

JOHN

Chapter 11

The Death of Lazarus

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.” ⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, **“This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”** ⁵ Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. ⁷ Then he said to his disciples, **“Let us go back to Judea.”** ⁸ “But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?” ⁹ Jesus answered, **“Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world’s light. ¹⁰ It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light.”** ¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, **“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”** ¹² His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” ¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. ¹⁴ So then he told them plainly, **“Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”** ¹⁶ Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

11:1-53 During the season of Lent we have witnessed the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, the Samaritan woman at the well, the healing of a man born blind, and the Savior’s prediction of his death and encouragement for his disciples to live as humble servants. All of these accounts point to our Savior’s power over sin, Satan, and the sickness of this world. Today’s Gospel carries this power over the final enemy of death and points to our Savior’s own glory in the cross and the empty tomb. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

This chapter of John’s Gospel is divided into three distinct sections. The first (vv 1–16) is introductory to the rest of the chapter. The second (vv 17–44) deals with the resurrection of Lazarus. The third (vv 45–57) speaks of the decision of the Sanhedrin that Jesus must die. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

Commentators have noted the detailed, eyewitness character of the events in this chapter. (TLSB)

11:1-6 The verb/noun combo, *astheneō* and *hē astheneia*, literally “to be weak” and “weakness,” respectively, are here translated “to be ill” and “illness.” The frequency here (five times) underscores Lazarus’s desperate condition. John’s editorial reference to

Mary in v 2 clearly links her to the anointing accounts in Mt 26:6–13 and Mk 14:3–9, soon to be told also in Jn 12:1–8. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

11:1 Lazarus. Mentioned only in chs. 11–12 of John’s Gospel (the name is found also in the parable of Lk 16:19–31). The sisters are mentioned in Lk 10:38–42. (CSB)

Brother of Martha and Mary; friend of Jesus. Name means “God has helped.” He appears only in Jn 11–12. (TLSB)

“Lazarus,” the Greek form of Eliezer, “God is my help.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

11:2 poured perfume. See 12:3. (CSB)

11:3 the one you love. The relationship must have been exceptionally close. (CSB)

Equivalent to “close friend.” (TLSB)

The Greek word used for “love” was one that stressed the friendship between the two. “Jesus, your good friend is sick.” It was, implicitly, a simple prayer: “Jesus, we have a problem. We know you will help us.” (PBC)

This was not a request for Jesus to come, but information for him indicating the sisters knew that he would want to know about Lazarus because he cared so much for the family. It confirms the kind of relationship Christians ought to share with other believers. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

The prospect of losing their brother was painful and frightening. They would miss him terribly. Besides that, who would take care of them and provide for them if he were gone. (LifeLight)

11:4 Cf. 9:3. *This sickness will not end in death.* Thus predicting the raising of Lazarus (v. 44), since Jesus already knew of his death (v. 14). In fact, Lazarus must have died shortly after the messengers left Bethany, accounting for the “four days” of vv. 17, 39: one day for the journey of the messengers, the two days when Jesus remained where he was (v. 6; see 10:40), and a day for Jesus’ journey to Bethany. But see note on v. 17. (CSB)

Lazarus will not stay dead, proving Jesus’ claim (cf v 25). (TLSB)

“not end in death.” Jesus did not say that Lazarus would not die, but only that the final result and outcome of his sickness would not end in death. “For God’s glory” expresses the purpose of his illness, which was to manifest God’s power over death among mankind and lead people to believe in Christ as the Savior. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

glory. See notes on 7:39; 12:41; 13:31. Here God's Son would be glorified through what happened to Lazarus, partly because the miracle displays the glory of God (who alone can raise the dead; see 5:21) in Jesus (v. 40) and partly because it would help initiate events leading to the cross (vv. 46–53). (CSB)

Lazarus's illness provided an occasion for the Father to reveal His Son's glory, that all should honor the Son as they honor the Father (5:23). (TLSB)

11:5-6 Jesus' delay was not due to a lack of love for His friends; quite the opposite. Obedient to His Father's will, Jesus helped this dear family at the hour the Father appointed for the manifestation of His power and grace. Cf. 9:2. (TLSB)

11:5 JESUS LOVED – This time the Greek word for “love,” *agape*, meant more that “was friends with.” *Agape* is the godly love that understands those loved, cares for them, and acts in their favor. (PBC)

11:6-7 Jesus and his disciples were east of the Jordan River, where they had gone to escape the Jews who had wanted to seize him (Jn 10:39–40). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

11:6 *he stayed where he was*. Jesus moved as the Father directed, not as people (here Mary and Martha) wished (cf. 2:3–4). (CSB)

Here we learn that there is such a thing as a loving delay. In order to do what is best for all concerned, our Lord sometimes takes His time in responding to our pleas for help. He has a wonderful sense of timing. Because He loves us so much, He waits with His help until we will get maximum benefit from it. (LifeLight)

