The Raising of Lazarus

Bible Stories Anthology — John 11:1-46

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> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

Four Days Too Late

The message was short: *Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.*

It came from two sisters in Bethany, Martha and Mary. Their brother Lazarus was dying. They did not even ask Jesus to come. They knew he loved Lazarus. Surely he would hurry.

He did not hurry. He stayed where he was for two more days.

By the time Jesus reached Bethany, Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days. The house was full of mourners. Martha met him on the road with words that were half faith and half heartbreak: *Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*

Then Jesus said something that has been read at the gravesides of believers ever since: **"I am the resurrection, and the life."**

He went to the tomb. He wept. He told them to roll away the stone. He thanked his Father aloud. And with a loud voice he called into the darkness of the cave: *Lazarus, come forth.*

And the dead man came out.

This is the story of the raising of Lazarus — the last and greatest of the signs in John's Gospel, the miracle that showed the glory of God, and the miracle that sent Jesus to the cross.

The Setting

When. In the last weeks before Jesus' death, in the late winter or early spring of about A.D. 30 by the reckoning this series uses. Jesus had been in Jerusalem at the winter feast of the dedication, where the leaders had tried to stone him (John 10:22, 31, 39). He had withdrawn **"beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode"** (10:40). Bethany was about a day's journey away.

Where. Bethany, a village on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, **"nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off"** (John 11:18) — under two miles from the city. The road from Jericho came up through Bethany on its way to Jerusalem. Today the village is called *al-Eizariya*, which comes from the name *Lazarus*. A tomb cut in the rock there has been shown to pilgrims as the tomb of Lazarus since early Christian times; it fits the kind of tomb John describes, though no one can be certain it is the very one.

The family. Jesus often stayed with this family when he was near Jerusalem. Luke tells of an earlier visit, when **"a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word"** — and Martha, busy with serving, complained (Luke 10:38-42). Martha was the active one; Mary was the one who sat at his feet. Their brother Lazarus is mentioned only in John's Gospel.

Who.

- **Jesus**, the Son of God, about a week or two before his last Passover.
- **Lazarus**, of Bethany, whom Jesus loved.
- **Martha** and **Mary**, his sisters.
- **The disciples**, including **Thomas**, called Didymus.
- **Many Jews** who came from Jerusalem to comfort the sisters.
- **The chief priests and Pharisees**, and **Caiaphas** the high priest.

The administration. The **Christ administration**, under the Law of Moses.

The Story, Told Faithfully

"He Whom Thou Lovest Is Sick"

> **John 11:1** *Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.*
>
> **John 11:2** (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.)
>
> **John 11:3** *Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.*

"Named Lazarus." *Lazarus* is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Eleazar*, which means *God has helped*. It was the name of Aaron's son, who became high priest after him (Numbers 20:28). It is a fitting name for a man God was about to help as no man had been helped before.

"(It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment.)" John tells us which Mary he means by pointing ahead to something he has not yet described. In the next chapter, at a supper in Bethany six days before the Passover, Mary would pour a pound of very costly ointment on Jesus' feet and wipe

them with her hair (John 12:1-3). John's first readers already knew that story, so he identifies her by it. Telling something before its time like this is the figure called **prolepsis**, *anticipation*.

"Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." That was the whole message. The sisters did not say, *Come quickly*, or *Heal him*. They simply told Jesus the need and appealed to his love: *the one you love*. They trusted that would be enough. It is the same kind of request Mary the mother of Jesus made at Cana: **"They have no wine"** (John 2:3; story 41).

"Not unto Death"

> **John 11:4** *When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.*
>
> **John 11:5** *Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.*
>
> **John 11:6** *When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.*

"This sickness is not unto death." *Not unto death* means *will not end in death* — death would not be the final outcome. Lazarus would die; but death would not have the last word.

"But for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." The purpose of what was about to happen was the glory of God — and through it, the glory of His Son. When God works through His Son, both are glorified: God, as the one who does the work, and the Son, as the one through whom He does it. Jesus said, **"I seek not mine own glory"** (John 8:50), and **"the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works"** (John 14:10).

"Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." John names all three. The word for love here is *agapaō*, the deep, giving love of God.

