

# G R A C E

## Reformed Baptist Church

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### THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

#### Sermon Notes

#### *The Resurrection of Lazarus*

John 11:1-27

November 13, 2005

#### Introduction

- ⇒ In Chapter 10, immediately after Jesus states, “I and the Father are one,” “The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.” Then, the Evangelist states [verses 39-40], “Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp. And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing, and He was staying there.”
- ⇒ Therefore, at the beginning of Chapter 11, Jesus is no longer in Jerusalem, but rather in the Transjordan.
- ⇒ This is the climax of Jesus’ “signs” in the Gospel of John.
- ⇒ This “sign” will directly lead to Christ’s arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

#### Verse 1

- John, the Evangelist, opens this chapter immediately informing the reader that Lazarus of Bethany is sick.
- This is NOT the same Bethany of John 1:28. Rather, it is *the village of Mary and her sister Martha*, about two (2) miles outside of Jerusalem.

#### Verse 2

- John, then, states *which* Mary he is referring to: “the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair...”
  - This is a very interesting verse, in that John does not mention this event until Chapter 12 (verses 1-8). However, given that the Gospel of John was written after the Synoptics, one may safely assume that John the Evangelist believed that his readers would be familiar with this well-known event.

### Verse 3

- Mary and Martha address Jesus [in their message] as “Lord.” However, this is the common Greek phrase for “sir.” Also, Mary and Martha were, likely, speaking Aramaic, and would have possibly used the title “Rabbi.”
- “The sisters” refer to their brother Lazarus as “he whom You love.”
  - This expression [*he whom You love*] is poignant, as it reveals the truth of Christ’s **humanity**. During His life on earth, Christ developed real friendships and relationships.

### Verse 4

- The immediate response of our Lord was simple, “This sickness is not to end in death...”
  - Of course this statement does not mean that Lazarus will not die *physically*, as most readers of John’s Gospel are well aware of what happens next; however, Jesus is stating that this sickness will not end **ultimately** in death. Again, the typical reader knows that Jesus will resurrect Lazarus from the dead.
- Then, Jesus explains **why** the sickness of Lazarus will not end in death – [he will be resurrected by Jesus] “for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.”
  - This statement by Jesus is very significant. Jesus is **NOT** saying that this will be done “so that God may be glorified,” that is, praised; but, rather, “for the glory of God” or “in order that God’s glory may be revealed.”
    - One scholar [C.K. Barrett] noted that the Greek construction, here, means “on behalf of God’s glory,” “for revealing God’s glory,” or, “in order to reveal God’s glory.”
    - This statement goes back to the very purpose of Christ’s “signs” in the Gospel of John – so that some truth of Christ’s nature might be revealed that was previously hidden.
    - The glory of God is, simply, the revelation of who He. God’s final revelation to humanity was His Son Jesus Christ [“and we beheld His glory”]. Yet, there is a very real sense that we will not fully behold God’s glory until we see Him “face to face.”
    - As God is incomprehensible, so is His glory, i.e., ALL of who He is. Because we, as humans, are finite, we cannot fully behold God’s glory.
    - Wayne Grudem [*Systematic Theology*, p. 221] states, “The greatness of God’s being, the perfection of all his attributes, is something that we can never fully comprehend, but before which we can only stand in awe and worship.”
  - Jesus, then, states, “so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.”

- Notice, here, that the raising of Lazarus from the dead will be done so that a.) God’s glory might be revealed, and b.) so that the Son of God **may be glorified**.
- In other words, when God’s glory is revealed, His people honor, praise, and worship His Son, the final revelation of Himself to humanity. This is NOT to say that God the Father should not be praised – HE SHOULD. But, as Jesus states in John 5:23, it is God’s will that “all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”
- There is great irony, here:

The raising of Lazarus from the dead will not only “reveal the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it,” but it will directly lead to the ultimate moment of glorification of the Son: the crucifixion.

Remember, Christ is glorified on the cross because it reflects His complete and perfect obedience to the will of the Father. However, it could also be stated that the cross reflects the holiness [an eternal attribute] of God [the Father] as He pours out His wrath [His justice is also an eternal attribute] onto His Son in order to atone for the sins of His people. Therefore, in the crucifixion, we see, at least in part, the glory of God [the display of who He is in His attributes] being revealed.

### Verses 5-6

- Verse 5 states that “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.”
- The reason John mentions this truth is, likely, because of Christ’s delay in Verse 6. In other words, the reader of the Gospel of John should never assume that Christ’s delay in Verse 6 reflects a lack of love or compassion towards Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Rather, to the contrary, it is **because Christ loved them** that He delayed.
- Because the Lord created us, He did so that we might find our complete sufficiency in Him. Christ’s delay, therefore, was intended for **the good** of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, that they might place their trust, not in their physical circumstances, but in Him for their eternal hope.
- Another powerful truth revealed in these events is this: **God will not be manipulated, regardless of who “pure” or “sincere” the motives.** God will always act in accordance with His will [which includes “the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes”].
  - Notice the parallel between this account and Jesus’ first sign – the wedding at Cana. There, in John 2, Jesus’ mother, Mary, asked His assistance, stating, “They have no wine.” Jesus, then, gently rebukes her, refusing to act in accordance with her desires, for He was sent to do the will of the Father.
  - Also, in John 7, Jesus’ brothers urge Him to go to Judea during the Feast of Booths. Yet, again, Jesus denies the immediate request, replying, “My time is not yet here.”

