

John 11:38-57
Jesus Raises Lazarus, Gets Death Penalty

Today: Today we continue on in John 11, the account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. The irony is that in raising Lazarus from the dead earned Jesus the death penalty. This record tells us all we need to know about who Jesus really is (God) and what kind of men the leaders really were (wicked, evil men).

Review:

******Why was Jesus “glad” that He was not there when Lazarus died (11:14-15)?** It was so that a situation would arise that caused the disciples to believe.

Jesus declared He *Himself* to be the resurrection and the life (read 11:25a). What does it mean for Jesus *Himself* to be the resurrection and the life? There will be neither resurrection nor eternal life apart from Jesus. He made resurrection possible and He decides who gets eternal life.

ESV **John 1:4** In him was life . . .

******What paradoxical statements did Jesus make in 11:25b-26?** He said those who believe in Him will live even if they die, and that those who live will never die.

What did Jesus mean when He said that those who die will live and those who live shall never die (11:25b-6)? Eternal life is not something you get after your body dies. It begins at the moment you are born again and continues on for eternity. Those who believe in Jesus immediately possess eternal life. Those who believe will continue to live even after their bodies die physically, and those who live spiritually will never die spiritually.

******Why did Jesus pray out loud before raising Lazarus from the dead (11:38-44)?** He prayed aloud so that the people standing around would hear the prayer, see the miracle, and believe that the Father sent Jesus, 11:41-42.

The prophet Elijah, confronting the false prophets of Baal, also prayed aloud for a similar reason:

ESV **1 Kings 18:37** Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God . . .

Application: Some people object to public prayer, but Jesus set an example for us. Furthermore, Jesus crafted His prayer with the public in mind, suggesting that we also keep others in mind when praying aloud.¹

¹ Carson, *John*, 418.

Why did Martha object when Jesus wanted to take away the stone (11:39)? Since Lazarus had been entombed four days, she knew there would be a terrible odor, as indeed there probably was! Lazarus was, as Nacho said of his monk's robe, "estinky."²

Why was Martha's odor objection something John wanted his readers to know (11:39)? It showed that Lazarus was truly dead, no doubt about it.

Based on what Jesus said to Martha in 11:40, is seeing believing or is believing seeing? In this instance, Jesus clearly stated that if she believed, she would see God's glory. He said this because earlier He had said:

ESV **John 11:4** . . . 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.

ESV **John 1:14** . . . the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

What does it mean for a person to see God's glory (11:40)? John Calvin said, "The glory of God is when we know what He is."³

Principle: If you believe in Jesus, you will see the glory of God.

ESV **John 14:21b** . . . he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

Other Thoughts on Miracles: Others who were not yet believers saw the miracle that day and it led directly to them believing in Jesus. This is in contrast with still other people present that day who also saw the miracle, but still did not believe. Many people today see ample proof of God, yet they suppress the evidence. The Bible warns of:

ESV **Romans 1:18-20** . . . men, who . . . suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Why do you suppose that as part of raising Lazarus, Jesus "cried out with a loud voice" (11:43), rather than whispering or speaking normally? Since Jesus was God, He could have raised Lazarus anyway He pleased, even remotely from far away. As with His public prayer, it was likely necessary for the sake of those watching in order to strengthen their faith. He wanted everyone within earshot to know that the dead would respond to His call.⁴

ESV **Matthew 5:16** . . . let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

² Line from the movie, *Nacho Libre*.

³ Steven J. Cole, "Lesson 63: Believing is Seeing, but Seeing is not Believing (John 11:38-57)", Bible.org. Accessed January 30, 2020.

⁴ Hendriksen, *John*, 159.

Why do you suppose Jesus specified for *Lazarus* come out rather than simply shouting, “Come out” (11:43)? There is a day coming when all who are in their tombs will come out in response to Jesus’ call (5:28-29):

ESV **John 5:28-29** . . . 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.

Perhaps He specified for Lazarus to come out so that not all the dead came to life!

What Happens When You Die: When a person dies, he is fully conscious after death. He is not asleep; he is merely separated from his physical body. Everyone will be conscious in one of two places, with Jesus in paradise or apart from God in torment. When Jesus appears a second time, everyone’s will be reunited with his resurrected body and face final judgment for the things he did in life.