"When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still." Read the word *therefore* carefully. Jesus loved them; *therefore* he stayed where he was two more days. It seems backwards. But Jesus' delay was not indifference. He was waiting for his Father's timing, so that something far greater than a healing could take place. As at Cana, Jesus did not act at the request of those he loved, but when and as God directed (story 41).

How long had Lazarus been dead? When Jesus arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had been in the grave **"four days"** (11:17). It was about a day's journey from where Jesus was to Bethany. The messenger took a day to come; Jesus waited two days; then he travelled a day. Lazarus may well have died at about the time the messenger reached Jesus. Even if Jesus had set out at once, he would not have arrived in time. He knew Lazarus was already dead (11:14).

"Let Us Go into Judaea Again"

> **John 11:7** *Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judaea again.*
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> **John 11:8** *His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?*
>
> **John 11:9** *Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.*
>
> **John 11:10** *But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.*

“The Jews of late sought to stone thee.” Only weeks before, at the feast of the dedication, the leaders in Jerusalem had picked up stones to kill him (John 10:31). Going back to Bethany meant going back within two miles of Jerusalem.

“Are there not twelve hours in the day?” The Jews divided the daylight into twelve hours, from sunrise to sunset. Jesus meant: *My day has a set length, appointed by God. Until it is over, no one can cut it short. And while it is day, I walk in the light, and I will not stumble.* He had said earlier, **“I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work”** (John 9:4). His hour had not yet come.

“Our Friend Lazarus Sleepeth”

> **John 11:11** *These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.*
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> **John 11:12** *Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.*
>
> **John 11:13** *Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.*
>
> **John 11:14** *Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.*
>
> **John 11:15** *And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.*

“Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.” *Our* friend — Jesus counted Lazarus a friend of all of them. **“Sleepeth”** is the Greek *koimaomai*, *to fall asleep*. This is how Scripture speaks of death again and again. When David died, **“David slept with his fathers”** (1 Kings 2:10). Daniel wrote of the resurrection, **“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt”** (Daniel 12:2). When Stephen was stoned, **“he fell asleep”** (Acts 7:60; story 55). Paul wrote of believers who have died as **“them which are asleep”** and **“the dead in Christ”** (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 16).

“But I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.” If death is sleep, then raising the dead is waking them. Jesus spoke of raising Lazarus as easily as a man speaks of waking a friend in the morning.

“Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.” The disciples took him literally: if Lazarus was sleeping, he was getting better. Sleep is good for the sick.

“Howbeit Jesus spake of his death.” John explains, so that no reader will make the same mistake. To speak of death as sleep is a figure of speech. It is chosen with care: the dead, like sleepers, are unconscious, at rest, and — for those whom God will raise — waiting to be woken. **“For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing”** (Ecclesiastes 9:5). Death is not the end of a believer; it is a sleep from which he will be awakened.

“Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.” No more figures. *Lazarus is dead*.

“And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe.” Glad? Because what was about to happen would strengthen their faith as nothing else could. They had seen him heal the sick. Now they would see him call a man back from the dead — four days dead.

> **John 11:16** *Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellowdisciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.*

“Thomas, which is called Didymus.” *Thomas* is Aramaic for *twin*; *Didymus* is the same word in Greek. He is remembered as “doubting Thomas” because of what he said after the resurrection (John 20:25). But here he shows courage and loyalty: **“Let us also go, that we may die with him.”** He expected Jesus to be killed in Judea, and he was ready to die alongside him.

Four Days in the Grave

> **John 11:17** *Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already.*
>
> **John 11:18** *Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off:*
>
> **John 11:19** *And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.*

“Four days already.” In that hot climate the dead were buried the same day they died. By four days, a body had begun to decay. There was no question that Lazarus was dead. Some Jewish teachers of a later time held that the soul of a dead man hovered near the body for three days, hoping to return, and departed when it saw the face beginning to change. Whether that belief was held in Jesus’ day is not certain, but if it was, a man four days dead was beyond all hope in the eyes of everyone there. (Scripture itself does not teach that the soul hovers; this series mentions the later belief only as background.)

“About fifteen furlongs off.” A *furlong* (*stadion*) was about 607 feet; fifteen furlongs is a little under two miles. Bethany was close enough to Jerusalem that many of the mourners, and news of what happened, could easily reach the city.

