

Chapter 22: The Life of Jesus

John 11:1–44

In Jesus' last, greatest sign, he brings his public attestation to a close. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus has demonstrated repeatedly through his words and his works that he is indeed the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name (John 20:31). In the sign of raising Lazarus up from the dead, Jesus now decisively proves that he is the one in whom is *life* (John 1:4). Jesus performed his first sign at a wedding (John 2:1–11), and Jesus now performs his last sign at a funeral, revealing his glory across the range of human experience.¹ Furthermore, as Craig Keener points out, Jesus' first and last signs contrasts with the first and last signs of Moses in that Moses brought death, but Jesus brings life. Moses' first sign was to turn the water of the Nile into blood (Ex. 7:14–25), killing everything in it, while Jesus turns water into wine to fill a wedding party with life-filled joy. Moses' last sign, on the other hand, was the death of every living firstborn in Egypt (Ex. 11–12), while Jesus raises up a dead man to life.²

The contrast between Moses and Jesus does not end with the distinctions between the law for the former, and grace and truth for the latter (John 1:17); ultimately, the difference between Jesus and Moses is nothing less than life and death. Perhaps part of Moses' accusations against those who reject Jesus (John 5:45) will be on the basis of Moses' plea with the Israelites: "Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live" (Deut. 30:19)—words that Moses uttered in his last speech to his people before he himself died. Here too, raising Lazarus from the dead will lead directly to Jesus' own death (John 11:53).³ This sign of raising the dead to life, however, demonstrates that Jesus possesses authority over life and death, even in his authority to take up his own life again after he lays it down for his sheep (cf. John 10:17–18). In John 11, we encounter the glory of Jesus in his capacity as the Lord of Life: *for his glory and our good, Jesus shepherds us out of death into his resurrection life.*

His Glory; Our Good (John 11:1–16)

John does not tell us how much time has passed since the end of Jesus' dispute with the Jews in John 10. We do not even know whether Jesus is still near the Jordan (John 10:40–42), which means that we should be hesitant to calculate how many days it may have taken a messenger to reach Jesus from Mary and Martha with the report that Lazarus has fallen ill (John 11:3).⁴ Instead of providing a detailed chronology, John brings us directly into the conflict of the story: "Now a certain man was ill..." (John 11:1). The name of the sick man, Lazarus, is a shortened form of the Hebrew name Eleazar, which means "God helps."⁵ This name raises an important question in this story: Will the *Son* of God help Lazarus in the midst of his sickness and death? John's mention of Mary's actions to anoint Jesus suggest that she, along with her sister Martha, are well known in the early church (John 11:2; cf. John 12:1–7).⁶

In their message to Jesus, Mary and Martha appeal for Jesus' help on the basis of their close

relationship with him: “Lord, he whom you love is ill” (John 11:3). The word for love here is *phileō*, “the love of affection and personal attachment,” not *agapē*, “the love of the spirit and of reason.” Knowing the deep affection of Jesus for Lazarus, they write in the hopes that Jesus will somehow heal their brother. When Jesus does not heal Lazarus, and even waits two more days before leaving for Bethany (John 11:6), the text raises another important question: Does Jesus *truly* hold the deep affection and personal attachment of *phileō* that Lazarus’s sisters believe that he does?

The Glory of the Son of God

When Jesus hears this summons to help the man whom he loves, he says, “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” (John 11:4). Jesus points to the circumstance of Lazarus’s illness as an opportunity for God to be glorified—and, more precisely, for the *Son of God* to be glorified. The Father does not keep glory from his Son, for he is most glorified when his *Son* is glorified: “God wishes to be acknowledged in the person of his Son in such a manner, that all the reverence which he requires to be given to his own majesty may be ascribed to the Son.”⁸ The occasion for the Son to be glorified in this situation will come through the way that the illness “does not lead to death.” It is not that Jesus will cause Lazarus to avoid death, but that he will do something far greater by bringing Lazarus back to life *from* death. Just as a man was born blind not because of any sin, “but that the works of God might be displayed in him” (John 9:3), so now Lazarus’s illness and death will be a stage for Jesus to reveal his glory to the world.⁹ As Jesus publicly wields his power over life and death, he will be glorified in the flesh, on earth, in front of many witnesses who will come to believe in him because of this sign (John 11:45).¹⁰