11:7-10 In their last trip to Judea and Jerusalem, Jesus was almost stoned twice (Jn 8:57–59; 10:31–39). Jesus, however, is undeterred. Echoing language from last Sunday's Gospel (in particular, Jn 9:4–5), Jesus relates to his disciples that there is nothing to fear—yet. His death will come in due time, but no sooner than that. Meanwhile, he has work to do. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

11:8 A SHORT WHILE AGO – As recently as the Feast of Dedication (10:31, 39). Events of chapter 11 would have transpired shortly afterward. (TLSB)

the Jews. See note on 1:19 – (the phrase occurs about 70 times in this Gospel. It is used in a favorable sense (e.g., 4:22) and in a neutral sense (e.g., 2:6). But generally John used it of the Jewish leaders who were hostile to Jesus (e.g., 8:48). Here it refers to the delegation sent by the Sanhedrin to look into the activities of an unauthorized teacher.) (CSB)

tried to stone you. See note on 10:31. There was clear danger in going into Judea. (CSB)

The disciples were not surprised when Jesus stayed where He was after the message about Lazarus reached Him. The authorities in Jerusalem were after His life. Why should He walk into their trap? That Jesus stayed where He was – in the wilderness where John had carried out his ministry – did not surprise them. What did surprise them was when Jesus announced that He was going to go to Lazarus near Jerusalem after all. Jesus was quite unconcerned about His enemies. They could do nothing to Him until His time came. (LifeLight)

11:9-10 Jesus spoke figuratively of daylight and darkness to teach that as long as He, the light of the world, is among His disciples (both then and now), they are safe. (TLSB)

11:9 *twelve hours*. Enough time for what must be done, but no time for waste. (CSB)

Night would come when He would suffer and die. But it had not yet come. It was daylight, and He was able to go safely on His way. (LifeLight)

Although Jesus' words here answered the disciples question about why they were going, we can see other symbolism too. Jesus at the beginning of this gospel was already identified as "the light of men" (1:4). Those, then who walk with Jesus walk in the day, and His light keeps them from stumbling. But those who walk in the night, in the darkness of sin, stumble because they do not have the light of Jesus in them. We have no indication that the disciples understood what Jesus meant here. Most likely they were puzzled by His actions and by His response to their concerns. (PBC)

11:11-16 Jesus, using a common euphemism for death, declares that Lazarus has now "fallen asleep" (*koimaō*). The disciples, however, don't catch it, instead misinterpreting Jesus' words as a positive turn of events—namely, that Lazarus's fever has broken and sleep has come. Meanwhile, Thomas's call to go "die with him" (v 16) seems quite strange in view of Jesus' reassurance of a safe trip and promise of a resurrection to boot. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

11:11 *fallen asleep*. A euphemism for death, used by the unbelieving world as well as by Christians. (CSB)

No mere euphemism; at the hand of Jesus, death is no more serious than sleep (cf. Mk. 5:39; 1 Cor. 15:5). This expression is commonly used of death in the NT (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:6, 20; 1 Thess. 4:13). (TLSB)

Lenski quotes Luther in writing, "to speak of sleeping 'is to indicate secretly the resurrection from the dead, since they who sleep have the hope of rising again.'" (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

11:14 LAZARUS IS DEAD - Jesus clarifies for the disciples that the sleep of Lazarus has just now ended in death, demonstrating our Lord's omniscience. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

11:15 FOR YOUR SAKE – By raising Lazarus, Jesus will demonstrate the truth that He is the resurrection and the life. The faith of His disciples will grow, and for this reason He rejoices. (TLSB)

The phrase “for your sake” holds the emphasis because these sorrows and events surrounding the death of Lazarus are intended for the spiritual welfare of the disciples. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

believe. Cf. 20:31. (CSB)

By raising Lazarus, Jesus will demonstrate the truth that He is the resurrection and the life. The faith of His disciples will grow, and for this reason He rejoices. (TLSB)

11:16 Thomas ... Didymus. The Hebrew word from which we get “Thomas” and the Greek word *Didymus* both mean “twin.” We usually remember Thomas for his doubting, but he was also capable of devotion and courage. (CSB)

we may die with Him. Courageous devotion, or perhaps sarcasm. Thomas understands the mounting danger for those close to Jesus. (TLSB)

Was it devotion and courage or a touch of pessimism and cynicism? We can't be sure. But based on the known threats to Jesus' life and Jesus' own predictions of His death (Mark 8:31, 32), Thomas clearly feared Jesus could be killed in Judea. That meant that His disciples might well also be in danger. (PBC)

11:1–16 Jesus, the Son of God, will raise Lazarus from the dead so that He might be glorified. Death overwhelms us all. Even Christians have difficulty at times accepting God's promise to strengthen faith through adversity. At the hand of Christ, suffering serves God's gracious purpose; even death loses its sting (1Co 15:55–57). • O Lord, strengthen me for the days ahead, that I may bear witness to Your glory. Amen. (TLSB)

Jesus Comforts the Sisters

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. 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.” ²³ Jesus said to her, **“Your brother will rise again.”** ²⁴ Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” ²⁵ Jesus said to her, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”** ²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.” ²⁸ And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” ²⁹

When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. ³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 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. ³⁴ **“Where have you laid him?”** he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then 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?”

