

**LESSON #17 CHAPTER 11: 1-57*****Raising of Lazarus***

**Divine Attribute:** Life-giving

**Theological concept:** Resurrection

**Geographical location:** Bethany

**Chapter Structure**

**11: 1-16** The death of Lazarus

**11: 17-44** The quickening shout

**11: 45-57** The fateful council

**Spiritual Principles:**

P1 Mortal life must come to an end, but the life in Christ endures forever.

P2 The best way to comfort a person in grief is to bring him/her to Jesus

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**Today's lesson...**

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The raising of Lazarus from the dead was certainly the Lord's greatest miracle that aroused the most response from both His friends and His enemies.

The emphasis in this chapter is on faith; the word 'believe' occurs at least eight times in various forms. In raising Lazarus, Jesus sought to strengthen the faith of three groups of people: his disciples (vv.1-16), Martha and Mary (vv.17-44), and the Jews (vv.45-57).

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**A.11: 1-16 The death of Lazarus**

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Jesus was at Bethabara (10:40; 1:28)(see map attached), about 20 miles from Bethany, which was about a day's travelling. Bethany was about 2 miles from Jerusalem(v.18), on the other side of Olivet, less than 2 miles along the road to Jericho.

One day, a messenger arrived with the sad news from his dear friends Mary and Martha that their brother Lazarus, whom Jesus loved, was very ill,

*"Lord, he whom you love is ill."*

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**Sidenotes:** It is an interesting coincidence that the three names (Mary, Martha, Lazarus) were found in 1873 in an ossuary inscription in one tomb near Bethany. The bearing of these inscriptions on the Gospel narrative is simply that these were very common names at that period. - F.F. Bruce "The Gospel of John" p.253

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The tone of the message indicates that the illness is serious and Jesus' attention is urgent. There was no explicit request for healing. First, they knew that it was not safe for Jesus to return to Judea

because Jesus' claim, "I and the Father are one," at the festival of Dedication earlier had provoked a hostile reaction from the Jewish leaders (v. 10:31, 11:8). Second, they trusted that Jesus would not let Lazarus die.

Jesus did not immediately return to Bethany with the messenger; instead, he sent them back with the message, "4 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." And Jesus himself remained where he was for another two days. And Lazarus died.

Was it a miscalculation of timing or a misdiagnosis of the illness on Jesus' part? No! God does not make such mistakes. In fact, Jesus knew that Lazarus died on the day the messenger departed Bethany.

Rather, Jesus had a schedule in mind. He planned to heal Lazarus, but not when he was alive, but when he was dead, and dead for four days! Besides physical decay that produced a bad odour (v.39) there was also a spiritual aspect to the 'four days'. There was a belief attributed to a rabbi that the dead person's soul revisited the tomb during the first three days but left it permanently from the fourth day onwards; death was then irreversible. Therefore, raising a man whose body has begun to decay gave greater authenticity to the miracle and a greater opportunity for people to believe, including his own disciples.

His disciples, of course, did not know that Lazarus had died (v.12). They were alarmed by Jesus' decision to return to Judea. Why should he venture into the lions' den again? Could he not cure Lazarus from a distance? (John 4:43-54)

15 And for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." These words become plain when we realise Jesus' intention to delay his trip. Jesus did not say He was glad that Lazarus died, but that He was glad that He could reveal who He truly is - the Lord of life and death - to them. The result would be God glorified and their faith strengthened.

16 So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." We know Thomas as a doubting man, but here we see he was also a devoted and courageous man: he was willing to go with Jesus into danger and risk his own life.

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### **B. 11: 17-44 The quickening shout**

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#### 1. Jesus counsel Martha

Jesus knew very well that when the messenger returned to Bethany, Lazarus was already dead. How are Mary and Martha to process Jesus's message for them, "4 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." ? Jesus was urging them to believe his word no matter how discouraging the circumstances might appear.

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#### Life application

Each experience of suffering and trial ought to increase our faith, but this kind of spiritual growth is not automatic. We must respond positively to the ministry of the Word and the Spirit of God.

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"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (v. 21,32) were the first words that Martha and Mary said to Jesus, indicating both their faith in Jesus' ability to heal and their regret that Lazarus had to experience the terror of death.

Martha came out to meet Jesus outside the village as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming. Mary stayed at home, probably overwhelmed by grief and displeasure or anger that Jesus did not come early.

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#### Life application

We can identify with Mary's anger. But we need to know that God's love for His own is not a pampering love; it is a perfecting love. The fact that God loves us and we love Him is no guarantee that we will be sheltered from the problems and pains of life. That is a wrong idea to 'sell' when preaching the Gospel. We must not think that love and suffering are incompatible. Certainly, they unite in Jesus Christ. The Father loves His Son and yet permitted His beloved Son to drink the cup of sorrow and experience the shame and pain of the cross. What is important is not for us to live a comfortable life but to glorify God in all that we do.