The Love of the Son of God

Earlier, Mary and Martha spoke of Jesus’ *phileō* for Lazarus, but now John writes of the *agapē* of Jesus for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus: “Now Jesus *loved* Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (John 11:5). This love is a critical piece of information in the narrative, and John wants us to keep it in mind as we read the next verse: “So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was” (John 11:6). The conjunction connecting these two verses, “so” or “therefore,” describes a result or consequence from verse 5 that leads into verse 6.¹¹ Jesus waits for two days *as a result* of loving Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, not *in spite* of loving them. Where his personal affection (*phileō*) alone perhaps would have caused him to go immediately to heal Lazarus, Jesus’ deeper, richer *agapē* for this family causes Jesus to stay put.¹² Unless Lazarus dies, Jesus cannot reveal his glory by raising him up from the dead. Even more than Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, Jesus later tells his disciples that it was good for *them* that Lazarus died: “Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe” (John 11:14–15). Jesus reveals his glory so that those whom he loves will believe in him.

Notice, then, that preventing or relieving pain is not the most loving thing that God can do for us. On the contrary, the most loving thing for God to do is to reveal the splendor of his glory to us, even if we must endure agony or even death in order to gain that revelation. Our chief end in life is not to be merely healthy and comfortable; rather, we were created so that we might know God and enjoy him forever.¹³ As such, Jesus is revealing and representing the fatherly love of God for us:

We ought to remember, however, what I formerly observed, that the fatherly kindness of

God towards us is here represented in the person of Christ. When God permits us to be overwhelmed with distresses, and to languish long under them, let us know that, in this manner, he promotes our salvation. At such a time, no doubt, we groan and are perplexed and sorrowful, but the Lord rejoices on account of our benefit, and gives a twofold display of his kindness to us in this respect, that he not only pardons our sins, but gladly finds means of correcting them.¹⁴

God does not demonstrate his love toward us through spoiling and indulging us with whatever we think we want or need. Instead, he demonstrates his love toward us ultimately by sending his Son to die for us for the remission of sins, and then by using every part of our lives to bring us deeper into a saving knowledge of him.

Twelve Hours in the Day

It is only after Lazarus dies that Jesus tells his disciples, “Let us go to Judea again” (John 11:7). The disciples try to persuade him against going, pointing out that he had only very recently escaped the attempts of the Jews to stone him (John 11:8), and it is possible that they are worried for their *own* safety as they consider what might happen when they go with Jesus (cf. John 11:16).¹⁵ Contradicting them, 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 walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him” (John 11:9–10). This is a very similar emphasis to what Jesus spoke in John 9:4: “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.” That is, we must make our hay while the sun (of our lifespan) still shines, because no one can work at night (after death), for they will stumble.¹⁶ Everything the Father has given to the Son to do must be done, and no one can touch Jesus until the time will come for him to lay down his own life, that he might take it up again.

After Jesus insists on the necessity of finishing his work in this way, he says, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him” (John 11:11). The disciples misunderstand Jesus’ meaning, thinking that Jesus means that Lazarus is taking his rest. From this misunderstanding, they try again to convince Jesus that he does not need to go: “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover” (John 11:11–12). Why risk his life if Lazarus will heal on his own through restful sleep?¹⁷ Still, when Jesus corrects their wrong thinking, telling them that he is glad for their sake that he was not able to prevent Lazarus’s death (John 11:14–15), they resolve to go with Jesus. Thomas, one of Jesus’ disciples, says, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16). Whether Thomas speaks of dying with Lazarus or with Jesus (or both), the point is the same.¹⁸ Thomas speaks out of a spirit of “despondency and devotion,” so that he is “ever afraid that he may lose his beloved Master, or that some evil will befall the latter. He expects evil, and cannot believe the good when it occurs.”¹⁹ Thomas and the other disciples may be going to their deaths, but they will follow their Master all the way to the end.