“Many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them.” Jewish mourning customs were strong. After a burial, the family sat at home in mourning for seven days, and friends and neighbours came to sit with them, weep with them and comfort them. Often hired mourners and flute players added their wailing (compare Matthew 9:23). The house at Bethany was crowded with people from Jerusalem, many of them people of standing. They would be witnesses to what happened next.

“If Thou Hadst Been Here”

> **John 11:20** *Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.*
>
> **John 11:21** *Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*
>
> **John 11:22** *But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.*

“Martha … went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.” True to what we know of them from Luke, Martha the active one went out to meet him on the road; Mary stayed where she was, sitting with the mourners, as the custom was.

“Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” It is not quite a reproach, but it is very close. *Where were you? If you had come, he would be alive.* She believed Jesus could have healed him. Mary would say the same words (11:32); perhaps the two sisters had said them to each other many times over those four days.

“But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.” *Even now*. Martha did not say what she hoped for. Perhaps she hardly dared. But she knew where Jesus’ power came from: **“whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.”** She understood that Jesus did his works by asking God, and that God gave him whatever he asked. That is exactly what Jesus would do at the tomb.

“I Am the Resurrection, and the Life”

> **John 11:23** *Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.*
> **John 11:24** *Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*

“Thy brother shall rise again.” Martha took it as the usual comfort people say at a funeral.

“I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” This was Martha’s faith, and it was right. Faithful Jews believed in the resurrection of the dead at the end of the age, as Daniel had written (Daniel 12:2) — not that the dead go somewhere else at death, but that they will rise again. The Sadducees denied it (Acts 23:8), but the Pharisees and most of the people held it. Jesus himself had taught it: **“And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day”** (John 6:40; story 46). Martha knew Lazarus would rise *some day*. But that was a long way off, and it did not take away the pain of today.

> **John 11:25** *Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:*
> **John 11:26** *And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?*

“I am the resurrection, and the life.” Martha spoke of the resurrection as an event at the last day. Jesus said: *I am the resurrection.* The resurrection is not only a doctrine about the future; it is tied to a person, standing in front of her. God has given His Son the authority to raise the dead and to give life: **“For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also … for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth”** (John 5:26-29). The resurrection and the life are *given* to the Son by the Father. To call himself “the resurrection” is the figure called **metonymy**: the one who brings about the resurrection is called by the name of what he brings.

“He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” The believer who dies will live again: he will be raised.

“And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” And the believer who is alive — what of him? This has been read two ways. Some take it to mean that the believer will never die *the second death*, the death from which there is no return (Revelation 20:6, 14): even if he falls asleep, his death is not final. Others take it of those who are alive and believing when Christ comes for his own, who will not die at all: **“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed”** (1 Corinthians 15:51); **“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air”** (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Both readings agree on the main point: for the one who believes, death is not the end. What these words do *not* say is that the dead are already alive somewhere else. *Though he were dead, yet shall he live* — the life comes by resurrection.

“Believest thou this?” Jesus did not leave it as a statement. He asked her.

> **John 11:27** *She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.*

“Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” Martha’s confession is one of the greatest in Scripture. It is almost word for word the reason John gives for writing his whole Gospel: **“But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the**

Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31). Martha believed exactly that: Jesus is *the Christ*, God's anointed; *the Son of God*; the one **"which should come into the world"** — the coming one the prophets promised.

"Jesus Wept"

> **John 11:28** *And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee.*
>
> **John 11:29** *As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him.*
>
> **John 11:32** *Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*

"The Master is come, and calleth for thee." Martha went back and whispered it to Mary, perhaps so that the mourners would not crowd after her. But the mourners followed anyway, thinking she was going to the grave to weep (11:31).

"She fell down at his feet." Mary, who had once sat at his feet to listen (Luke 10:39), and who would soon anoint his feet (John 12:3), now fell at his feet in grief. She said the very same words as Martha: *Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.* But she said no more. She could only weep.

> **John 11:33** *When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled,*
>
> **John 11:34** *And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see.*
>
> **John 11:35** *Jesus wept.*

"When Jesus therefore saw her weeping." The word for Mary's weeping and the mourners' is *klaiō* — loud, wailing grief, the open lament of the East.

