

All Signs Point to Jesus

Session 7

April 13, 2025

### **The Sign of His Power over Death**

**The Point:** Jesus offers us the hope of a new life.

**Session Passage:** John 11:25-27;38-44

#### **John 11:25-27**

**Connection to the Point.** Jesus is the resurrection and life.

**Context.** While the central focus of all four Gospels is Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection, the Gospel of John spends almost half of the book discussing Jesus's final week. This session looks at the final verses before John's recounting of Jesus's final week starts in chapter 12. In 11:1-24, John began the story of Lazarus's death. Lazarus is described to Jesus as "the one you love" (v. 3). John used a similar phrase to designate his own relationship with Jesus—as the disciple whom Jesus loved. In both cases, John emphasized that Jesus is the originator of love and friendship. While Lazarus and John can both be described as Jesus's friends, Jesus is the originating source of the love and friendship. Lazarus's death had the potential to be a crisis, but in God's sovereignty and Jesus's power and compassion, Lazarus's death became an opportunity for Jesus's disciples to believe (v. 15).

**Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.** These three were siblings from a town called Bethany. The town's name means something like "house of the figs/dates" or possibly "house of suffering." It is mentioned in all four of the Gospels and was a small village located near Jerusalem, on the east of the Mount of Olives. In addition to the story of Lazarus's raising told in these verses, Bethany played a prominent role and was the location of at least two other significant events in the life of Jesus. First, as referenced in 11:2, Lazarus's sister, Mary, anointed Jesus with expensive perfume (Mark 14:3-9) and wiped His feet with her hair (Luke 7:38). It was also the town near which Jesus ascended into heaven (24:50-51).

The name *Lazarus* is likely a form of the name Eleazer, a common name in Hebrew. The only other Lazarus in Scripture appears in Luke, and, like this Lazarus, is also the special recipient of divine grace. Some New Testament scholars have argued that Mary of Bethany is Mary Magdalene and have also argued that she is the same sinner mentioned in Luke 7.

**I am the resurrection, and the life** (v. 25). This is the fifth and perhaps the greatest "I am" statement Jesus made in the Gospel of John. Each and every time Jesus declares "I am," He is declaring He is God who has come in the flesh. The Hebrew phrase "I am" is the grammatical basis of His name that God reveals to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:14), and it stands behind the Greek phrase used here. The various "I am" statements Jesus made also serve to unpack and explain what it means for Jesus to be God incarnate. Death is not victorious over the life Jesus brings. Jesus both *brings* resurrection and life and also *is* the resurrection and the life.

**Even if he dies. . . will never die** (v. 25-26). Due to the fall in Genesis 3, physical death will come to everyone until Jesus's return. Eternal death waits for those who are outside of Christ. Eternal life waits for

those who are in Christ. In the previous chapter, Jesus had told the Jews that His sheep were eternally secure in His hands (10:28). The theme of eternal life is prominent throughout John's Gospel (6:50; 8:51). The eternal life theme also appears in his first letter (1 John 5:13).

**You are the Messiah** (v. 27). Directly translated, *Messiah* means "Anointed One." or "Messiah." The idea is used throughout the Old Testament about various individuals who were anointed by God to carry out various tasks. Messiah is one of the key concepts tying the Old Testament to the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the Messiah is a figure who will come to be the Davidic king from the line of Judah (Gen. 49:10) and who will sit on the throne of David forever. In Matthew 16, Peter famously confessed that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus affirmed Peter's confession and told him this knowledge was given to him as a gift by the Father.

**The Son of God** (v. 27). From the first New Testament book (Matt. 16:16) to the final book (Rev. 2:18), *Son of God* is a prominent title used of Jesus. John used this term almost exclusively of Jesus. When writing about believers, he preferred the term "children of God." On four occasions John added "one and only begotten" to the phrase. Sometimes John simply used the phrase "the Son," and apparently expected the reader to supply "of God" (John 3:35-36; 5:19-23,26; 6:40; 8:36). While the title is used very early in John's Gospel (1:34,49), it is possible that when Nathanael used the term he didn't understand the full implications of what he was saying. The reader is expected to interpret the term correctly by the end of John's Gospel (20:31).

