

## WEEK 24

### **Return to Bethany**

#### John 11

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is one of the most wonderful incidents recorded in the bible. Here we see Jesus as a man, weeping at the death of a friend, and as God, giving Lazarus life. Who but God can give life.

John told us in chapter 20 that the purpose of the signs or miracles he recorded is so that we might believe Jesus is the Christ and have eternal life. And the purpose of the works, or signs was, according to Jesus, a reason for the Jewish leaders to know that He is divine. At the Feast of Tabernacles, which we studied last time in Chapter 10 of John, Jesus told the Pharisees that if they didn't believe His teachings, they should believe the works or miracles, they were His credentials to prove He was Messiah. Here in chapter 11 of John, Jesus is about 2 miles away from Jerusalem, with many eyewitnesses, doing such an amazing miracle, that you would think any skeptic would have believed.

In addition, this miracle was to prepare the Jews for Jesus' resurrection. It proved without a doubt that a person dead 4 days could be restored to life. Why was necessary? It was to bring glory to God but also somewhat prophetic in that when Jesus was resurrected a short time later, there would have been a precedent for such an event.

#### John 11:1-2

The events recorded in chapter 11 occurred about 4 months after the end of chapter 10. This is the first time John has mentioned Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha but Jesus had visited their home many times during His ministry. The name Lazarus means "God is my help", and certainly prophetic in this case. There are 2 Bethany locations on the maps of Jesus time. One is located out near the site of Jericho, on the Jordan River and this is where John had been baptizing when Jesus came to Him (John 1). This Bethany is where Jesus went when He left Jerusalem. There is another Bethany located near Jerusalem and that is where I believe Lazarus and his sisters lived since Jesus said in verse 7 He would return to Judea and John says it was about 2 miles from Jerusalem.

John's commentary regarding Mary's display of love for Jesus (described in chapter 12) was well known to the first century Christians.

#### John 11:3

Has anyone ever told you that a true believer will never be sick or have problems if they have enough faith? Any time spent in God's Word will surely show you this is not true. I have encountered several people who had based their faith in God on this lie and when trouble came, as it always does, their faith in God was shipwrecked. Why?

Because they had been taught that any trial, sickness or difficulty came on them because they didn't have enough faith. That is the same as saying that God is not sovereign over all my life. That really means I am in charge and I should have everything the way I want it or else God doesn't love me and I don't believe Him. God dealt with the Jews of the Old Covenant in a one to one relationship, that is, they were blessed as they obeyed. That is not how He deals with us, believers in the New Covenant.

Friends, living in a world of disease and death, means we are sure to experience both some day and it can be very difficult. Sickness is not a sign of God's displeasure, no, it is usually allowed for the good of our souls. Sickness can take our attention away from this world to think more about the next. It should cause us to turn to our bibles and spend more time in prayer. It tests our faith and patience and shows us the real value of our hope in Christ. It reminds us that life will end; we cannot remain indifferent to our end when we are ill. Grace does not exempt us from trial.

John 11:4

Lazarus was probably already dead when Jesus made this statement. Jesus meant that Lazarus' illness would not end in death, and it did not, Jesus raised him. Again this suffering had a purpose and would ultimately result in glory to God. But also it would have an electrifying effect on the family, and friends of Lazarus. I can't think what it meant to Lazarus, its unimaginable. Perhaps this was a message meant to be sent back to Mary and Martha.

John 11:5

Friends, it was not lack of love that kept Jesus from immediately going to Lazarus. God had a greater plan for Lazarus. We must never conclude when we suffer that God does not love us.

John 11:6

The messenger who came to Jesus probably took a day to find Jesus, then He waited 2 more days and it probably took a day for him to get to Bethany, 4 days in all. Can you imagine the pain and questioning as the sisters watched their brother die and Jesus did not come? Lazarus had to go through the death and dying experience, perhaps wondering why Jesus did not come.

Everything Jesus did was according to God's timing, which He clearly stated before this. Isn't it interesting that He did not go when He was called? Did you ever call on God and get no answer? Did you get discouraged and upset?

Sometimes when it seems like there is no answer it is really a matter of waiting patiently on God's timing.

John 11:7

God's time had come for Him to return. Friends God timing is always perfect, whether in guiding Jesus in His ministry on earth or guiding us today and answering our prayers.

The time may come when He leads you or me on some journey we dislike. When that happens, trust Him and follow. Remember, His sheep hear His voice and follow Him.

John 11:8

Obviously the disciples are not eager to face the Jewish leaders again. Has God ever lead you somewhere you did not want to go and you just couldn't figure out why? Times like that call for patience and faith. If the 12 disciples had not followed Him back to Bethany, they would not have seen the amazing miracle of Lazarus resurrection. I am sure if I were allow to choose my own path, I would error on the side of ease and no problems and I would never have learned what I know about Jesus.

Remember the Jewish leaders wanted to stone Jesus the last encounter but Jesus still has more to show them. Jesus was not afraid. He knew He was going to die and He knew God would determine the time. The disciples cannot understand why He would do such a strange thing as return where people want to kill Him.