"He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." "Groaned" is *embrimaomai*, a strong word. It was used of a horse snorting, and of a man moved with deep indignation or stern feeling; elsewhere it is translated *straitly charged* (Matthew 9:30) and *murmured against* (Mark 14:5). Jesus was not only sad. Something in him rose up — deeply stirred, even angry. At what? Not at Mary or the mourners. Many readers understand it as anger at death itself, and at the enemy behind it — the one who, as Hebrews says, **"had the power of death, that is, the devil"** (Hebrews 2:14). Death is **"the last enemy"** (1 Corinthians 15:26). Standing before the grief it had caused, Jesus was moved with holy indignation. This series gives this as how the word is best understood; John does not explain it. **"And was troubled"** — literally, *he troubled himself*, shaken in his inmost being.

"Where have ye laid him?" He asked. He was a real man who asked questions to learn.

"Lord, come and see." The very words Jesus had said to his first disciples: **"Come and see"** (John 1:39). Now they were said to him, at a grave.

"Jesus wept." Two words — the shortest verse in the English Bible. The word here is different: *dakryō*, *to shed tears*, quiet weeping. The mourners wailed; Jesus wept silently.

Why did he weep, when he knew that in a few minutes Lazarus would walk out of the tomb? Because he loved them, and he felt their pain. Because death is a terrible thing, an enemy, not a friend. Because he was a real man with a real heart. **"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the**

feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15). Paul later wrote, **"Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep"** (Romans 12:15). Jesus did both on the same day.

> **John 11:36** *Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!*
> **John 11:37** *And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?*

"Behold how he loved him!" Even those who did not believe in him could see his love.

"Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind …?" Some remembered the man born blind whom Jesus had healed in Jerusalem a few months before (John 9). *If he could do that, why couldn't he have kept his friend alive?* Some may have asked it sincerely; others, perhaps, with a sneer.

"Take Ye Away the Stone"

> **John 11:38** *Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.*
> **John 11:39** *Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.*
> **John 11:40** *Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?*

"Again groaning in himself." The same strong word as before.

"It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it." Tombs around Jerusalem were often caves, natural or cut into the soft limestone, with a low entrance and ledges or niches inside where bodies were laid. The entrance was closed with a large stone, sometimes a round, wheel-shaped stone rolled in a groove, sometimes a squared block, to keep out animals and robbers. The body was washed, anointed with spices, and wrapped in strips of linen, with a separate cloth over the face (11:44; compare John 19:39-40).

"Take ye away the stone." Jesus could have moved the stone himself, or by a word. He told the people to do it. They could do what they were able to do; only God could do the rest.

"Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days." Practical Martha objected. After four days in that climate, the body would be decaying, and the smell would be terrible. She had confessed great faith a few minutes earlier. Now, at the open grave, her faith faltered. It is very human.

"Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Jesus reminded her: *believe, and you will see the glory of God.* Not his own glory, but God's — as he had said at the beginning: **"for the glory of God"** (11:4).

"Father, I Thank Thee"

> **John 11:41** *Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.*
> **John 11:42** *And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.*

"Then they took away the stone." They obeyed. The dark opening of the tomb gaped before the crowd.

“And Jesus lifted up his eyes.” He looked up to heaven, to God, as he had at the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:41; story 46).

“Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.” Here is the secret of the miracle, spoken aloud. Jesus did not say, *I will now raise this man by my own power*. He thanked his Father for having *heard* him. He had already asked — perhaps during those two days beyond the Jordan, perhaps as he walked to Bethany, perhaps as he groaned in the spirit at the tomb — and God had heard. He thanked God *before* Lazarus came out, as he gave thanks before the bread was multiplied. That is faith: thanking God for the answer before it is seen.

“And I knew that thou hearest me always.” Jesus’ life was one of constant fellowship with his Father. God always heard him, because he always did his Father’s will: **“for I do always those things that please him”** (John 8:29).

“But because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.” Jesus prayed aloud so that everyone there would know where the power came from. When Lazarus came out, no one could say Jesus had done it by himself, or by some other power. He had prayed to God, and God answered. And the purpose was that they would believe **“that thou hast sent me”** — that God had sent him. Martha had already said it: **“whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.”** Peter later said the same to the crowd at Pentecost: Jesus was **“a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you”** (Acts 2:22).