The Shepherd in the Valley of the Shadow of Death (John 11:17–37)

By the time that Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has already been in his tomb four days (John 11:17). Also, John tells us that many Jews have come to Bethany from Jerusalem to console Martha

and Mary (John 11:18–19), which explains why there will be so many witnesses to the miracle when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. When Martha hears that Jesus has come, she goes to meet him, while Mary remains in the house (John 11:20). D. A. Carson observes, “The picture of Martha as more active and perhaps more aggressive than Mary is in striking accord with the cameo found in Luke 10:38–42.”²⁰ From another perspective, however, it is *Martha*, and not Mary, who now chooses the good portion of going immediately to Jesus (cf. Luke 10:42). Just as the good portion of listening to Jesus’ word was not taken away from Mary in the story in Luke, so now Martha is rewarded by hearing directly Jesus’ self-revelation as the resurrection and the life (John 11:25–26). Even though Jesus does not necessarily solve our problems immediately when we go to him, going to Jesus is always the good portion that we ought to choose.

“If you had been here...”

When Martha reaches Jesus, she says to him, “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” (John 11:21–22). Martha speaks words of “poignant grief,” wishing desperately that Jesus might have arrived sooner to prevent Lazarus’s death.²¹ Certainly, she is not scolding Jesus for failing to come sooner, and yet, John probably wishes us to hear her desire for Jesus to have been present during Lazarus’s illness in comparison with the royal official from Capernaum whose son was ill (John 4:46–54). The official wanted Jesus to come immediately with him to heal his son, but Jesus tested his faith by healing the son by his word alone, telling the official to go back without any certain confirmation that Jesus succeeded.²² Jesus demonstrated there that his power transcends his bodily presence, and yet Martha now laments the fact that Jesus had not been there, as though Jesus’ distance was the factor that prevented her Master from healing Lazarus.

“But even now I know...”

Still, Martha quickly adds that she has not lost hope in Jesus’ power: “But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” What exactly does Martha think that Jesus might do? The rest of the narrative prevents us from thinking that Martha believes unwaveringly that Jesus would eventually raise Lazarus up from the dead, since when Jesus assures her that “Your brother will rise again” (John 11:23), Martha can only respond by speaking of her future hope: “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day” (John 11:24). Furthermore, when Jesus later instructs the Jews to take away the stone, it is Martha who warns Jesus, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days” (John 11:39). Nevertheless, why would Martha express her confidence that Jesus can ask for and receive anything from his Father if she did not believe that raising Lazarus up from the dead was possible?

In my judgment, Martha’s words sound like the words of Abraham in another passage about gaining back a family member from the dead. In Genesis 22, God tested Abraham by commanding that he sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. By faith, Abraham “considered that God was able even to raise [Isaac] from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back” (Heb. 11:19). That is, Abraham experienced the figurative resurrection of Isaac from the dead when God stopped him from killing Isaac and instead provided a sacrificial lamb, whose horns were caught in the thicket (Gen. 22:10–13). Now, Abraham had no idea that God would, “figuratively speaking,” raise Isaac up from the dead by providing an alternate sacrifice. Nevertheless, on the way up Mount

Moriah, when Isaac asked his father Abraham where the lamb for the sacrifice was, Abraham answered with words of faith that he himself did not completely understand: “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” (Gen. 22:8). Abraham fully believed that his son would die, but even more than that, Abraham *also* believed that God would provide the lamb for a burnt offering.

