

The Gospel of John

Lesson 8

John 11:1 - John 12:11

Lazarus' sickness

John 11:1 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. **2** It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. **3** So the sisters sent word to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." **4** But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it."

Jesus is still in Bethany beyond the Jordan River when He hears the news of Lazarus' illness. There are two Bethanys and Lazarus lives in the one that is just two miles southeast of Jerusalem. They are about a two-day journey apart. Chronologically, the Gospel of Luke indicates that Jesus has just told the parable of the rich man and Lazarus; however, there is nothing in any of the ancient texts to connect the Lazarus of the parable with this man. Although it hasn't happened yet, John tells the story of Mary's anointing the Lord with oil. John is giving this information simply to identify her because Mary is the most common name among women in Jesus' day. Martha is the older of the two sisters and we must not confuse this Mary with Mary Magdalene.

The sisters call to Jesus in desperation, understanding that He loves Lazarus greatly. In many ways, the sickness of Lazarus is a sequel to the man born blind whom Jesus healed during His last visit to Jerusalem; both healings are performed to glorify God and to show His power manifested in the Son of God.

Lazarus' death

John 11:5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. **6** So when He heard that he was sick, He then 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 seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" **9** Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. **10** "But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." **11** This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." **12** The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." **13** Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. **14** So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, **15** and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." **16** Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him."

Jesus purposely delays going to Bethany for two days so that Lazarus will die. Jesus intends to go to Jerusalem after He goes to Bethany, and He informs the apostles of His plan. They are astounded by His determination to return to the city where the Jews were seeking to stone Him just a few weeks before.

Jesus returns to the symbol of light and darkness. His reference to the twelve hours of daylight is indicative of His full confidence in the Father's plan. Jesus walks around in the

glaring sunlight in full view, but His accusers lurk in the darkness of night or the corners of secluded rooms. He will not stumble in the light of day.

His announcement concerning Lazarus is misunderstood by the apostles. Here Jesus uses the Hebraism of "sleep" when He mentions the death of Lazarus. Misinterpreted, Jesus plainly says, "Lazarus is dead," and his death is to glorify God so many will believe. In Thomas' mind, since Lazarus is dead, they will kill Jesus and His apostles. Thomas is ready to die.

Martha and Jesus

John 11:17 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning *their* brother. ²⁰ Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. ²¹ Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." ²² "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." 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; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies," ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world." ²⁸ When she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you."

The sisters bury Lazarus before sunset, according to their custom, on the same day that he dies. Four days pass before Martha greets Jesus on His way to their house. She says that if Jesus had come before her brother's death, He could have saved him. She has seen Jesus heal many in the last three years, but she never expects Him to raise Lazarus from the dead now. Four days is a long time after death and the stench of decaying flesh is unbearable. Jesus says, "Do you believe?" Notice that Jesus did not say, "Do you have faith?" The two words are different. Martha's faith is in Christ, but Jesus wants to know the level of her belief in His ability. Martha slips in to tell Mary the news that Jesus has arrived. She is careful to whisper the news because some of the Jews from the Sanhedrin are visiting her home.

Mary and Jesus

John 11:29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and was coming to Him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha met Him. ³¹ Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her *also* weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, ³⁴ and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see."¹⁰⁰ ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews were saying, "See how He loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?"

¹⁰⁰ Psalm 82:6

Mary is also fully aware of the power of the Lord and the things He can do. Rushing to Him, she bows to worship at His feet. The Jews follow Mary, and when they see her bowing to Jesus, division is once again seen in their ranks. Some see the emotion of Jesus and speak about it in terms of love; others use the moment as an opportunity to question His authority and His claim of being God. The opening of the blind man's eyes must have made an impression on some of the Sanhedrin several weeks before, if not two to three months before, but the nay-sayers still remember the miracle as a way to chide Jesus.

Lazarus' tomb

John 11:38 So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been *dead* four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴² "I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me." ⁴³ When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." ⁴⁴ The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Of the two sisters, Martha is always the one who tries to control the circumstances. She even seeks to stop Jesus from doing what she would love for Him to do. Jesus has promised Lazarus' resurrection and He is not going to disappoint her; neither will He allow the opportunity pass to prove to the Jewish leadership who He is. There is no question that Lazarus is dead; the description of his grave clothes indicates that he has been fully prepared for the grave and nothing else can be done with him. When Jesus dies, He will be buried so quickly that they do not have time to do anything with His body except wrap it in a tunic. Lazarus is in full grave garb, including the cloth wrapped around his head. "Unbind him," Jesus says as Lazarus comes from the tomb. It is a once-in-a-lifetime sight which will pierce the souls of all who are at the tomb that day; some for good and some for evil.

Belief

John 11:45 Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him.

The resurrection of Lazarus is not the first miracle the Jewish leadership has seen, but it is by far the most convincing. It is so convincing that many of the Jews believe in Jesus as their Christ in spite of their rule that will put them out of the synagogue. Their belief is so strong that they are willing to break the rule. Judaism is no longer their faith; belief in Christ is.

Caiaphas' prophetic words

John 11:46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. ⁴⁸ "If we let Him *go on* like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, ⁵⁰ nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." ⁵¹ Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being

high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation,¹⁰¹ **52** and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.¹⁰²

The report of the miracle stirs the wrath of the Jerusalem Pharisees who did not see the miracle. They are afraid of Jesus and assume He is going to overthrow the government and do away with their positions of authority. Even though the prophecies of their Scripture describe the Father's plan, they are ignorant of the text and see only that they have to kill Jesus soon. Unknowingly, Caiaphas speaks a word of prophecy that explains that Jesus is the "one [who] will die for all the people so that an entire nation will not perish." Why did Caiaphas say this? Caiaphas is simply ordained to help fulfill the plans of God.