“Lazarus, Come Forth”

> **John 11:43** *And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.*
>
> **John 11:44** *And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.*

“He cried with a loud voice.” Not a whisper. A great shout, so that everyone could hear. Jesus had said, **“the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth”** (John 5:28-29). At Bethany, one man in one grave heard his voice. Some have remarked that if Jesus had not named Lazarus, every grave would have emptied.

“Lazarus, come forth.” Three words in English, two in Greek: *Lazare, deuro exō — Lazarus, here, out!* He called him by name, as a man calls a friend from another room.

“And he that was dead came forth.” John says it as simply as possible. The man who had been dead for four days, whose body had begun to decay, stood up and came out of the tomb, alive and whole.

“Bound hand and foot with graveclothes.” He was still wrapped in the linen strips. How he moved is not explained; perhaps the strips were wound around each limb separately, or perhaps he shuffled out, or the same power that raised him carried him. John records only that he came.

“And his face was bound about with a napkin.” A *napkin* (*soudarion*) was a cloth for wiping the face, used to cover the face of the dead. The same word is used of the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head, found folded by itself in his empty tomb (John 20:7).

“Loose him, and let him go.” Again, Jesus told the people to do what they could. God gave life; the people unwrapped the graveclothes.

What Lazarus Did Not Say

Lazarus had been dead for four days. If the dead go at once to heaven or anywhere else, he would have had a great deal to tell. People would have come from everywhere to ask him what it was like. But Scripture records not one word from Lazarus about where he had been. He is never quoted at all. This fits what the Scriptures teach about death: **"the dead know not any thing"** (Ecclesiastes 9:5). Lazarus had been asleep, and Jesus woke him. This series notes the silence as consistent with that teaching; it does not build the teaching on the silence alone.

Lazarus was raised to his old mortal life. He would grow old and die again. He was not the first to rise from the dead *to die no more* — that honour belongs to Christ alone: **"Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him"** (Romans 6:9). Christ is **"the firstfruits of them that slept"** (1 Corinthians 15:20). Lazarus's raising was a sign — a powerful sign — of the resurrection to come.

"It Is Expedient That One Man Should Die"

> **John 11:45** *Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.*
> **John 11:46** *But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.*

"Many of the Jews … believed on him." Many who had come to mourn went home believing.

"But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees." Others went straight to the authorities in Jerusalem, less than two miles away.

> **John 11:47** *Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles.*
> **John 11:48** *If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.*

"This man doeth many miracles." They did not deny it. They could not. A man four days dead was walking around Bethany.

"If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him." Their fear was not that Jesus was false, but that everyone would follow him.

"And the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." *Our place* — the temple, and their position of power. If the people hailed Jesus as Messiah and King, Rome might see it as a rebellion and crush the nation, and the leaders would lose everything.

> **John 11:49** *And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all,*
> **John 11:50** *Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.*
> **John 11:51** *And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation;*
> **John 11:52** *And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.*

“Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year.” Joseph Caiaphas was high priest from about A.D. 18 to 36, appointed by the Romans. In 1990 an ornate bone box (an ossuary) inscribed with the name “Joseph son of Caiaphas” was found in a family tomb in Jerusalem; many archaeologists believe it held the bones of this very high priest.

“Ye know nothing at all.” A rude, arrogant man, speaking to his own council.

“It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people.” *Expedient* means *to our advantage*. Caiaphas meant it as cold political calculation: better to kill one troublemaker than let the whole nation be destroyed by Rome.

“And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied.” John sees in Caiaphas’s words a meaning Caiaphas never intended. God spoke through the high priest’s office, even through a wicked man, as He once spoke through Balaam (Numbers 23–24). Jesus would indeed die for the people — not to save the nation from Rome, but to save it, and the world, from sin and death. **“And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.”** His death would gather God’s children from every nation into one.

> **John 11:53** *Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.*

“From that day forth.” The raising of Lazarus was the turning point. From that day the leaders were determined to kill Jesus. Later they even plotted to kill Lazarus too, **“Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus”** (John 12:10-11). The greatest miracle of life led straight to the cross.

Jesus withdrew to a town called Ephraim, near the wilderness (11:54). Six days before the Passover he came back to Bethany. They made him a supper; Martha served, **“but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him,”** and Mary anointed his feet with costly ointment (John 12:1-3). Jesus said she had kept it **“against the day of my burying”** (12:7). Within a week he would be in the grave himself.

