

For the Glory of God (John 11:1-27)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (2/13/2022)

Introduction

1. John 10 closes the public ministry of our Lord. The miracle in chapter 11 was not a public miracle. John Chapters 11 and 12 are connected and are preparatory to the Passion Week. The last and greatest of Jesus' miracles is the trigger event that drives the Sanhedrin to carry out their plan to kill Jesus.
2. The final verses (40–42) of John 10 have Jesus retiring to *Batanea* (OT *Bashan*) on the east of the Jordan in the tetrarchy of Philip. The Jews were seeking to kill Him, but His time is not yet. Thus, as before, He discreetly escapes their clutches.

John the Baptist began his ministry in this place (John 1:28), and also introduced Jesus' public ministry here. It was here that Jesus was identified as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29). What better place to go where Jesus now ends His public ministry—the place where it started.

3. We also find a subtle but clear proof of Christ's ministry in this seemingly incidental reference at the end of the chapter. How is this? Remember, this retirement signals the end of Jesus' ministry, and thus, the witness of John the Baptist about Jesus is reviewed here. John showed that Jesus was indeed the true Israel, the Savior of the world. While the Jews want to kill Jesus, however, those in rural *Batanea* remembered John's witness about Him. They found John's witness to Jesus to be true and faithful. Although he was a prophet, prophets were generally remembered by some sign given; yet John did no sign. However, his words pointed men to Jesus on whom they now believed.
4. Chapter 11 begins with “now,” showing the connection with the previous chapter. The Jews (referring to the Pharisee elders and scribes) who challenged Jesus' Messianic claims. While there, We were introduced to the family of Lazarus from Bethany of Judea. Lazarus took ill and the sisters sent for Jesus to come. Jesus took the summons as a divine signal but remained in *Batanea* for 2 more days.

What we see in the verses of our text this morning is the revealing of the Good Shepherd in action.

I. Loving His Own (vv.1–6)

1. John introduces us to *Lazarus*, his friend from Bethany in Judea, whose sisters were Mary and Martha. This Mary is the one who anointed Jesus (v. 2; see 12:3). Lazarus became ill by divine appointment for the glory of God. Jesus made that clear in verse 4.

Here John also reveals relationships not explored in the other Gospels. Jesus had friends with whom He had a special relationship. In well-to-do family of Bethany, near Jerusalem, Lazarus fell ill, and the sisters quickly sent a message to Jesus, “*He whom you love is ill*” (v. 2). This was an unspoken summons for Jesus to come immediately to heal him. The proof of this is that when Jesus did come, Martha said, “*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died*” (v. 21). But Jesus stayed two days longer and then took the four-day trip to Bethany after he died.

2. Jesus responded to this summons with a cryptic word: “*This illness does not lead to death*” (v. 4). By this, Jesus did not mean that the illness was not fatal because Lazarus died, but rather the illness served greater purpose—the glory of God. Lazarus must die in order to reveal this greater purpose that followers of Jesus, even though they may die, are delivered from death by resurrection.

It also showed three important truths: (1) Jesus refused to be manipulated but rather waited for the Father’s timing. (2) Jesus waited to be certain that the miracle would be beyond dispute. (3) Jesus desired to confirm the faith of both the disciples and the family in Bethany.

II. Encouraging Courage (vv. 7–16)

1. After the wait to assure the passing of Lazarus, Jesus informed the disciples, “*Let us go to Judea again*” (v. 7). At this point, the disciples expressed their concern (v. 8). Judah was a dangerous place and did Jesus just recently leave the area for that reason?
2. Jesus’ responded with a reference to the need to walk in the light. We must do what we need to do when the time is right. We are more successful working in the daylight rather than the darkness of night. The application Jesus makes is that He is safe as long as He performs the Father’s will. Will their fear of danger override their need to do their duty and follow Jesus anywhere?
3. The hero among the disciples was Thomas. He is here called *Thomas Didymus* (the twin). Only John gives information about him (John 14:5; 20:24-28). Thomas was a practical person. He also understood the principle of discipleship—dying to self and taking one’s cross to follow Jesus.

III. Comforting the Grieving (vv. 17–27)

1. Of the two sisters, Martha is dealt with first. She is the one who understands Jesus the least. Mary understood the importance of fellowship with Jesus. She sat at Jesus’ feet while Martha was busy trying to serve Jesus (Luke 10:38-42). Martha sought to get Jesus to rebuke her sister for her failure to be with her in the kitchen getting the meal ready, but Jesus defended her, thereby subtly rebuking Martha. Thus, John here deals with Martha first.
2. Martha’ faith, expressed in verse 22, supports the fact that she was not rebuking Jesus in v. 21. Martha had a simple, confident trust in the person of Jesus as coming from the Father. Martha was confident that Jesus’ relationship with His Father was such that He could get what He asked for of the Father.
3. Jesus’ declaration in response to Martha was that resurrection was not merely an eschatological hope but a present reality in the person of Christ (v. 25). *Resurrection* and *life* are not synonyms. That Jesus is the life makes resurrection possible. This is not actually a promise but a fact. Believers have life. If they die, they will be raised again. Those who live and believe do not really die, they just fall asleep in Jesus. Did Martha believe this?

Lessons

Is Jesus your life?

Is your faith based on what you hope will be true in some future expectation?

Is your faith the supernatural work of the Spirit, bringing you into a vital and present personal relationship with the living Savior?