To Ephraim

John 11:53 So from that day on they planned together to kill Him. **54** Therefore Jesus no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples.

The resurrection of Lazarus is the last straw for the Sanhedrin; his death is now their only desire. Jesus is aware of their plans and decides not to enter Jerusalem for a while but goes to Ephraim, a city that is two days north of Jerusalem, where He continues His ministry. It is in the small mountain range that parallels the Jordan River. The city is located at the southernmost border of the land given to Ephraim when the Israelites conquered the Promised Land between 1405 – 1400 BC. It is 300 feet above the level of Jerusalem and cooler than the Holy City.

List of events in the life of Jesus from the other Gospels not included in John's Gospel

EVENT	SCRIPTURE PASSAGE
Jesus heals the ten lepers.	Luke 17:11-14
The Samaritan returns to see Jesus.	Luke 17:15-19
The Pharisees ask Jesus about the kingdom.	Luke 17:20-21
Jesus warns the apostles about the future.	Luke 17:22-37
Jesus tells the story of the unjust judge.	Luke 18:1-8
Jesus tells the parable of the Pharisees and the tax collector.	Luke 18:9-14

Jesus stays in Ephraim for just a short while and then begins His slow journey to Jerusalem by way of the Jordan River. The trip will include the miracles at Jericho and His meeting with Zaccheus.

List of events in the life of Jesus from the other Gospels not included in John's Gospel

EVENT	SCRIPTURE PASSAGE
Jesus goes to Judea by way of the Jordan River.	Matt. 19:1; Mark 10:1
The multitudes follow Jesus.	Matt. 19:2
The Pharisees ask Jesus about divorce.	Matt. 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-9

¹⁰¹ **Isaiah 53:8** By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living, For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due?

¹⁰² **Isaiah 49:6** He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

The apostles ask Jesus about divorce.	Matt 19:10-12; Mark 10:10-12
Jesus blesses the little children.	Matt. 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17
The rich young ruler comes to Jesus.	Matt. 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-27; Luke 18:18-27
Jesus speaks of the apostles reward.	Matt. 19:27-30; Mark 10:28-31; Luke 18:28-30
Jesus teaches how the first will be last.	Matt 20:1-16
Jesus predicts His death while he is on the road to Jerusalem.	Matt. 20:17-19; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34
James and John request to be first and second in the kingdom.	Matt. 20:20-24; Mark 10:35-41
Jesus heals the blind man near Jericho.	Matt 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43
Zaccheus is converted near Jericho.	Luke 19:1-10
The blind men are healed near outside Jericho.	Luke 19:11-27

John 11:55 Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover to purify themselves. ⁵⁶ So they were seeking for Jesus, and were saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?" ⁵⁷ Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he was to report it, so that they might seize Him.

As Jesus approaches Jericho, He heals the blind man outside the city, and then He calls Zaccheus down from the tree and stays with him in his home. On the way out of Jericho, Jesus heals more people. It is now time for Passover, and the Jews from all over the world are making their journey to Jerusalem for the feast. In Jerusalem, the Pharisees and Sadducees from all the regions in Israel have gathered in preparation for the feast, and they are all wondering if Jesus will come for this meeting. Jesus did not attend the Passover in Jerusalem the year before, but they did see Him at the Feast of Dedication the previous December. Nevertheless, the chief priests have ordered that if Jesus shows Himself in Jerusalem, He is to be arrested by the temple police.

Six days before Passover, AD 30

John 12:1 Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining *at the table* with Him. ³ Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, ⁵ "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?" ⁶ Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. ⁷ Therefore Jesus said, "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. ⁸ "For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me."

Just a short distance from Jericho is Bethany, the city where Jesus' friends Lazarus, Martha, and Mary live. It is six days before the Passover of AD 30, and Jesus, with His apostles, are staying in the home of His three friends. While Martha is busy preparing for the guests, Mary is more interested in worshiping Jesus. We do not know where all the apostles are; however, Judas Iscariot is near enough to see Mary's act of worship.

Judas is the keeper of the money bag for the apostles and it has been common practice for him to steal portions of the donations from the bag for his own use. Jesus knows he is a thief but overlooks his sin because he is part of God's plan. Judas, desperate for money, is incensed when Mary pours the oil on Jesus and wipes His feet with her hair. It seems to be a common thread among thieves who are insiders to try to justify their greed and jealousy by using the argument of "the needs of the poor." Judas is not intending to help the poor

and neither does any other thief in the same position. If Judas could have gained possession of the oil, he probably would have used the money for his own purposes.¹⁰³

Jews visit Lazarus' home

John ^{12:9} The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. ¹⁰ But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.

As stated earlier, the resurrection of Lazarus has posed an enormous problem for the Sanhedrin and they have determined the need to eliminate him and Jesus. They believe that if they can kill Lazarus, it will turn the new believers from their newfound faith in Christ. They also believe that after they kill Jesus, their personal lives and religious work will return to normal and be just as it was before the arrival of John the Baptist. Therefore, their visit to Lazarus' home is twofold; they plan to seize Jesus and kill Lazarus, but neither happens. With the dawn of the next day, Jesus sends two apostles on a mission.

An event in the life of Jesus from the other Gospels not included in John's Gospel

EVENT	SCRIPTURE PASSAGE
Jesus decides it is time to go to Jerusalem so he sends two apostles for the colt.	Matt 21:1-7; Mark 11:1-7; Luke 19:28-35

The other Gospels cover the details of Jesus' sending the two apostles to retrieve the colt on Sunday morning; therefore, John does not retrace the story. Rather, John picks up his Gospel in union with the other three with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem in the afternoon, the act which begins Jesus' last week before His death.

¹⁰³ Also found in Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9