed for something and God did not answer like we thought he would. In the times when he didn’t answer like you thought, did it cause you to doubt? Turn angry? Or were you able to remain hopeful? Please answer honestly.

John tells us directly what the purpose of this passage is. In fact, he tells us four different times. Furthermore, he tells us the same purpose for all different groups of people involved in this story. Notice these purpose statements and to whom they are spoken to:

- 11:4 – But when Jesus heard [about the illness of Lazarus] he 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.*”
- 11:14 – Jesus told [the disciples] plainly, “Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, *so that you may believe.*”
- 11:25-26 – Jesus said to [Martha], “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believe in me, through he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. *Do you believe this?*”
- 11:40 – Jesus said to [Mary], “Did I not tell you that *if you believed you would see the glory of God.*”

- 11:41-42 – So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, *that they may believe that you sent me.*”

John’s purpose in this passage is that every person involved (Mary, Martha, the disciples, and the Jews) would believe and glorify Jesus as the Son of God.

EXPLANATION // ...believe Jesus is the Christ...

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 11:1-4

Our story begins with Mary and Martha sending word to Jesus that their brother, Lazarus, is ill. They request Jesus come so that Jesus might heal him. Of course, they expected Jesus to come quickly. They were confident Jesus loved them and their brother. In fact, prior to this, they had witnessed Jesus heal strangers, even express a willingness to travel long distances, to heal (Matthew 8:7). Surely, they could have thought Jesus will come to heal his beloved friend.

Jesus noticeably says in the moment, “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.” By this statement, Jesus seems not to worry. He has a plan in the back of his mind. He knows what will unfold in the near future.

Admittedly, Jesus’ words are vague. Readers today know what he meant by it because we can fast forward to the end of the story. By looking at the end of the story, we know Lazarus dies, but that Jesus raised him back to life. In doing it this way, Jesus does not allow the illness to end in death, and more so, he glorifies himself in greater degree since he raised the dead as oppose to simply preventing death. However, Mary and Martha did not realize this.

So admittedly, Jesus’ statement at this point is vague. Mary and Martha upon hearing Jesus’ words, likely could have heard either that Jesus would come to heal Lazarus before he died or that Lazarus would eventually get better without healing. Again, Jesus gives a vague, almost coded, promise to Mary and Martha.

Do you think Jesus’ vague promise about Lazarus’ illness not ending in death was fair to Mary and Martha? Should he have given them a more direct or clear promise?

Why do you think Jesus chose to give the vague promise as oppose to telling them directly he would allow Lazarus to die and then raise him back to life?

Let's get personal, how do you deal with the vague promises of God? On a scale from 1-10, are you comfortable with God not giving you all the details of how he will glorify himself in your story?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 11:5-16

As the story continues, rather than go immediately to Bethany to see Lazarus, Jesus decided to stay two more days where he was. After waiting, Jesus said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

But the disciples were unsettled by this plan. They simply did not want to return to the general area in which Jesus almost was arrested and stone.

But Jesus' response is wonderful. His statement clues us in to his love for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Even more so, it clues us in to his sovereignty, his unselfishness to obey the Father, and his purposeful and missional mindset. Jesus says,

"Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walk in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I will go to awaken him" (11:9-11).

What did Jesus mean by this? And why is this response appropriate for why Jesus should go to Judea despite the potential danger?

To explain, two significant points can be made. First, just as the sun gives light during the day and allows people to walk without stumbling, so too, Jesus realizes he is the spiritual light of the world to keep people from stumbling into darkness and sin. As the *only* true light of the world, there is no substitute who can take his place. Knowing this, Jesus does not want to remain in hiding as if to avoid all danger. As light of the world who is compassionate and loving towards all people, Jesus recognized his specific calling to be visible before people so they may come to the light and not stumble in darkness. In short, people won't understand he is from the Father if he simply secluded himself. In order to prove he is light of the world, he must be before people.

A second significant point is Jesus refers to a time element of the day. In this instance, Jesus refers to the day as twelve hours. By this, Jesus understood the day only lasts for so long and one must make the most of the time he is given. Jesus recognized that his time had not come yet (that is, to be lifted up on the cross), but still, it was approaching very soon. And with not much time left for Jesus on this earth, he urged his disciples to get on the move along with him.

So... to return to our story, we want to point out again Jesus' exact words towards his disciples. Jesus said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I will go to awaken him" (11:11). When Jesus spoke these words, he meant to say that Lazarus had died, but the disciples thought that Jesus meant he was only asleep but would recover on his own. But Jesus clarified and told them directly, "Lazarus had died" (11:14). John, the author, wants there to be no confusion. Lazarus was dead, not just asleep.

Earlier when Jesus initially heard that Lazarus was ill, he responded, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified." And here, Jesus says a similar statement to his disciples. He reiterates, "Lazarus had died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him" (11:15).