In the same way, Martha does not seem to believe that Jesus has arrived to raise Lazarus up from the dead. She believes that death so completely grips her brother that she will not see him again until the resurrection of the dead on the last day (John 11:24). But more than that, she *also* believes that Jesus has the authority to ask anything of his Father in heaven, and to receive it from him. From one perspective, Lazarus’s resuscitation is a surprise; from another perspective, Martha knows that the power of Jesus has no limitations, not even over death itself. She knows that Jesus can do anything, and yet when Jesus assures her that Lazarus will rise again, she cautiously affirms only that Lazarus will rise at the resurrection on the last day. Martha’s faith does not feel entitled to a sign and wonder around every corner, but she is always ready for whatever Jesus might do. Rather, Martha’s faith, like Abraham’s, is characterized by confidence in the midst of uncertainty. In this way, her faith sets an important example that we should seek to follow.

“I am the Resurrection and the Life”

When Martha mentions the eventual resurrection of the dead on the last day, Jesus extends her faith and puts it on the sure foundation of himself.²³ He says, “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. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25–26). Now, Jesus has already made similar statements about his ability to raise the dead and to give life:

“For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will...Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself...Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” (John 5:21, 25–26, 28–29)

Still, this fifth “I am” statement in the Gospel of John takes those previous thoughts a step further. Here, Jesus states not only that he possesses the power to raise the dead and to give life; more than that, he states that he *is* the resurrection and the life. As the Son of the Father, he possesses in himself the same life that the Father himself possesses (John 5:26), and he manifests that life in his human body: “the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us” (1 John 1:2). Jesus *is* the life who has been made manifest in the world, and when his disciples looked upon Jesus, they saw *resurrection life* in human form.

Jesus came to give the life that he *is* to a dead world.²⁴ When the corruption of sin entered the world through Adam’s rebellion, death entered with it (Rom. 5:12). Jesus has come, then, to restore spiritual life to those who have been cut off from the source of life through alienation to God.

Beyond our spiritual renewal, Jesus also came to restore life to his decaying creation. At the resurrection of the dead on the last day, Jesus will recreate the heavens and the earth in such a way that death shall be no more (Rev. 21:4). In order to put death away forever, and to restore imperishable life, Jesus must give us nothing less than *himself*, for he *is* the resurrection and the life. It is for this reason that Paul writes, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:19–20). Jesus reconciles all creation to himself in order to breathe life back into it after the original life of creation was lost at the fall. Therefore, “The eschatological rule of God for which Martha hopes, with all its blessings for humankind, is vested in Jesus.”²⁵ Therefore, for the one who believes in Jesus, even if that believer dies, he shall live by the power of Jesus’ resurrection. Then, once raised up, the one who then “lives and believes in me shall never die.” Through our union with the one who *is himself* the resurrection and the life, we can never finally perish.

“Do you believe this?”

After this extraordinary self-revelation, Jesus asks Martha, “Do you believe this?” (John 11:26). Martha answers, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world” (John 11:27). This confession sits halfway through the Gospel of John, and it echoes a statement we find at the beginning of the Gospel and another statement at the end. At the beginning of the Gospel, Nathanael confessed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (John 1:49), and at the end of the Gospel, John tells us that all he has included in the Gospel “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).²⁶ She does not know whether Jesus will leverage his authority as the Christ and his power as the Son of God to raise up Lazarus here and now, but her confession of faith holds that idea as a possibility. In the valley of the shadow of death, the Good Shepherd leads Martha to walk by faith, not by sight.

“The Teaching is calling for you”

After Martha’s conversation with Jesus, she returns to her sister Mary, telling her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you” (John 11:28). Upon hearing this word, Mary rises quickly to go see Jesus, who is waiting for her outside Bethany, in the place where Martha met him (John 11:29–30). It is not entirely clear why Martha needs to deliver Jesus’ message to Mary “in private,” so the best explanation may be that Martha wants “Mary to have the opportunity for a few minutes’ private conversation with Jesus, as she apparently had. And this may be the reason why Jesus remained for a time outside the village.”²⁷ John also tells us that a group of mourners at Mary’s house follow her to Jesus. This is an important detail since Jesus will move straight from speaking with Mary to raising Lazarus up; these mourners will be witness to one of Jesus’ greatest miracles.