Where the Story Leads

To the Messiah

The seventh sign. Many students count seven signs in John’s Gospel before the cross, beginning with water made wine at Cana (story 41) and ending here. Each one pointed to who Jesus is. This last sign pointed most clearly of all: the Son of God, through whom God gives life to the dead.

The resurrection and the life. “I am the resurrection, and the life.” At Bethany Jesus raised one man to his mortal life. A week or so later Jesus himself died, was buried in a tomb with a stone across its mouth, and after three days and three nights God raised him from the dead — not to die again, but to live for ever. Then God took him up to His own right hand. **“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept”** (1 Corinthians 15:20). Because he lives, all who believe will be raised.

One man for the people. Caiaphas said, *one man should die for the people*. He spoke better than he knew. **“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly”** (Romans 5:6). **“Who gave himself a ransom for all”** (1 Timothy 2:6).

Victory over the enemy. Jesus groaned in indignation at the grave. By his death, resurrection and ascension he defeated the one who held the power of death: **“that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all**

their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15). **"Our Saviour Jesus Christ … hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel"** (2 Timothy 1:10).

"Though one rose from the dead." In a parable, Jesus once told of a rich man and a beggar also named Lazarus. When the rich man begged that someone be sent from the dead to warn his brothers, Abraham answered, **"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead"** (Luke 16:31). It is a different Lazarus, in a story, not this man. But the words came true at Bethany: a man named Lazarus rose from the dead, and the leaders, instead of believing, plotted to kill both him and Jesus. This series notes it as a striking parallel; Scripture does not join the two.

He calls his own by name. "Lazarus, come forth." One day **"the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first"** (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

To the Grace Administration

Sorrow, but not without hope. Jesus wept at a grave, and so may we. But Paul writes, **"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him"** (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). **"Wherefore comfort one another with these words"** (4:18).

The dead asleep, awaiting the trumpet. Like Lazarus, believers who have died are asleep. They will be woken at Christ's return: **"For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed"** (1 Corinthians 15:52).

Death defeated. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? … But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55, 57).

The same power in us. "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:11). The God who raised Lazarus, and raised Jesus, has given His spirit to every believer as the guarantee of resurrection.

A body like his. "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Philippians 3:20-21).

Weep with them that weep. Jesus did not lecture the grieving sisters; he wept with them. **"Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep"** (Romans 12:15).

God's timing. Jesus delayed, and it seemed too late. It was not. **"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"** (Romans 8:28).

To the Topic of Death and Hope

- **Death is real and painful** — even Jesus wept.
- **Death is an enemy,** not a friend; Jesus was moved with indignation before it.
- **Scripture calls death sleep** — unconscious, at rest, awaiting waking.

- **The hope is resurrection** — "Thy brother shall rise again."
- **Jesus is the resurrection and the life;** God has given him power to raise the dead.
- **Believers who die will live;** death is not the end.
- **God's delays are not denials.**
- **Thank God before you see the answer.**
- **The God who raised Lazarus and raised Jesus will raise all who believe.**

The Main Takeaway

Word came to Jesus from Martha and Mary of Bethany, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick"; Jesus said the sickness was "not unto death, but for the glory of God," and because he loved them he stayed two more days; then he told his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep," and plainly, "Lazarus is dead"; when he reached Bethany, Lazarus had been in the grave four days; Martha met him: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee"; Jesus said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live," and Martha confessed, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God"; Mary fell at his feet weeping, Jesus groaned in the spirit and wept, and at the cave he said, "Take ye away the stone"; lifting his eyes he prayed, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me … that they may believe that thou hast sent me," and cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth" — and the dead man came out, bound in graveclothes, and Jesus said, "Loose him, and let him go." Many believed, but from that day the leaders plotted his death, and Caiaphas unknowingly prophesied that one man should die for the people. Within days Jesus died, was raised by God never to die again, and was exalted — the firstfruits of all who sleep, and the guarantee that every believer will hear his voice and rise.