And again, as John, our author, wants to be clear. Everyone recognized that Lazarus was dead. More evidence is due to the fact Thomas, one of the disciples, speaks up saying, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (11:16). Whether spoken sarcastically or not, Thomas thought that Lazarus was dead. By them going, he thought a similar fate might befall them.

What stands out to you about Jesus thus far in this story?

What stands out to you about the disciples at this point in the story?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 11:17-27

When Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been buried four days already. Many Jews had accompanied Mary and Martha to console them. And due to the current tensions between Jesus and the Jews, rather than Jesus come to Martha, Martha decided to go to Jesus just outside of Bethany. Meanwhile, Mary remained at home.

Martha at this point will show remarkable faith. She says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. *But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you*" (11:21-22). It seems best to consider Martha's statement as a statement of faith. While the statement is certainly filled with grief, she does not appear to express resentment, or bitterness at Jesus. Instead her statement appears submissive to Jesus. Despite for the moment not getting what she hoped for, she still had faith in Jesus that he was the Son of God.

Jesus' answer is short and sweet. He says vaguely, "Your brother will rise again" (Jn. 11:23).

And still Martha is appreciative and submissive to Jesus' words. She comments, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day" (11:24).

Jesus, presumably with his plan that he had from the very beginning, is setting the stage for what will unfold next. Jesus' plan, you'll remember, is that "the Son of God may be glorified" (11:4). So, in response to Martha, Jesus wants to communicate not only is there a resurrection after death but more specifically that the resurrection comes only as a result of Jesus. So, Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believe in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (11:25). You see... Jesus reveals that resurrecting from the dead into eternal life happens through one's belief in Jesus.

Pointedly then, Jesus asks of Martha, "Do you believe this?" (11:26).

And remarkably, despite Jesus did not heal her brother when she initially asked, Martha affirms: "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world" (11:27).

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 11:28-37

Leaving there, Martha went to Mary privately and told her that Jesus wanted to speak to her. She arose quickly to go see him. Unfortunately, the Jews who were there to console her saw her leave. The Jews followed her thinking that she was going to go mourn at the tomb.

When Mary saw Jesus, she fell at his feet saying, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (11:32). It is interesting to note that these are the same words Martha spoke to Jesus earlier. However, it is likely that Mary says these words with a more doubtful tone and attitude.

When Jesus saw Mary's weeping along with the Jews who had also come weeping, the Bible says, "[Jesus] was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled" (11:33). This is somewhat of a peculiar response from Jesus. The Greek words behind it carry the idea of agitated, nearly angry, with elements of grief stricken. Commentators have different opinions, but most tend to view Jesus displaying a mixture of anger and grief. Anger due to death and grief due to its sad effects on people.

Wasting no time, Jesus requests, "Where have you laid him?" (11:34).

"Lord, come and see," Mary replied (11:34).

And Jesus wept.

But the Jews have mixed responses. Some are impressed with Jesus' love for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Others are disappointed that Jesus did not arrive sooner so that he could heal Lazarus.

When it comes to expressing grief, are you more like Mary or Martha?

What are some of the similarities and differences in how Jesus interacts with Mary and Martha?

Anything stand out to you about Jesus' emotions in this story thus far?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 11:38-44

At the tomb, Jesus was deeply moved again. And as a side note, it is worth mentioning that grief and anger towards death is not a sin. Indeed, Jesus had a plan and foresaw from the very beginning that he would raise Lazarus from the dead, and still, that did not mean he was absent of emotions during the death of a close friend. Grieving over the death of a loved one is something that should stir within us emotions of grief, sadness, and anger towards death. As Christians we get to express grief, sadness, and anger through the lens of faith. We have hope that our sorrows, grieves, and angers will one day turn to joy at the resurrection.

So too in this instance, as Jesus approaches the tomb, he requests for the stone to be removed. Initially Martha will advise otherwise. She explains that the body has been there for four days and an odor has fully developed. And yet still amidst all the emotions of grief, sadness, and anger Jesus calls for Martha to recall her faith. Jesus says, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" (11:40).

By faith, Martha and Mary allows the stone to be removed. Whereas Martha had previously described Jesus as one who God listens to, so now Jesus would pray to his Father. Jesus would preface his prayer saying, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me" (11:42).

And with a loud voice Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" (Jn. 11:43).

And the man who had been wrapped in linen strips with his hands and feet bound arose and came out. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go" (11:44).

APPLICATION // ...have life in His name.

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

As mentioned in the introduction of this lesson, the purpose of this story is that people might believe. Does this story in particular help you to believe more?

As a group we can be open with each other. Has anyone been through a season of grief? Please share.

Is anyone in a season of grief right now that others in the group do not know about? Would you feel comfortable sharing?

PRAYER

This may be a really good opportunity to pray for those who are grieving in some way. Teachers, please be mindful of this and pray accordingly.