### **John 11:38-40**

**Connection to the Point.** The glory of God is revealed as Jesus works on our behalf.

**Context.** In verses 28-37, Jesus was confronted by Mary—much as He had been earlier by Martha—and arrived at the tomb of Lazarus. Both sisters confessed that if Jesus had been present earlier, their brother would not have died. Martha also confessed she believed Jesus could ask anything from God and God would grant it (v. 22). Mary seems overcome with grief at her brother's death and simply fell at Jesus's feet (v. 32). We should not conclude Martha had greater faith than her sister, but rather observe that Martha continued to be more proactive than Mary.

**Deeply moved** (v. 38). This Greek phrase is difficult to understand. Translating it *deeply moved* maintains the uncertainty. The difficulty in translation carries over what was surely a complexity in Jesus's emotions. While we want to always maintain the biblical teaching that Jesus is fully God, we should also maintain the biblical teaching that Jesus is fully human. Since He is both fully God and fully human, Jesus's emotional life was exceptionally complex. As a man, He was saddened at the death of His friend. As God, He was saddened at His followers' unbelief. The people were mourning the death of Lazarus even after Jesus had clearly said his sickness would not result in death (v. 4). Furthermore, Jesus had already promised to "awake him up" (v. 11). Finally, Jesus said Lazarus would "rise again" (v. 23). This complexity of emotions is visualized in what is famously known as the shortest verse in the Bible—"Jesus wept" (v. 35).

**The tomb** (v. 38). Wealthy individuals often had elaborate tombs like the one Jesus occupied (Matt 27:57-60). Meanwhile, the poor, criminals, and foreigners sometimes had their bodies thrown into communal graves (27:7). Lazarus must have been a man of some wealth. Most likely he was laid on a bench in a hollowed-out cave with a plan to move his bones into a box called an ossuary about one year after death. In that way, the same tomb would be used for others who died.

**A stench** (v. 39). Some translations use a phrase like “bad odor” for the Greek phrase here, but the smell emanating from the tomb was much worse than that. In an era before embalming and refrigeration, a dead body would have begun to decompose quickly. The resultant odor would have been overwhelmingly putrid. As such, Martha’s concerns were very reasonable. By reporting her concerns, John confirmed Luke’s portrayal of Martha as being very pragmatic and concerned with the physical things in life (Luke 10:38-42). Her concern about the stench seemingly reversed her earlier professed belief that God would do anything Jesus asked (John 11:22). Martha’s faith was inconsistent at best and contradictory at worst. This event is similar to the father, whose son was possessed by a spirit, when he declared, “I do believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). Praise the Lord that He saves us not according to the strength of our faith but according to the power of His ability to save us!

**Dead four days** (v. 39). The mention of *four days* is an important detail. In fact, it is so important that John not only mentioned it here but also in verse 17. The reason that four days is significant is because a Jewish superstition held that a dead person’s spirit waited by the body for three days looking for an opportunity to return to the body. However, on the fourth day, it was believed, the body had decomposed to the point that the spirit gave up trying to return. This detail is also given to reinforce the idea that the stench of the dead body would have been unbearably rancid.

**See the glory of God** (v. 40). The glory of God is an attribute of God that we speak and write about frequently, but it is not easily grasped. The Hebrew word that is translated *glory* in the Old Testament is connected to the idea of weight. The Greek word used here is connected to the honor given to rulers like Julius Caesar. It is a focused praise given to a human ruler. However, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the glory of God is not usually something that can be viewed by human eyes. However, whenever the New Testament speaks about God’s glory as being visible, it is usually in eschatological scenes. In other words, whenever people can see the glory of God, the Bible is painting a picture of the inbreaking of the kingdom of God, and the reader is given a glimpse of what the new heavens and new earth will be like—a place without sin, death, or evil.