- **Bring your need to him,** and trust his love.
- **His delays are not denials.**
- **Death is sleep for the believer** — and he will awaken us.
- **He is the resurrection and the life** — believe it.
- **Weep with those who weep.**
- **Thank God before you see the answer.**
- **Roll away your stone** — do what you can, and let God do the rest.

For Our Learning — The People

- **Jesus.** The Son of God, who loved Lazarus, wept at his grave, prayed to his Father, and called him out.
- **Lazarus.** Of Bethany; his name means "God has helped"; four days dead, raised to life.
- **Martha.** The active sister; met Jesus on the road and confessed him as the Christ, the Son of God.
- **Mary.** The sister who sat at his feet, fell at his feet weeping, and later anointed them.
- **Thomas (Didymus).** "Let us also go, that we may die with him."
- **The Jews who came to comfort.** Many believed; some reported to the Pharisees.
- **Caiaphas.** High priest about A.D. 18–36, who said one man should die for the people.

- **The chief priests and Pharisees.** Took counsel from that day to kill Jesus.

For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **Bethany** — a village on the Mount of Olives, under two miles from Jerusalem.
- **Burial the same day** — necessary in a hot climate.
- **Cave tombs** — natural or cut in limestone, closed with a large stone.
- **Graveclothes** — strips of linen wound around the body with spices; a separate cloth (napkin) over the face.
- **Seven days of mourning** — the family sat at home, and friends came to comfort.
- **Loud mourning (klaiō)** — wailing, sometimes with hired mourners and flutes.
- **Four days dead** — decay well begun; a later Jewish belief held the soul lingered three days.
- **Twelve hours in the day** — daylight divided from sunrise to sunset.
- **Martha meets, Mary sits** — the mourning custom of sitting at home.
- **The high priest** — appointed by Rome in Jesus' day; Caiaphas's family ossuary found in 1990.
- **"Place and nation"** — the temple and the leaders' power under Rome.

For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Prolepsis (anticipation)** — "It was that Mary which anointed the Lord" (11:2), told before John describes the anointing.
- **Parenthesis** — the whole of 11:2, set into the story.
- **Euphemism / metaphor** — "Lazarus sleepeth" (11:11) for death, and "awake him out of sleep" for raising him.
- **Erotesis (questions for effect)** — "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" (11:9); "Believest thou this?" (11:26); "Could not this man …?" (11:37).
- **Metonymy (one name put for a related thing)** — "I am the resurrection, and the life" (11:25): the one who gives resurrection and life called by their name.
- **Antithesis (setting opposites against each other)** — "though he were dead, yet shall he live" (11:25); "walk in the day … walk in the night" (11:9-10).
- **Brachylogy (brevity)** — "Jesus wept" (11:35), the shortest verse in the English Bible.
- **Synecdoche (a part for the whole)** — "the world" (11:27) for mankind; "our place" (11:48) for the temple and their authority.
- **Irony** — Caiaphas's "one man should die for the people" (11:50), true in a way he never meant.

What the Bible Actually Says

- **Lazarus was sick, and his sisters sent word to Jesus.**
- **Jesus said the sickness was for the glory of God.**

- **Jesus loved them, and stayed two more days.**
- **Jesus called Lazarus's death sleep, and then said plainly, "Lazarus is dead."**
- **Lazarus had been in the grave four days.**
- **Martha said God would give Jesus whatever he asked.**
- **Martha believed in the resurrection at the last day.**
- **Jesus said, "I am the resurrection, and the life."**
- **Martha confessed him as the Christ, the Son of God.**
- **Jesus groaned in the spirit and wept.**
- **Jesus thanked his Father for hearing him, so that the people would believe God had sent him.**
- **He called Lazarus out with a loud voice, and Lazarus came forth.**
- **The Bible records nothing Lazarus said about being dead.**
- **Many believed; the leaders plotted to kill Jesus, and later Lazarus.**
- **Caiaphas prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation.**

God's Will and Intent

- **God's glory is shown through His Son** — what God does through him glorifies both.
- **God hears His Son always,** and answers.
- **God has given His Son power to raise the dead** and give life.
- **God's timing is perfect,** even when it seems too late.
- **God feels with His people in their grief.**
- **God will raise all who believe** at the return of His Son.
- **God turned even His enemies' plans to His purpose:** one man died for the people, was raised, and was exalted, so that all who believe might live.