

Bible Study Guide: Week of 3-23-2020

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Blessings on your study and reflection. Please contact me with any questions or comments. Stay healthy in mind, body, and spirit. God bless!

Pastor Andrew

John 11:1-45

1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3 So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 4 But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." 5 Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6 after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. 10 But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." 11 After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." 12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." 13 Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16 Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." 17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God,

the one coming into the world." 28 When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." 45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

Although it is not stated explicitly, many assume that Mary and Martha of Bethany mentioned here are the same sisters named in Luke 10:38-42. This man, Lazarus of Bethany, is only mentioned in John's gospel. He should not be confused with Lazarus, a fictional or hypothetical poor man who appears as a character in Jesus' parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

2 Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill.

Here Mary is introduced as the one who anointed the Lord with perfume. This refers to the events of John 12:1-8. The fact that the author here refers to an event that hasn't occurred in the narrative yet indicates that the story of Jesus' anointing was familiar to the community to which

the author was writing. John alone identifies Jesus' anointer as Mary of Bethany, but this story of his being anointed for burial is common to the four gospels.

3 So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."

The only other person in the gospel who is referred to as the one whom Jesus loves is the so-called "Beloved Disciple" who comes up only after this point in the narrative. Often assumed to be John, the gospel writer, there is some scholarly conjecture that "the beloved disciple" or "the disciple whom Jesus loved" is actually Lazarus.

4 But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." 5 Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6 after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

Just as he indicated that the blind man in Chapter 9 was born blind in order to show forth God's works, Jesus says that Lazarus' illness will be to show forth the glory of God. Jesus' delay in traveling is clearly part of Jesus' plan to display God's glory.

8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. 10 But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them."

In John 10, the Jewish people gathered in the temple tried to stone Jesus for claiming to be God's son. Here the disciples question Jesus' wisdom of going back to the place where people sought to kill him. Jesus' answer once again picks up on the day/night and light/darkness imagery common

to the Gospel of John. As is typical of Jesus in John, his response doesn't plainly answer the objection of the disciples, at least not on their terms. Jesus is claiming that his work is more important than attempts to thwart that work.

11 After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." 12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." 13 Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16 Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Jesus begins to use another figure of speech with the disciples. The euphemism of "sleep" equating to death was common in the ancient world. It was also common in early Christianity (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 and Acts 7:60). The NRSV translates these occurrences of this word as "died" even though the literal meaning is "fallen asleep." In 1 Thessalonians Paul is referring to Christians who have died and what will happen to them when Christ returns. He calls them "those who have fallen asleep" to emphasize the temporary nature of their "death." Since Christ has defeated death, those who have died in Christ will "awake" to new life. The same motif is present in Acts 7. As Stephen, the first deacon, is stoned to death he is said to "fall asleep." His death will not be the end for him.

Interestingly, Thomas comes up here. He is more famous from his appearance at the end of the gospel where he is often derisively referred to as "doubting Thomas." Here, it is not clear who the "he" is referring to. Is Thomas saying, "Let us also go, that we may die with Lazarus" or "Let us also go, that we may die with Jesus"? Either is possible grammatically. The first option makes sense because Lazarus is the one who has died already. Given the earlier reference to "the Jews"

trying to stone Jesus, the second option works better. Thomas is saying, “Let’s go get stoned to death too since Jesus is going back to the place people tried to kill him.” Far from being the doubting one, here Thomas is bold to follow Jesus.

17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

Martha and Mary are going through a pattern familiar to us even today—gathering with loved ones after the death of a loved one. Likewise, Martha expresses grief in a way many of us can relate to.

22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

Martha goes on to express faith in Jesus despite her grief and anger at his not being present for Lazarus during his time of need. Jesus and Martha’s brief exchange about rising and resurrection would not have been the consensus view of afterlife in that day and culture. Various Jewish sects had their own teachings and beliefs about resurrection and afterlife.

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Jesus once again offers up an “I AM” statement as we saw in John 9 (“I am the light of the world.”) There, that statement was linked to the healing of the man born blind, providing literal light. Here, the statement is linked to the raising of Lazarus, providing literal resurrection and life.

27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." 28 When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

Here Martha takes on the role of a disciple. She calls Jesus Lord, confesses her faith in him as God’s son who has come into the world, and goes and calls another (Mary) to come and see Jesus.

30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Mary expresses the same sentiment Martha had expressed before. Here she is accompanied by “The Jews;” in this case this term is a stand in for the villagers who have come to console the sisters.

33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."

Jesus' emotions here are indicative of anger and indignation. It is unclear what Jesus is angry at: The death of Lazarus, death itself, the unbelief of the people gathered there, or something else. Earlier in John's gospel the phrase "come and see" has been used by people to invite others to faith (Jesus to his first disciples, Philip to Nathanael, the woman at the well to her community). Here it is used by the crowds to invite Jesus to come and see death itself.

35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.

Verse 35 is that famous memory verse we all coveted in Sunday school—the shortest verse in the bible. But there is great meaning and power in this short verse. The Jews interpret Jesus' tears as tears of grief for a lost friend. Given Jesus' knowledge and plan that he will raise Lazarus (as he said early in this chapter), this seems to be a misinterpretation. Again, his being "disturbed" is consistent with anger and indignation. He seems disturbed at the lack of faith demonstrated by those who question his power and identity in vs. 37. The stone present here is one of many parallels with Jesus' own eventual burial and resurrection.

39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone.

Like at Jesus' own eventual burial, there is a stone rolled away here. The description of the stench of death contrasts beautifully with the story that is to come in John 12 referenced earlier by the narrator in 11:2—Mary's anointing Jesus for burial with costly perfume. There, the

fragrance of the perfume fills the house. The stench of death is replaced by the fragrance of life. It is Jesus who makes this transformation possible. One of the most evocative images of this scene is a 14th century painting by Duccio. In this painting you can see one of the characters holding his nose as Lazarus emerges.



*The Raising of Lazarus by Duccio di Buoninsegna c. 1310.
Kimbell Art Museum Ft. Worth, Texas.
Public Domain*

And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

This is one of the few places Jesus addresses the Father in front of crowds. Even his words combined with his action of raising Lazarus from the grave is not enough to convince some that Jesus is who he claims to be.

44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." 45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

The description of the grave clothes of Lazarus are very similar to the later description of Jesus' own burial garments. In Lazarus' case, he comes out still wrapped like a mummy. When Jesus is raised at the end of the gospel, the grave clothes no longer bind him and the face cloth is rolled up neatly. The implication seems to be that Lazarus is still bound by the rules of death; he has been resuscitated, but will die again. Jesus' resurrection has completely overwhelmed the power of death and rendered it powerless. Many believe in Jesus because of this sign; some still do not. In fact, it is this sign in John's gospel that really ramps up the effort among the ruling council to put Jesus to death. Ironically, it is his powerful gift of new life that makes the people turn against him and try to kill him.

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

1. Whom have you grieved losing in your life? How was your grief similar to and different from Mary's and Martha's grief?
2. How does it make you feel that Jesus, knowing Lazarus was ill and would die, waited two days to go visit him?
3. Why do you think Jesus began to weep?