11:17-19 The reference to “four days” is usually explained in terms of one day travel for the messenger, the two-day delay, plus an additional day of travel to get to Bethany. The references to a tomb (*to mnēmeion*) and numerous people coming to console Lazarus’s sisters are indications of significant family status, wealth, and reputation. The proximity of Bethany to Jerusalem, here mentioned as being two miles away, would likely add to the number of well-wishers. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

11:17 *four days*. See note on v. 4. Many Jews believed that the soul remained near the body for three days after death in the hope of returning to it. If this idea was in the minds of these people, they obviously thought all hope was gone—Lazarus was irrevocably dead. (CSB)

Perhaps significant because of the rabbinic belief that the soul hovers over the body for three days and then departs when decomposition sets in. John’s point is that only a genuine miracle could account for the raising of Lazarus. (TLSB)

11:18 *less than two miles*. Reflects John’s concern for accuracy. (CSB)

11:19 *to comfort them*. Jewish custom provided for three days of very heavy mourning, then four of heavy mourning, followed by lighter mourning for the remainder of 30 days. It was usual for friends to visit the family to comfort them. (CSB)

Possibly Lazarus and his sisters were of high social standing, thus drawing the attention of many neighbors. (TLSB)

11:20 *she went out to meet him*. Perhaps because as the elder she was hostess. (CSB)

Mary’s decision to remain at the house is a puzzle. Nearly all interpret it in Mary’s favor—that when Martha heard Jesus had finally come, she kept the news to herself and went out to meet Jesus privately. Given the nature of close sisters in general and their identical complaint to Jesus in particular (vv 21, 32), though, we might wonder if, in

fact, Martha did tell Mary, who, in her deep hurt and disappointment, chose to remain seated at the house. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

11:21-22 Martha laments Jesus' absence when Lazarus was sick but confesses her faith and confidence in him as a great prophet. The phrase "even now" expresses her great faith even in the midst of grief and sorrow. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

11:21-27 Martha concludes her complaint—which isn't so much an accusation as it is a statement of fact—with words of tentative hope now that Jesus has finally come. Jesus speaks to that hope with news of Lazarus's impending resurrection. It's possible Martha misinterprets this as a religious cliché, something she has likely heard quite a bit of the past four days. But her response in v 27 is profound—and quite amazing, given our general impression of her from Lk 10:38–42. We would have expected such words of faith from the sister who chose to sit at Jesus' feet, but from the one preoccupied in the kitchen? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

11:21 Repeated by Mary in v. 32. Perhaps the sisters had said this to one another often as they awaited Jesus' arrival. (CSB)

11:22 *whatever you ask*. This comment seems to mean that Martha hoped for an immediate resurrection in spite of the fact that Lazarus's body had already begun to decay. Nothing is too difficult for God to do. (CSB)

A statement of trust and hope that anticipates Lazarus' resurrection to eternal life. Martha did not have the resurrection of Lazarus in mind (cf. v. 39) but affirmed the general truth that God gives Jesus whatever He asks. (TLSB)

11:23 Jesus interrupts Martha regarding the resurrection and is not being ambiguous, but is gently leading her in the revelation about who He is. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

11:24 Martha's confession of the resurrection could certainly be based on OT teachings pertaining to the resurrection such as Dan. 12:2; Ps. 17:15; Job 19:25-27; and perhaps even the vision of Ezekiel. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

Taught by the Pharisees and others but denied by the Sadducees (cf Mt 22:23–33). (TLSB)

11:25-26 Jesus directs Martha's attention away from Lazarus and the ultimate resurrection to himself and what he was about to do, indeed to what he is. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

11:25 *I am*. See note on 6:35 – (In the Greek the words are solemnly emphatic and echo Ex 3:14.) (CSB)

life. See note on 1:4 – (One of the great concepts of this Gospel. The term is found 36 times in John, while no other NT book uses it more than 17 times. Life is Christ’s gift (10:28), and he, in fact, is “the life” (14:6). Jesus was saying more than that he gives resurrection and life. In some way these are identified with him, and his nature is such that final death is impossible for him. He is life (cf. 14:6; Ac 3:15; Heb 7:16). (CSB)

Everlasting life can be found in no one else but Jesus. (TLSB)

He who believes ... will live. See note on 1:7. Jesus not only is life but conveys life to the believer so that death will never triumph over him (cf. 1Co 15:54–57). (CSB)

