

**Introduction: John** has shifted from scenes at the temple during the Jewish high festivals now to a story that happens just outside of Jerusalem in Bethany. If the previous miracles and claims of Jesus weren't enough to inspire belief and enrage the religious elites—this miracle and Jesus' claim is going to set into motion his demise.

**The story takes place in 3 acts...**

### **Act I: The Delay**

- **Jn 11:1** “Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.” We know these people are **not fictional because archeologists** have discovered these three names in an ossuary—an ancient Bethany grave. Jesus received word that his good friend Lazarus from Bethany has fallen gravely ill. Jesus knows their family well. **Mary was the same woman who anointed Jesus's feet with perfume for his burial. Upon receiving the news, Jesus declared that this sickness would not result in death.** He did not say that Lazarus wouldn't die.
- **Jesus waits just long enough to make sure that Lazarus is dead.** Good. And. Dead. It takes a day for the news to reach him. He waits two more days, and it takes a day for him to travel back to Bethany.
- **The Disciples, meanwhile, are understandably jittery** about going back to Bethany—a bedroom community to Jerusalem. They had just escaped with their lives—the death threats and the attempts on Jesus' life came too close for comfort. When Jesus announces they are returning to this hostile territory, **Thomas bravely declares, “Then we will go to die together.”** But ironically, by the end of the story, Thomas' heroic sentiment evaporates as the horrors of Jesus' trial and crucifixion become reality.
- **(v.4) The purpose of this delay was so that the glory of God's one and only Son might be on full display.**
- **(v.15) Jesus did this miracle to reinforce the Disciples' belief.**

**Delays are not always denials.** But delays can be discouraging. It feels like this valley of the shadow of darkness will never end.

**Ultimately, whatever God does is going to bring his Son maximum glory.**

## Act II: The Reassurance

- **Jesus arrives just outside of town and Martha hears of it.** She runs out to meet him 11:21 “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” <sup>24</sup> Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, “**I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?**” <sup>27</sup> “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” Notice her faith is that God will give Jesus whatever he asks. But Jesus doesn’t have to ask. V. 42 he says he is always in deep communion with the Father—she believes as far as she knows.

## Act III: The Resurrection Power

- **There appears to be a large crowd of mourners and this would consist** of the local village coming out to mourn with the family. Jewish custom required 6 days of mourning, and those passing through would have been required by rabbinic law to engage in **sympathetic mourning**. It was considered an act of religious piety.
- **Mary runs out sorrowful, the crowd follows close behind.** When they all arrive Jesus sees Mary weeping, the crowds just theatrically wailing—and he can hold his emotions in no more. 11:33 “When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. <sup>34</sup> “Where have you laid him?” he asked. This word for **deeply moved and troubled** means to be angrily agitated. Deep stirring of spirit because of anger. This whole scene reveals the humanity of Jesus. **And he is deeply agitated—not at their sorrow, not at the crowd—they are his mission field. But the scene reveals a deep river of sorrow in him towards the effects of sin—the permanency of death.** They took him to the mouth of the cave sealed shut with a stone—and 11:35 says, “Jesus wept.” The word for weep here is used in other contexts to mean **wail aloud**. **Can you see it. The sisters weeping over the loss of their loved one. The friends and villagers**

sympathetically mourning—and Jesus—howling in tears at the losses of sin because of death. Death is the result of the curse.

- **So he commands that they remove the stone.** They protest that breaking the seal on this **airless tomb** will release **a mighty stench**. The cadaver reeks by now. He again reassures them that what His word would not be broken. And standing in front of that tomb with **no fanfare, no fireworks, no rituals or magical incantations**—he simply speaks the words **11:43: When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”**
- **Silence.** And the man who had died came shuffling out wrapped up in his grave clothes.

**Summary of Lazarus’ Story: 11:45-47:** Many believed and those in power plotted Jesus’ demise.

**Let's talk about death.** Because, you can't talk about life unless you first understand the nature of death. **What Jesus was weeping so bitterly over—he wept over the losses of Eden: the loss of life.**

**Let's talk about 3 biblical perspectives on death...**

- **Physical death:** The cessation of body life. No longer interacting with the physical world.
- **Relational/social death:** The cessation of a relationship/estrangement with a family member. Social death.
- **Spiritual death:** The deadening of the spiritual faculties whereby we can perceive accurately the truth about God, about ourselves, and about how to access relationship with God.