When Mary comes to Jesus and sees him, she falls at his feet, saying the same thing that her sister Martha had said to him: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:32). Probably the two sisters spoke with each other about the need for Jesus’ arrival in the days leading up to and following Lazarus’s death, which is why this idea is the first thing that each says to him. As we mentioned earlier, we should not overlook the preoccupation that the sisters have with Jesus’ bodily presence. John Calvin points out the shortfall in her thinking: “the power of Christ, which filled heaven and earth, ought not to have been limited to his bodily presence.”²⁸ The fact that Mary falls at

Jesus' feet does not seem to indicate any kind of worship, but more simply "less emotional restraint than her sister."²⁹ While we should not criticize a grieving woman too harshly, we nevertheless need to recognize the limitations that the sisters place upon Jesus, for it will be these limitations that Jesus shatters through his miracle.

Angry Grief

The next verse is of critical importance for our interpretation of this story: "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" (John 11:33). Because Jesus became fully human, he took upon himself the full weight of human grief and sorrow, except to whatever degree our griefs and sorrows are caused by our sinfulness.³⁰ Yet, Jesus does not merely grieve at this funeral. The word for "deeply moved in spirit" has to do with being moved to anger or sternness (Mark 1:43; 9:30; 14:5), with its most basic meaning describing the snorting of a horse.³¹ Jesus is not simply *sad* as he sees all these people grieving, but he is righteously indignant and troubled with angry grief. Death should never have marred the goodness of creation, and as the Word through whom all things were created (John 1:3), Jesus alone can see the stark contrast between the vivid life of the world before the fall and the darkness of death after the fall. As he looks upon the wreckage of death in the world, he experiences visceral rage at what he sees.

Jesus then asks where they have laid Lazarus, and the people respond, "Lord, come and see" (John 11:34). This is the final instance of "Come and see" in the Gospel of John, and it demonstrates the mission that Jesus came to accomplish in the world. Earlier, Jesus invited his own disciples to follow him, saying, "Come and you will see" (John 1:39), and then his followers invited others to follow Jesus by telling them, "Come and see" (John 1:46; 4:29). These words offer an invitation to experience Jesus in all the fullness of his glory and life as the Word who became flesh and dwelt in our midst. Here, the opposite is true: the Jews invite Jesus to look upon the full, hideous misery of death, which Jesus has come to destroy.

When the Resurrection and the Life looks upon death, John simply tells us that Jesus weeps (John 11:35). In distinction from the word used to describe the weeping of Mary and the Jews—"a loud, demonstrative form of mourning, a wailing"—the weeping of Jesus is "rather a quiet weeping. Jesus did not wail loudly, but he was deeply grieved."³² Of this word, William Hendriksen writes the following:

This is the only place in the New Testament where this verb occurs....However, the noun (tear, tears) whose root enters into the formation of this verb, is found also in Heb. 5:7 in connection with Jesus: "who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to have him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear," etc. See also Mark 9:24; Luke 7:38, 44; Acts 20:19, 31; II Cor. 2:4; II Tim. 1:4; Heb. 12:17; Rev. 7:17; 21:4. In all these passages (beginning with Mark 9:24) the tears are shed by others, not by Jesus. However, there surely is a connection between 11:35 ("Jesus burst into tears") and Rev. 7:17 ("God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes"): because of his tears ours shall be wiped away.³³

Jesus here tastes the fullness of grief over the death of another before he too must give himself over to

death. Herman Ridderbos writes, “As the Son of God he does not come to redeem the world from imaginary grief or to make grief over death imaginary.”³⁴ Even though Jesus is about to raise Lazarus up from the dead, the fact that Lazarus had to endure death at all, causing his family and friends to grieve over him, horrifies Jesus. There is a reason that Paul calls death Jesus’ “last enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26). Jesus weeps because his dear friend Lazarus has lost a costly defeat to Jesus’ great enemy, death. As the Jews watch Jesus weep, they remark about the depth of his grief, “See how he loved him!” (John 11:36), while others lament the fact that Jesus did not come soon enough to keep Lazarus from dying (John 11:37).

