



Death & Life

John 11:1-44

Story Elements

- ❑ *People:* The main people in the story¹ are Jesus, Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Martha and Mary are sisters.² Lazarus is their brother. They are good friends with Jesus.
- ❑ *Place:* Martha, Mary and Lazarus live in Bethany. Bethany is located less than 3 km east of Jerusalem, along the road to Jericho. The story begins with Jesus east of the Jordan River.³
- ❑ *Time:* This story occurs roughly 6 weeks before Jesus' death. About 2 months earlier, Jesus had been in Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication, but he left after some Jews attempted to kill him (*John 10:22-40*).⁴ Read John 11:1-44.

Sickness, Death & Sorrow

- ❑ Lazarus was very sick, so Martha and Mary sent word to Jesus (*11:3*). However, before Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus died. Lazarus' death resulted in much sorrow. As Martha and Mary grieved, many Jews came "to comfort them in the loss of their brother" (*11:19*).



1. Why did Lazarus die?⁵ Assuming Jesus could have prevented his death, why did Jesus allow Lazarus to die?⁶ Consider Jesus' words (*11:4, 14-15*).⁷

Sorry, Too Late?

- ❑ When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he did not leave immediately. Instead, "he stayed where he was two more days" (*11:6*).⁸ Jesus' response seems late, but he responded according to the Father's will. (The Lord does not always answer prayer as expected.)
- ❑ At the right time, Jesus started toward Bethany (*11:7, 14*). Though it was dangerous for Jesus to go there (*11:8*), he knew he had work to do, and his disciples did too (*11:9*). Jesus told his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep;⁹ but I am going to wake him up" (*11:11*).

¹ John presents this "story" as a *true* story. Along with the other accounts in John's gospel, it is "written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (*20:31*).

² Mary and Martha are also mentioned in Luke 10:38-42. Lazarus is mentioned only here (in John 11-12).

³ John 10:40 says, "Jesus went back [from Jerusalem] across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days". The precise location is unknown. The traditional location is opposite Jericho, about one day travel from Bethany. However, some scholars argue the location is Batanea, which is much farther north, about 3-4 days from Bethany. See http://www.ancientsandals.com/overviews/bethany_beyond_the_jordan.htm for discussion.

⁴ They attempted to "stone" Jesus because of his supposed blasphemy – his "claim to be God" (*10:31-33*).

⁵ Lazarus was sick (*11:1*). Death is caused by various things – e.g., sickness, natural catastrophes (like earthquakes), accidents, war, murder, old age. Death is one of the characteristics of this world. Everyone dies physically.

⁶ Considering Jesus' healing abilities (even from a distance) it is reasonable to believe that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus' death, as Martha and Mary realized (*11:21, 32; also 11:37*). Of course, it is obvious that God allows "bad things" to happen to people, including Christians. Sometimes he intervenes supernaturally, but he usually does not. In any case, God can use "bad things" to accomplish his good purposes, as he does in this story.

⁷ Only God could raise Lazarus from the dead, so God's glory would be revealed in and through his Son – Jesus Christ (*11:4*). This revelation of God's power through Jesus would strengthen the faith of his followers (*11:14-15*).

⁸ In verse 6, the NIV translates *oun* as "Yet", but it is better translated "therefore" or "so". He delayed leaving because of his love for Lazarus' family and the disciples, as well as the glory of God (*11:4-5, 14-15*). By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been dead 4 days (*11:17*) making his resurrection all the more amazing.

Comfort & Hope

- ❑ As Jesus approached, Martha went out to him. It was too late for Jesus to prevent Lazarus' death, but Martha knew that God would give Jesus whatever he asked (11:21-22). Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again" (11:23). Like most first-century Jews, Martha believed in "the resurrection at the last day".¹⁰ But Jesus had something more in mind.

Conqueror¹¹ of Death

- 📖 "Jesus told [Martha], 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die' (11:25-26a).
- 2. What do you think Jesus meant by this statement?¹² What questions do you have about it? If you have believed in Jesus, how does this affect your life?

Crying & Weeping

- ❑ Martha believed that Jesus was "the Christ" and "the Son of God" (11:27), but she did not expect what Jesus was about to do (11:39). Martha returned and called her sister, and Mary went quickly to Jesus and fell at his feet (11:28-29, 32). Mary was crying. Others were also loudly crying. Jesus was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled...Jesus wept" (11:33, 35)¹³

Come Out!

- ❑ Jesus went to Lazarus' tomb and told them to remove the stone (11:39). He gave thanks to the Father, then called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" (11:43). Lazarus came out!
- 3. Why did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead?¹⁴



The Life & You

- After saying, "I am the resurrection and the life", Jesus asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" (11:26). What about you? If you do not believe, keep seeking knowledge about Jesus.
- As a believer, reflect on question 2. "The life" is the resurrection life of Jesus. To live "the life" is to live in the realization of Jesus' victory over death. Yes, we will experience trouble, suffering, and physical death. But read Romans 8:28-39 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58.

⁹ "fallen asleep" (*kekoimētai*) – a metaphor for death. For the Christian, death is not final.

¹⁰ The Bible teaches a future resurrection of all people at the end of this age (Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:12-13). "Resurrection" refers to a return to bodily life after a person has died. Believers will rise to everlasting life in the presence of God, while others will rise to condemnation.

¹¹ A "conqueror" is one who overcomes or defeats an enemy. Jesus claimed to be the conqueror of death.

¹² As "the resurrection", Jesus provides for the future, final resurrection (John 5:21, 25-29; 6:39-40). Whoever believes in Jesus will be raised to everlasting life in a new, imperishable body suitable for the new creation. As "the life", Jesus provides eternal life the moment a person believes in him. Whoever believes in Jesus has everlasting life now, and this life continues through death. Physical death is the gateway to further life in fellowship with God.

¹³ Why was Jesus "deeply moved in spirit and troubled"? Why did Jesus weep? Bible scholars differ. Based on the Greek word translated "deeply moved", some say that Jesus was angry at sin, death and/or unbelief. Others say that Jesus was moved by empathy. Perhaps it was a combination of these things. The word used for Jesus' weeping (*dakryō*) is different from the word used for Mary and the Jews (*klaiō*). *Dakryō* is more of a quiet weeping.

¹⁴ The raising of Lazarus anticipated Jesus' own resurrection (roughly six weeks later) and revealed Jesus as "the resurrection and the life". Truly, Jesus is the conqueror of sin and death, and the giver of eternal life.