- Lastly, one of the primary reasons for Jesus’ delay was because it ensured that Lazarus was truly dead.
  - A general timetable of events is as follows:
    - (1.) Lazarus likely died shortly after the messenger left Bethany [where Lazarus was] for the Transjordan [where Jesus was] with news that Lazarus was sick.
    - (2.) It would have taken the messenger about a day to arrive and share the news with Jesus. Therefore, once Jesus receives the message, Lazarus has been dead a day.
    - (3.) Jesus delays two days in the Transjordan. At this point, Lazarus has been dead three days.
    - (4.) Jesus then makes the one-day journey to Bethany, arriving there after Lazarus had been dead for four days.

#### **Verses 7-8**

- After the two days, Jesus disciples said, “Let us go to Judea again.”
- The disciples, then, recall the events recorded in the previous chapter [John 10:31, 39] – that the Jews were seeking to stone Jesus.

#### **Verses 9-10**

- Jesus’ response to the disciples reflects the truth that “there are only so many hours in a day.”
- Further, the phrase “twelve hours in the day” refers to the daylight hours when one could see, and therefore, work.
- There is a sense, here, that Jesus is stating that His time on earth is short [only “twelve hours”], and that He must do the work and will of His Father.
- Also, since Jesus has recently referred to Himself as “the Light of the World,” He is clearly making a reference to a deeper, divine truth.
  - The lives of those saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are illuminated by “the Light of the world.” They “do the work” of their Father, and He lights their path and they do not stumble.
  - However, those who are not saved walk in the night, and they stumble “because the light is not in” them.

#### **Verse 11**

- Jesus tells His disciples that Lazarus “has fallen asleep.”
  - The idea of death being “sleep” is relatively common in the New Testament.

- The point, here, of course is that now that Jesus is “on the scene,” and in light of His death, burial, and resurrection, death no longer has its sting (1 Corinthians 15:55) and should be feared no more than sleep.
- Also, notice that Jesus says, “*Our* friend Lazarus...*I* go...”
  - Lazarus may be a mutual friend of Jesus and the disciples; however, **only Jesus can wake Lazarus from this sleep.**

### Verses 12-13

- Once again, Jesus’ disciples misunderstand what He is saying, thinking that He is referring to **physical** sleep.
- Also, John, as is typical in this Gospel, comments on this truth.

### Verses 14-15

- Jesus could not speak in any plainer terms than He does here in Verse 14: “Lazarus is dead.”
- This is actually the aorist tense [past/punctiliar] and could be translated, “Lazarus died.”
- Also, this passage reveals Jesus’ supernatural knowledge.
- Then, in Verse 15, Jesus makes a very “strange” statement [i.e. strange *to us*]: “I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe...”
  - The fact that Jesus was not there increases the magnitude of the miracle He will soon perform.

### Verse 16

- We now hear from a disciple that is rarely considered the model of courage and devotion: Thomas.
- John calls him Didymus, which means “twin” in Greek.
- Thomas says, “Let us also go, so that we may die with Him.”
  - The belief of Thomas is that if Jesus goes to Judea, He will be stoned by the Jews, and his expression is one of complete devotion – even to the point of sharing in the same death as Jesus.
  - Yet, this statement also reflects a misunderstanding as to the nature of Jesus’ death – **ONLY CHRIST** could die the death He did - as the perfect, blameless substitute for the sins of His people.
  - However, Thomas’ words reflected great truth also, in that Jesus Christ calls all believers, in a sense, to share in His death daily – “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:26)

### Verse 17

- When Jesus arrived, John tells us, “He found that he had already been in the tomb four days.”
  - Once again, this is very significant.
    - According to Jewish superstition, the soul stays near the body for three days after a person dies. On the fourth day, the soul departs from the body permanently. At this point, there is no longer any hope of resuscitation or recovery.
    - According to a Jewish source: “Rabbi Abbba b. Rabbi Pappai and Rabbi Joshua of Siknin said in the name of Rabbai Levi: **‘For three days (after death) the soul hovers over the body, intending to re-enter, but as soon as it sees its appearance change, it departs...’**
- Bar Kappara said: **‘The full force of mourning lasts for three days. Why? Because (for that length of time) the shape of the face is recognizable’** (Lev. Rab. 18:1; Soncino edn., p. 226; see also Eccl. Rab. 12:6).
- Consistent with this, the Mishnah states that identification of a corpse must occur during the first three days after an individual dies (*Yeb.* 16:3).
- If Jesus had bowed to the desires of Mary and Martha and gone to the tomb of Lazarus, without waiting, He would have arrived in Bethany about two days after the death. Then, the resurrection of Lazarus would have occurred within the three day “window.” The Jews would have, then, been able to fall back on their tradition as a “reasonable” explanation for the miracle.

### Verses 18-19

- John’s statement, “Bethany was near Jerusalem” works to build the suspense for the reader, for Jerusalem represents the center of opposition to Jesus and His ministry. The astute reader is well aware that “the powers that be” in Jerusalem are seeking to murder Jesus.
- Then, John states, “many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary...”
  - Therefore, this miracle will be witnessed by a great number of Jews...it will be very public.

### Verse 20

- That Martha goes out to meet Jesus, while Mary stays at the house, is quite consistent with the account of Mary and Martha found in Luke 10:38-42.

### Verses 21-22

- Martha’s words in Verse 21 should not be taken as an angry attack or reprimand of Jesus. Rather, they express confidence and faith that had Jesus been there, He would have **been able** to save him.
- Verse 22 reveals that, even in the midst of her great grief, Martha recognizes the relationship between the Father and Son. In a sense, it seems as though she is asking, “Is there anything you can do? I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”

### Verses 23-24

- Jesus' response to Martha is profoundly simple and straightforward: "Your brother will rise again."
  - The words of Jesus most definitely have two meanings:
    1. Lazarus will be raised on *the last day* at the resurrection.
    2. Lazarus will be raised immediately from the tomb.
- This statement anticipates Jesus' final I AM statement in Verse 25.
- This is the hope of all believers.