Resurrection Life (John 11:38–44)

As Jesus approaches the tomb (a cave, with a stone covering its entrance), John tells us that Jesus is again “deeply moved”—furious in righteous indignation. Of this moment, John Calvin writes, “Christ does not approach the sepulcher as an idle spectator, but as a champion who prepares for a contest; and therefore we need not wonder that he again groans; for the violent tyranny of death, which he had to conquer, is placed before his eyes.”³⁵ Jesus has come to gain the victory over the grave—ultimately, through his own resurrection from the dead, but here through the resuscitation of Lazarus. As such, John deliberately compares and contrasts this scene with the coming resurrection of Jesus.

The Glory of God

As Jesus approaches the grave, he gives the command to “Take away the stone” (John 11:38). Martha responds to this command, warning Jesus that there will likely be an odor in the tomb, since Lazarus has been dead four days now (John 11:38), so Jesus once again redirects Martha to trust in his power over death: “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” (John 11:40). Sin and death have clouded the beaming, blazing glory of God, so that its light is not readily seen by all creation. Nevertheless, in this moment Jesus will display God’s glory in all its fullness by giving life to the dead through the power of his word. Lazarus is so fully dead that the people expect an odor from his decomposing body, and yet Jesus will summon him back from the grave through his power as the Lord of Life.³⁶ In this miracle, the Word made flesh makes the glory of God manifest for all to see.

The Prayer of Jesus

Jesus prays that the Father might reveal that he has sent the Son through this miracle: “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” (John 11:41–42). In that respect, this is a very different prayer from Elijah’s when the prophet battled the priests of Baal and Asherah. There, Elijah prayed, “O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back” (1 Kgs. 18:36–37). The nature of this prayer is not a mere prophet asking that God will work, but the prayer of the Son of God through whom the Father accomplishes his work. Also, Jesus does not pray aloud to *ask* that God will answer him; rather, he prays to *thank*

his Father for always hearing him. It seems, then, that Jesus has already prayed (“I thank you that you have heard me”), and must only thank the Father for granting him his prayer.³⁷

More than anything else, this miracle reveals that the Father has sent the Son to all the people standing around to witness it. Through this miracle, Jesus prays that these witnesses will come to believe that the Father has sent him into the world. Therefore, through this prayer, Jesus is revealing his relationship to the Father in a way that accommodates our weakness and blindness to that great reality.³⁸ Now that Jesus offers an extraordinary *word* in the hearing of the witnesses, he then performs his extraordinary *work* in their sight, crying out, “Lazarus, come out” (John 11:43). Immediately, Lazarus comes out from the depths of the grave to rejoin the living (John 11:44). Lenski writes, “Without a struggle death gives up its prey. All death’s ravages are undone. Here is the glory of the Father and the glorification of the Son whom he did send.”³⁹

Resurrection, Not Resuscitation

We must not speak of the raising up of Lazarus as *resurrection*, but only as *resuscitation*. This does not diminish the splendor of Jesus’ miracle, for Lazarus is so genuinely dead for four days that Martha warns Jesus that there will be an odor if they do remove the stone over Lazarus’s tomb. Nevertheless, when Jesus raises Lazarus up, Lazarus returns to his previous life with all the limitations and frailties that he endured before. He does not have the resurrected, spiritual bodies that Paul writes about in 1 Corinthians 15 as the future hope of all believers.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Lazarus will eventually die again, so that the power of death has not been abolished for Lazarus, but only delayed for awhile.