John 11:9-10

Jesus also knew He would be victorious over death, He was as sure as He knew there are 12 hours of daylight. Knowing of God's sovereignty over all things. A paraphrase of this might be "If a man on a journey walks during daylight hours, he sees his road, and does not stumble or fall, because the sun, which is the light of the world, shines on his path. If however a man on a journey chooses to walk at night he is likely to stumble or fall because he has no light on his path. My daylight hours are not over yet so there is no fear of my life being cut off before the time. Until my hour has come I am safe".

Jesus stated again, that we need light to keep from stumbling. We need Him and the light He gives our life to keep from stumbling around in the darkness of our ignorance. Before Jesus lighted my life, the darkness was dangerous, because I wasn't even aware of it. Now I have His light, when I ask He gives more Light.

John 11:11-13

Jesus realized the disciples had missed the point.

John 11:14-15

This is hard to hear, it's not what they wanted to happen. . Death is so real, so final. Jesus was not glad Lazarus was dead, He was glad He was not there now we know that Lazarus would soon be alive again, but they did not. For those who believe in the resurrection, death is merely sleep in comparison to eternal life. For the disciples Lazarus death and the miracle of his being raised by Jesus was another opportunity for building their faith.

Now Jesus knew it was time to go to him and it was a walk of between 20 and 30 miles.

#### John 11:16

Probably Thomas expressed what all of them were feeling. They may not have understood why Jesus was going to die but they were loyal. There can be a high cost for being Jesus disciple. Sooner or later you are going to have to go forward.

#### John 11:17

Why was it important for John to let us know that Lazarus had been dead 4 days? In those days, embalming was not done, as we know it today. There was the risk that a person could have suffered some kind of paralysis or stroke and may not be dead after all. Therefore the Jews always waited 3 days for burial, there were then and are now certain rituals for "sitting shiva" or the mourning period with a family death. Some of the rules include; sitting quietly at home, fasting, not preparing food (therefore friends bring food). The Hebrew word shiva means 7 so the mourning period is 7 days. There is no mourning on Sabbath days or holy days but the day is counted. Typically the mourner sits on a low stool, no shoes, does no work while friends come to comfort. Nowadays the burial usually takes place within a day of the death.

All of this is important to note but especially the fact that the Jewish observance had taken place, there were friends and mourners present, proving that Lazarus was really dead. This prevents naysayers from coming up with the idea that the reason Lazarus appeared to be raised is because he never died.

Lazarus had been dead 4 days, in a hot climate; he was a decaying corpse. No one could deny he was dead.

#### John 11:18-19

So this Bethany is only about 2 miles from Jerusalem and since Lazarus and his sisters were well known in the city, many Jewish leaders came out to visit the family. John gave us this information in case we are not familiar with Israel. How many people came out to mourn, the bible says many came. This again proves Lazarus was dead; there would not have been mourners if he were still alive.

It is safe to say that it is clear that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were well known people and anything that happened in their house at Bethany was soon public news in Jerusalem.

#### John 11:20-21

From what we have heard about Martha its no surprise that she ran out to meet Jesus on the road when she heard He was coming. Even at this time she expressed faith as she said "I wish you had been here. I believe you could have healed my brother."

#### John 11:22

She is hoping against hope that everything will turnout OK anyway. It sounds like she still doesn't understand that He is God and He can raise Lazarus.

John 11:23-24

Here Martha reveals what she knows of Jesus and what faith she had. Notice she did not say, "I hope he will rise" but "I know he will rise". This is the assurance we have spoken about earlier. You can know you will be raised to newness of life and eternity with God; it's not a "hope so" issue.

John 11:25-26

Now Jesus is correcting Martha's understanding. He lets her know He needed no one to help Him. He told her He is not merely a human teacher of the resurrection but the Divine Author of all resurrection. In Him is Life. He is the One Who makes resurrection possible. No one but God could say this.

Remember now that Jesus told the woman at the well He was Messiah; He has said He is the Bread of Heaven, the Light of the World, the ex-blind man Son of Man, here He is revealing Himself as the source of resurrection life.

Let's take this statement of Jesus and look at it in 2 parts;

Firstly He says; I am the resurrection, those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, the believer will not experience eternal death. Every believer who has died will yet live, and every one who is still living and believing will die (unless they are raptured), but not eternally. Jesus did not promise to prevent physical death; he guaranteed in Himself to give Secondly; He explains the life; everyone who believes in Him will never die. Jesus Himself is the resurrection and He is the life. Only through a relationship with Him can we experience this resurrection and this life. Only one kind of life-the life of God is truly life. Only it can overcome death. Jesus is this life.

John 11:27

Martha's statement of faith is exactly what God wants to hear from us. Here is a believer acknowledging that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

Have you ever made this faith statement? Do you know Jesus to be Messiah, the Son of the living God? Have you bowed your knee to Jesus as your LORD and Savior? You can pray with me now; Jesus, I understand I am a sinner, I need a Savior. Thank you for taking my punishment for sin and giving me your righteousness. I surrender my life to You, Thank you for promising me eternal life in heaven with You. Amen

The celebration of Jesus resurrection on Easter will become a new and wonderful reality when you recognize that His perfect life can be exchanged for your imperfect life, His suffering, death and burial was to pay your sin debt. His resurrection proves He has overcome death, and gives you life eternal. Not I hope so, but I know so.