Proof Positive: Raising Jesus from the dead proved what Jesus earlier claimed:

ESV **John 5:21** . . . as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.

Evangelism Application: Just as there was no way Lazarus was coming back to life on his own, so too there is no way any lost person is coming to Jesus on his own.⁵ We are as dead in our sins as Lazarus was dead in the tomb. One of Spurgeon’s applications from this text was for us to believe God for the resurrection of lost people out of spiritual darkness. Ask God to raise your lost family members from being spiritually dead.

ESV **Romans 9:3** . . . I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

ESV **Romans 10:1** . . . my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be **saved**.

Why did John mention the detail of the linen strips on Lazarus’ hands, feet and face (11:44)? Perhaps it was to contrast later with what the disciples found in Jesus’ tomb after His resurrection. Jesus’ body was gone, but the linen wrappings were left behind:

ESV **John 20:5-7** . . . stooping to look in, he [John] saw the linen cloths lying there . . . Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.

Somehow Jesus escaped from his wrappings on His own. Most likely He simply materialized through them, leaving a cocoon behind. Jesus had a glorified body that could pass through closed doors and appear or vanish at will. Lazarus was resurrected to mortal life, but did eventually die again. Unlike Lazarus, Jesus will never die again.

⁵ Cole, *Lesson 63*. Accessed January 30, 2020.

******Why did the council conspire to kill Jesus (11:45-53)?** So many people kept coming to faith in Jesus (as Messiah) that they feared a revolt against Rome might erupt, causing the Romans to crush the rebellion and in the process destroy the temple (“our place”). Worst yet, they feared the Romans might go further and wipe out the whole nation (as had happened to the northern kingdom of Israel). The irony of this fear is that this is exactly what did happen, precisely because these men rejected Jesus. Later, false Messiahs came in Jesus’ place, misleading many people, and inciting a revolt against Rome which culminated in the destruction of both the temple and the nation.

Literary Purpose: John wanted his readers to understand that Jesus’ credentials were impeccable. The problem was the selfish self-interest of the leaders. Despite the amazing signs Jesus performed, they were not prompted to reassess their stance toward Jesus.⁶ Instead, their concern was staying in power and not antagonizing the Romans.

Among who witnessed it, what opposite reactions were there to Lazarus’ resurrection (11:45-46)? Many believed, but others maliciously reported it to the Pharisees.

- **“council” (11:47):** The Greek word here for “council” is *sunédrión* (Sanhedrin). It was the Jewish ruling body empowered by the Romans to control the internal religious and political affairs of Judea.
- **“high priest” (11:49):** Caiaphas was the high priest the fateful year this all happened (around A.D. 33). The priests were arranged in sort of a pyramid. At the top was the only and only high priest (Caiaphas). Below him in rank were the priests who were directly descended from Aaron, who himself was descended from Levi. Below them were the priests who were descended only from Levi, but not Aaron. Originally the high priest had served for life, but the office had become politicized and the high priest was replaced regularly by the Romans (thus John’s comment that Caiaphas was high priest “that year”, 11:49).⁷

What did Caiaphas mean when he said, “You know nothing at all?” (11:49b)? Perhaps he meant that they had no idea about a plan that had already been discussed, namely that Jesus be killed. Caiaphas has been described as a man of “brazen imprudence, insane ambition, rancorous jealousy and consummate cleverness” who “knew all the answers”, a “rude and sly manipulator, an opportunist, who did not know the meaning of fairness or justice and who was bent on having his own way.”⁸

⁶ Carson, *John*, 420.

⁷ Brown, *John*, 439.

⁸ Hendriksen, *John*, 162.

What did Caiaphas mean by what he said in 11:50? He meant that killing Jesus would save the geo-political nation from national destruction. In general, his fear was not unfounded.

Nationalistic fervor was at a high pitch; the common people expected God to send a political Messiah to overthrow the Romans. However, as already pointed out above, rather than saving the nation, killing Jesus led directly to its destruction. Killing Jesus cleared the way for false Messiahs to arise who truly did foment insurrection, leading to a Roman invasion. God used the Romans to destroy the nation as a judgment for rejecting their own Messiah.

ESV **Matthew 24:24** . . . false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders . . .

ESV **Matthew 24:11** . . . many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.

Who was really behind Caiaphas' statement that it was better for one man to die for the people (11:50-15)? Ultimately, God moved Caiaphas, since he held the office of high priest, to say this as a prophecy.