#### **John 11:41-44**

**Connection to the Point.** The work of Jesus draws us to put our faith in Him.

**Raised his eyes** (v. 41). Jesus’s posture of prayer was in line with the ordinary Jewish posture of prayer. For instance, when Solomon dedicated the newly built temple, the Bible says that “Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in front of the entire congregation of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven stood before the altar of the Lord in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and

spread forth his hands toward heaven” (1 Kings 8:22). In the Jewish worldview, God lived in the highest heaven, so by raising His eyes, Jesus was directing all attention to God the Father. In case those present at the tomb did not correctly interpret Jesus’s nonverbal cues of raising His eyes, He began His prayer with, **Father**. Jesus is fully God and is able to perform miracles according to His own authority, but He spoke to the Father in this way “**so that they may believe you sent me**” (v. 42).

**A loud voice** (v. 43). The Greek words of this phrase are *phone* [voice, sound] *meegas* [great] and thus could be directly translated “megaphone.” The image of God calling into the darkness and watery depths before creation, “Let there be light,” in Genesis 1:3 could come to the reader’s mind as we read these words. The Creator was speaking. His creation would respond.

Jesus did not need to use a *loud voice* in order for the miracle to be effective or for the Father to hear Him. As the Creator of the universe, Jesus has power over life and death, and His power sometimes comes as a “still small voice” or “a soft whisper” (1 Kings 19:12-13). Jesus used a loud voice because He wanted the people gathered around Lazarus’s tomb to see the power of God. Throughout the Old Testament, God often performed miracles in order for people to see His great power. In Exodus 7:5, God told Moses that the miracles He performed to persuade Pharaoh to release the Hebrews were so that the Egyptians would know that the God of the Israelites is real and powerful. In 2 Kings 19:19, Hezekiah asked God to save the people of Judah from the armies of Assyria, “so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, Lord, are God—you alone that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, Lord, are God all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only.”

**The dead man came out** (v. 44). In compliance with Jesus’s words, Lazarus returned to life and exited the tomb where he had been placed. It should be noted that Lazarus was only resuscitated—one day he would die again. Meanwhile, Jesus was resurrected to never die again. Given this reality, it is likely that Lazarus was put back into this very tomb when he eventually died a second time. Jesus, of course, never returned to the tomb in which He was placed, since He is “the firstborn from among the dead” (Col 1:18) and now sits victoriously on His throne in heaven with the Father (Rev. 3:21).

**Bound hand and foot** (v. 44). We should not conclude that only the extremities had been bound up. *Hand and foot and feet* here represent the whole body. Many ancient civilizations had methods for attempting to preserve bodies after death. The most well-known example is the process of mummification that the Egyptians used. Similarly, the Jewish practice of wrapping the body was also an attempt to slow deterioration and decomposition. John may have been giving us these details in order to foreshadow the fact that Lazarus was wrapped in a similar way to how Jesus would be wrapped after His death—including having a separate piece of cloth used to wrap His head (20:6-7). John may also have been describing Lazarus’s hands and feet as being bound in order to give us the readers a picture of what must have been a struggle for Lazarus as he *came out* from the grave. One minute Lazarus was dead. The next minute he was alive but wrapped in the clothes of a dead man and trying to make his way towards the voice of his dear friend Jesus.

**Unwrap him** (v. 44). Raising Lazarus from the dead was the seventh and final sign-miracle that John recorded in his Gospel. In previous miracles, Jesus was establishing for His followers (and those

observers open to understanding) His authority over various elements in the world. In this miracle, Jesus clearly demonstrates that He has the power over death. Notice that the focus of this miracle is on Jesus and not on Lazarus. Lazarus did not even speak in the passage much less take center stage in John's recounting of this miracle. The miracles that Jesus performed were meant to point people to Him and His kingdom and to testify that the kingdom was "at hand" (Mark 1:15, KJV).