

The Gospel of John Pt. 18

John 11:1-57

Big Idea

Jesus has the power over life and death

Exposition – John 11:1-57

Jesus leaves the area East of the Jordan River and returns to the Jerusalem area. His Triumphal Entry is only days away. The tenor of John's writing changes from the hatred of the Jews to the beauty of the glory of Christ as witnessed in the raising of Lazarus from the dead. This chapter is easily sectioned four ways: Preparation for the miracle, Jesus' arrival, the miracle, the miracle's results.



1. Preparation for the Miracle (V1-16)

A. John 11:1-3

1. The raising of Lazarus is Jesus' 7th miracle presented in John's Gospel.
2. Bethany was southeast of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley about two miles. This is not the town known as "Bethany Beyond the Jordan".
3. Lazarus, Mary, and Martha have not been previously mentioned by John. It seems that he assumes his readers would be familiar with them because of Luke introduction in Luke 10:38f where the story of Mary's anointing of Jesus is told. John alludes to that event later in John 12.

B. John 11:4-6

1. Jesus tells the true reason for Lazarus sickness and subsequent death – "...so that the Son of God may be glorified by it."
2. Verses 5 & 6 bear witness to this reason as well: Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters. Plus, Jesus paused for two days before going to Bethany. It seems that the sickness had to run its course first. Lazarus would need to have expired a significant amount of time in order to put to rest theories about whether or not Lazarus actually died.

C. John 11:7-10

1. The trip consisted of a two-day travel from Bethany beyond the Jordan to Lazarus' home.
2. Jesus' had just fled from Judea due to the violence of the Jews there. His disciples are shocked that He now wishes to return.
3. In V9-10 Jesus doesn't speak of literal daylight, but rather the daylight of the Father's will for Jesus' ministry. He knows that His hour is not at hand and therefore He is safe. Soon enough, this would change.

D. John 11-16

1. In actuality, Lazarus probably died before the messenger got to Jesus to inform Him that Lazarus was sick.
2. The disciples obviously misunderstand what Jesus means when He uses the phrase "sleep"
3. In V15 Jesus is quite forward about the fact that it was spiritually beneficial that Lazarus had died because their faith would be bolstered by the miracle that Jesus would perform.
4. Thomas' response shows commitment seasoned with pessimism. He was willing to go anywhere with Jesus, but it would likely cost their lives.

2. Jesus' Arrival (V17-37)

- A. Lazarus has been dead four days (Jesus waited two days then two days' travel). Due to the extreme heat in Palestine, burial usually happened on the same day as death. Jews did not embalm.

- B. V21-22 – Martha is not rebuking Jesus here. She is showing her confidence that Jesus has complete power over death. Nor is she asking Jesus to raise Lazarus. She understands that Jesus has special union with the Father and could somehow bring about a good outcome.
- C. V25-26 – This is the 5th “I AM” statement that Jesus would make (6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14). This causes Martha’s understanding of what Jesus meant to change. She moves from thinking of resurrection from being a general, last days idea to see Jesus as the one who is able to raise the dead.
- D. V27 – Martha’s confession. In one statement, Martha fulfills John’s reason for writing his gospel (John 20:30-31)
- E. V33 – According to Jewish tradition, all families must hire at least two flute players and a professional wailer to mourn the dead. It seems that Lazarus’ family was somewhat wealthy and therefore a number of professional funeral performers are present.
 - 1. It seems that the expected grief over the loss of Lazarus has crossed into hopelessness and despair. MacArthur says, “Most likely, Jesus was angered at the emotional grief of the people because it implicitly revealed unbelief in the resurrection and the temporary nature of death. The group was acting like pagans who had not hope (1 Thess 4:13)”
- F. V35 – The Gk word used here means to silently burst into tears. This is in stark contrast to what the professional mourners were doing. Jesus doesn’t weep because of Lazarus’ death, He will soon raise him from the dead. Jesus mourns because of the effect of sin on the world. Jesus is the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief (Is 53:3)

3. The Miracle (V38-44)

- A. Tombs in those days were often caves or hollowed out places in the rock. The custom was to use spices that were strong in aroma to mask the odor of a decaying body, but they didn’t actually preserve the tissues. Contrary to popular understanding, the Jews loosely wrapped bodies with cloth whereas the Egyptians mummified their dead.
- B. “Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” – We can again see the importance of faith in the Christian life.
- C. V40-41 – Jesus offers a prayer of thanks for what the Father was about to do. His words clearly reveal the divine purpose in Lazarus’ death and now his resurrection.
- D. Some say that Jesus uses Lazarus’ actual name stating that if He was ambiguous about the command to come forth then all of the dead bodies in the area would have risen. Interesting thought.

4. The Results (V45-57)

- A. Many Jews saw the works of Jesus and believed. But, now the Pharisees are aware also. This would further enrage them and cause them to conspire even more diligently.
- B. The Sanhedrin was a Jewish judicial council that consisted of Pharisees and chief priests and members of high priestly families. They governed the legal, civil, and religious life of the Jews. They would need consent from the Roman government to take legal movement against Jesus.
- C. The Jews are in a predicament – there is a continuous tension that runs between their fear of the Roman government and the Jewish people. If they give Jesus too much latitude then Rome could consider it an insurrection and they fear revolt from the people if they are too strict with Jesus.
- D. V52 – God is gathering His children from all the various folds (Jn 10:16)
- E. V53 -- Either way, the die is cast now – they are determined for Jesus to suffer and die. This would be the third Passover that John records (2:13; 6:4; 10:55)
- F. V54-57 – Jesus withdrew from the public eye until the Passover. The town of Ephraim is also known as Ephron and is about 12 miles northeast from Jerusalem. Jesus’ early absence in Jerusalem caused a great deal of speculation from the people about whether He would attend the Passover.