Side Application: We see a glimpse here of how divine inspiration worked. John McArthur helpfully explained inspiration as: "God's revelation communicated to us through human writers who used their own minds and their own words. God had so arranged their lives, their thoughts, and their vocabularies that the words they chose were the words that God determined from eternity past that they would use to write His truth."⁹

From God's perspective, in what sense did Jesus die "for" the nation (11:51)? It truly was necessary for Jesus to die in order to save the Jewish people—not from the Romans, but from their own sin. "For" is from *huper* and fundamentally means "for the sake of, on behalf of"; here it more particularly means "in the place of".¹⁰

ESV **John 1:29** Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

ESV **Hebrews 9:22** . . . without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

ESV **1 Peter 1:18-19** . . . you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers . . . with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

ESV **Mark 10:45** . . . the Son of Man came . . . to give his life as a ransom for many.

Substitutionary Atonement: We all owe a sin debt that must be paid. Jesus' death on the cross was in payment for our sins. Either you will die in your sin and pay for it yourself, or you will trust Jesus to pay for you. There was a great exchange: our bad went on Him and His good came on us. Atonement is a 1500's English word composed of the preposition "at" plus the number "one" plus the suffix "ment" (a suffix of a noun that denotes a resulting state). The word atonement denotes unity or reconciliation.

⁹ John McArthur, *Why I Trust the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 35.

¹⁰ Brown, *John*, 440.

Who were these children of God scattered abroad that Jesus died for (11:52)? This is probably a reference to Jewish people living outside the Promised Land, who were called the Diaspora, the very people John was writing to. John brought out the truth that Jesus' death in far-away Judea was for them, too.¹¹ Jesus' gathering the scattered was not back into the physical Promised Land, but into God's one spiritual flock, the church.¹²

Election Insight: The scattered Jews for whom Jesus died are called the "children of God" even before they came to faith in Jesus. They were *born* as sheep, but had not yet been saved. This is similar to what God said to Paul in Corinth:

ESV **Acts 18:9b-10** "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."

ESV **2 Timothy 2:10** . . . I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus . . .

******Well aware of their murderous plot, what did Jesus do (11:54)?** He got out of Dodge! One quite biblical response to persecution is to simply leave the area.

Banana Republic: The Sanhedrin did not seek Jesus' arrest in order to try His claims; His trial was a mere formality because He had already been found guilty.¹³ It would be a show trial to give their murderous plot a semblance of legality.

What do you suppose ever became of Lazarus? We are not told. He eventually did die again. One wonders if he was not later a target of their murderous plot in an effort to destroy the evidence.

******What bait did the chief priests and Pharisees count on to lure Jesus back into Jerusalem (11:55-57)?** They counted on the coming Passover feast to draw Jesus back into town. They were using religion to kill him.

Literary Purpose: This is a transitional paragraph into the next chapter, which deals with Jesus' final Passover observance.

So What?

How did raising Lazarus from the dead prove that Jesus really is who He claimed to be?

The resurrection of Lazarus from the dead was the greatest and final proof Jesus offered as to His identity. Earlier the Jews asked Jesus, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly" (10:24). Jesus answered:

¹¹ Caron, *John*, 422.

¹² Some commentator feel the scattered refer to future Gentile believers.

¹³ Carson, *John*, 423.

ESV **John 10:25** . . . The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me . . .

Unbelief, in general, is attributed to encountering things that are intellectually unacceptable. On this occasion, unbelief persisted in the face of irrefutable evidence. What reason did the council members have for not believing in Jesus? They were worried that the Romans would come and take away both their place and their nation. A common barrier to faith is a person's love for his sin. Seeing a miracle and continuing in unbelief results in a hardened heart.

Literary Purpose: John wrote this to convince unbelievers that they should believe in Jesus. Either what John wrote is true, or it is in the category of *Aesop's Fables*. **Which is it?**

Growing Faith: For those who already believe (like Mary and Martha), this should strengthen our faith. John recorded way back in 2:11 that the disciples believed when Jesus turned water into wine. Yet here in 11:15, Jesus said the purpose of raising Lazarus was so that the disciples may believe. Each of us has a growing faith.

**** = Ask this question before reading the text. This will engage people's minds and focus their attention.

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•Stephen E. Atkerson
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