John portrays these limitations symbolically through elements that will appear again at the burial and resurrection of Jesus: the stone over the tomb, and the body wrappings, which include linen strips and a facecloth.⁴¹ While Jesus moves the stone away from his own tomb without any assistance (John 20:1), Lazarus must wait upon those outside the tomb to move the stone away for him (John 11:39). Lazarus is raised up, but not by any power of indestructible life inherent in himself. Then, when Lazarus actually comes out of the grave, Jesus must give the order to unbind him from his body wrappings, which symbolize that the power of death that still looms over him (John 11:44). In contrast, when Peter and the beloved disciple inspect Jesus’ tomb, they see the linen strips piled up in a heap, with the face cloth folded up and lying in a place by itself (John 20:5–7). Jesus’ resurrection breaks the power of death over him entirely, so that he is fully loosed from the binding of the grave wrappings.

As such, our hope as believers is not that Jesus would raise us back from the dead as he did with Lazarus. As remarkable as this miracle is, we live to experience something much greater. God promises us that just as Jesus was resurrected from the dead, so also will we be resurrected when Jesus returns (1 Cor. 15). In fact, the Apostle John tells us in his First Letter that when Jesus Christ again appears, we will actually be like him, for we shall see him as he is when he returns in glory (1 John 3:2). We live for resurrection, not for mere resuscitation. We can have confidence that Jesus will resurrect *us* because Jesus himself has been resurrected.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you feel when you ask God for something, but you do not receive an answer to that prayer what you consider to be in a timely matter? How difficult is it to recognize God’s goodness

even in the midst of bitter disappointment?

2. What would it look like in the middle of your uncertainties for you to affirm your ongoing confidence in God’s power and goodness by saying “but even now I know...”? How do you avoid the extremes of name-it-and-claim-it theologies of prayer on one side, and the pessimistic despondency that inhibits prayer on the other side?

3. How does the Bible talk about death? Does the Bible avoid talking about death? Does the Bible downplay death? What does Jesus’ righteous indignation and fury against death teach us about how we should talk about death?

4. How central to you is the hope of your coming resurrection? How would faith in the certainty that you will be raised up to a body of glorification like Jesus’ change the way you approached your work? Your family? Your faith?

Notes

1. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 835.
2. Ibid.
3. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 387.
4. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 406–08.
5. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John’s Gospel*, 779.
6. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 386.
7. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John’s Gospel*, 780–81.
8. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 426. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvii.i.html>>
9. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 406.
10. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 387–88.
11. “οὐ̅ν,” BDAG, 736–37.
12. “Yet here is what troubled the hearts of these sisters, even as it still troubles many a Christian—to be a friend of Jesus, embraced in his true and tender affection, and yet to lie sick, to grow helplessly worse, to die at last—just as if Jesus, our Friend, had forgotten! Our answer to this is that above the φιλεῖν [*philein*] stands the unfathomable and blessed ἀγαπᾶν [*agapan*].” (Lenski, *The Interpretation of John’s Gospel*, 780–81.)
13. *Westminster Shorter Catechism* #1.
14. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 431. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvii.ii.html>>
15. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 427. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvii.i.html>>
16. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John’s Gospel*, 785–86.
17. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 430. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvii.ii.html>>
18. For the view that “him” refers to Lazarus, see Lenski, *The Interpretation of John’s Gospel*, 793–94. For the view that “him” refers to Jesus, see Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 144–45.
19. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 144.

20. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 411.
21. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 147.
22. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 434. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvii.iii.html>>
23. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 190.
24. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 435–36. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvii.iii.html>>
25. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 190.
26. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 399.
27. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 490–91.
28. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 439. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvii.iv.html>>
29. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 415.
30. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 439–42. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvii.iv.html>>
31. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 154.
32. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 495.
33. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 155.
34. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 402.
35. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 442. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvii.iv.html>>
36. “The evangelist records this objection of Martha in order to emphasize the greatness of the miracle....” (Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 157.)
37. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 418.
38. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 446. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvii.v.html>>
39. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John’s Gospel*, 819.
40. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 419.
41. For the parallels outlined in this paragraph, see Keener, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, 848.