**All of this brought by our fall into sin...which has brought that separation. And death reigns and remains unless and until there is some intervening principle.**

**Illus. Thousands of babies and mothers could have been saved** if physicians had only listened to **Dutch scientist and doctor Ignaz Semmelweis.** **There was a problem in the maternity ward in at the General Hospital of Vienna** where Semmelweis had been recently employed. Thousands of women and babies were dying of **Postpartum fever**—which today is very rare. Semmelweis noticed that the **incidents of child and mother death were far higher in the physician's ward than they were in the Midwives' ward.** So he ran a number of observational experiments to determine what the differences were between the midwives and the physicians. While they employed different techniques, **none of them were determinative as the cause of death.** And then he stumbled on the problem.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Doctors had begun to be trained in **scientific methods** and a large part of **their training was performing autopsies in order to collect data** from cadavers on disease. It turns out, that some pathologists were also falling ill to the same fever that the women had.

The physicians, it turns out, were transferring what at the time he called, **“small particles of death”** what we now know as Germs. He had the physicians and their assistants scrub their hands and instruments before touching the children and mothers in the **Maternity Ward—and Shazzam! Eureka.** He discovered that their failure to wash their

hands and their instruments was likely causing these high incidents of mortality. **Hand washing saves the world.** In 1860 Luis Pasteur discovered Germs and Semmelweis was proven right.

Death is the order of the day—until and unless ***we discover and intervening principle***. And the intervening principle is to be washed clean—to be made righteous in God’s sight—then we stop perpetuating the cycle of death all around us. ***The Problem is that we’re the problem.***

***The very first thing Jesus does for his disciples is to breath the life-giving Spirit of God on them.***

**Scripture: Resurrection (Jn. 20:19-29):** And Mary and the Disciples run to the tomb to see if it’s true—Had Jesus risen from the dead as he had told them so many times. Or this some kind of cruel joke. v. 19 “On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”<sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”<sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

***The very first thing Jesus does for his disciples is to breath the life-giving Spirit of God on them.***

**Jesus’ resurrection means that life is restored.** Dead people come out of their graves. This even is the great reversal of the human plight.

- **Spiritual life:** In place of the spiritually deadened heart, we are now made alive in Christ. Able to perceive the truth; able to sense genuine godly conviction over sin; able to confess and entrust our very lives to him. Spiritually reborn, renewed, changed forever.
- **Relational life:** As a result we are relationally restored in Christ. Our sin brought an offense to God’s law which required a Judge’s pardon; A defilement which requires cleansing; Enslavement and bondage which required emancipation; an incalculable debt that required payment; bringing a sentence that demanded punishment; And Christ has won it all. And we are reconciled. ***That is relational life.***

- **Physical life: A new resurrected body, never to die again.** Everyone in the room is going to die someday. I would also venture to guess that barring a special miracle of God to bring you back in this life; you'll stay physically dead. **Unless you're a believer and follower of Jesus.**

**1 Cor. 15:52** "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed."—at the resurrection we will receive a body fit for eternity; for the high beams of heaven's glory.

**The way to the Resurrection and the Life:** (1) Not a religious path—the false gospel of "Try Harder." (2) Not a philosophy on life—the false gospel of "Innovative Deep Thoughts", or (3) a political ideology—the false gospel of partisan allegiance; or (4) It's not the false gospel of the American dream! Because there is nothing in all that but death.

**Jesus told Lazarus' sisters that** "I Am the resurrection and the life; He who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

**Closing Story:** A little boy and his father were driving down a country road on a beautiful spring afternoon. Suddenly out of nowhere a yellow jacket flew in the car window. Since the little boy was **deathly allergic to bee stings** he became petrified. His father quickly reached out, grabbed the bee, squeezed it in his hand, and then released it. But as soon as he let it go, the young son became frantic once again as it buzzed by the little boy.

The father sensed his son's terror. Once again he reached out his hand, but this time he pointed to this hand. There, stuck in his skin was the stinger of the bee. **"You see this?"** he asked. **"You don't need to be afraid anymore. I've taken the sting for you."**

The Christian does not need to be afraid of death because Christ has taken the sting out of death and sin.

**Benediction: Scripture: Colossians 2:13-15** “And you, who **were dead** in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having **forgiven us all our trespasses**,<sup>14</sup> by **canceling the record of debt** that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, **nailing it to the cross**.<sup>15</sup> He **disarmed the rulers** and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”