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Verses 20 to 27 were Jesus' counselling conversation with Martha. Here we find the 5th great "I am" statement of Jesus.

Martha believed that even now, after being in the tomb for four days, Jesus could still raise him up, ["22 But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."](#)

She took Jesus' assurance in verse 23, "Your brother will rise again," to be a conventional word of comfort and hope in the resurrection of the dead on the last day. Under the influence of the Pharisees, it was now a general belief among the Jews, in spite of the Sadducean's resistance to it, and this teaching has remained an article of Jewish orthodoxy to this day.

Jesus assured Martha that her belief is true with an addition: He himself is the one who will raise the dead then, for the Father has authorised Him to do so (5:21, 25-29, 6:39),

["25 I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."](#)

These statements seem synonymous, but they are not. I find it easier if we rearrange them to be:

"I am the resurrection. Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live.  
I am the life, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

This points to Jesus' own rising from the dead and affirms that we who believe in Him will share his risen life even though we experience bodily death. Jesus is not only the one who affects the resurrection and bestows life; He is himself the Resurrection and the life. The risen life we share in Him is a life that knows no death!

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P1 Mortal life must come to an end, but the life in Christ endures forever.

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["27 Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."](#) This belief of who Jesus is is enough to deliver Martha from grief even though she did not receive the explicit assurance that Jesus was going to raise Lazarus right now. The first thing that she wanted to do was for her sister to be healed too. She knew exactly what Mary needs: to go to Jesus.

*“<sup>28</sup> When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”*

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Life application

It is never easy to comfort someone in grief. Most of the time, words do not help. The best way is to bring the person to Jesus and let him/her receive comfort and hope from the Lord directly. You can do it by reading the scripture or praying alongside.

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P2 The best way to comfort a person in grief is to bring him/her to Jesus

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Why did Martha speak to Mary in private? Possibly because of the danger involved: they knew that the Jewish leaders were out to arrest Jesus.

*“<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled...<sup>35</sup>Jesus wept.”*

Note that Jesus, being the Incarnate Word, was so completely in command of the situation and knew that the glory of God was about to be manifested, should nevertheless shed tears of grief for a departed friend and his mourning relatives as anyone else might do, and was frustrated by the havoc sickness and death wrought on human life! This shows that the Eternal Word truly *incarnate* and made himself like us in every respect and is able to sympathise with our weaknesses (Heb 2: 17; 4:15)

## 2. The Quickening Shout

Note the prayers of Jesus in vv. 41 and 42.

Jesus did not pray that Lazarus may be raised from death. The raising of the dead is a divine prerogative which the Father shares with the Son (John 5:21). Neither did Jesus have to pray aloud, but He did so for the benefit of the bystanders, *“<sup>42</sup> that they may believe that you sent me.”*

*“<sup>43</sup> he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out. <sup>44</sup> The man who had died came out, 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.”*

The shout which calls Lazarus back to life is a parable of that coming day when all who are in tombs will hear the same quickening shout and come out. But there is a difference. Lazarus was called out to a continuation of mortal life, whereas those who hear the shout on the last day are called out to an imperishable body, and life never ends, like the resurrected life of Jesus. That difference is manifested in that Jesus' graveclothes were left behind in the tomb (20:5-7), while Lazarus was still bound by his graveclothes as he made his way blindly out of the tomb in the direction of the voice that called him.

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### **C. 11: 45-57 The fateful council**

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*“<sup>45</sup> Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him,”*

The raising of Lazarus was an unquestioned miracle that even the most hostile spectator could not deny!

It was necessary for the Jewish Sanhedrin to meet and discuss what to do with Jesus. The official decision was that Jesus must die. They had wanted to kill him previously, but they did not take the initiative to do so. Now, they had decided that they should do it proactively, and they made a plan.

*“<sup>53</sup>So from that day on they made plans to put him to death....<sup>57</sup>Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.”*

They thought they were in control of the situation, but it was God who was working out His predetermined plan (Acts 2:23). Originally, they wanted to wait until after the Passover, but God had decreed otherwise. (Mat 26:5)

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### Closing

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A Puritan writer said that if Jesus had not named Lazarus when he shouted at the tomb, He would have emptied the whole cemetery! This would be a picture of the resurrection on the last day!

Brothers and sisters, Jesus has demonstrated that he is the Resurrection and the Life. The worst thing that sin can do to us is a temporal death, which would lead to the resurrection of a glorious and imperishable body!