THOUGH HE DIE – Even those who die physically in faith will rise again to everlasting life. Physical death is no obstacle to the resurrection. Cf 1 Cor. 15. Luther says, “The cemetery or burial ground does not indicate a heap of the dead, but a field full of kernels, known as God’s kernels, which will verdantly blossom forth again and grow more beautifully than can be imagined” (AE 28:178). (TLSB)

11:26 NEVER – The Greek grammar denies even the possibility of something happening. (TLSB)

DO YOU BELIEVE THIS – Jesus’ question probes the heart of every suffering human being. Blessed are those who can answer as Martha did. (PBC)

11:27 *I believe*. Martha is often remembered for her shortcoming recorded in Lk 10:40–41. But she was a woman of faith, as this magnificent declaration shows. (CSB)

Reflects Martha’s conviction as that of Peter in Jn 6:68–69 and of the church, which believes that because Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One who was to come from God. Through him all believers will emerge victorious from death. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

11:17–27 Jesus assures Martha that all who believe in Him, though they die physically, will live forever. Death is the consequence of sin (Gn 2:17; Rm 5:12; 6:23) and eventually takes everyone. No human being can overcome it. Comfort one another in the hope that even in the face of death, believers in Jesus Christ possess the sure promise of their own resurrection to everlasting life. • In the hour of our death, comfort us, O Lord, with the bright hope of life forever with You. Amen. (TLSB)

11:28-35 When Martha returns, she tells Mary privately that Jesus is asking for her. Perhaps it is the look on Martha’s face, but now Mary rises and quickly goes to her Lord, falling at his feet weeping. In response to Mary’s sorrow, Jesus “was deeply moved in his spirit” (v 33). The verb here, *enebrimēsato*, would seem to indicate an audible groan on his part, rather than simply an internal emotional reaction. Also note that Jesus’ weeping in v 35 (*dakruō*) is mainly just tears, as opposed to the loud

weeping and sobbing (*klaiō*) of everyone else, as in v 33. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

11:28 MARY ASIDE – Mary had likely wanted to be alone, away from the gathering crowd of mourners. (TLSB)

The Teacher. A significant description to be given by a woman. The rabbis would not teach women (cf. 4:27), but Jesus taught them frequently. (CSB)

11:29 GOT UP QUICKLY – She longed for Jesus’ help or consolation. (TLSB)

11:30 WHERE MARTHA HAD MET HIM – Jesus would also speak with Mary somewhere on the road to the village. John provides memorable details and the sequence of events, without naming the place. (TLSB)

11:31 to mourn there. Wailing at a tomb was common, and the Jews immediately thought this was in Mary’s mind. Because they followed her, Jesus got maximum publicity. (CSB)

11:32 Cf. v. 21. (CSB)

FELL AT HIS FEET – Poignant demonstration of reverence and faith (similar to her posture in Luke 10:39. (TLSB)

11:33 weeping. Both times the word denotes a loud expression of grief, i.e., “wailing.” (CSB)

DEEPLY MOVED – The Greek word may connote anger, revealing Jesus’ irritation, not only that death had taken His friend, but also that the mourners wept as those without hope (cf. 1 Th. 4:13). (TLSB)

Many English translations fail to do justice to the depth of emotion and response that Jesus had to Mary’s “wailing” in grief and sorrow at the death of her brother when she saw Jesus. The term *ejnebrimavsqai* is used only five times in the New Testament, and elsewhere carries a stern charge connected with a strong emotion (e.g., the account of the healed blind man told not to make known what happened in Mt 9:30, as well as in the case of the healed leper in Mk 1:43–44). Here Jesus makes no stern charge to Mary, but carries a deeper emotion that literally “shakes” and disturbs him, *ejtavraxen eJautovn*, as we also see later in vv 35 and 38. Jesus is greatly agitated and experiences the result of the power of death that brought such pain to the human race. His true humanity is here revealed. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

IN HIS SPIRIT – He did not voice a rebuke or complaint. (TLSB)

troubled. See note on 12:27; cf. 13:21. (CSB)

The Scriptures seldom show us such deep emotion in Jesus. But Jesus cared. His close friend, Lazarus, lay dead in a grave. His sisters were grieving. Even the hope of the resurrection, as Martha had expressed it, did not prevent crying. God had not created us die as Lazarus had. Physical death is a cruel and sad result of sin. (PBC)

11:35 *wept*. The Greek for this word is not the one for loud grief, as in v. 33, but one that denotes quiet weeping, i.e., “shed tears.” (CSB)

Jesus’ heart goes out to those who mourn (cf Mt 5:4; Rm 12:15). (TLSB)

11:36-37 The crowds misinterpret Jesus’ tears as either for himself or the deceased (or both). Regardless, Jesus, the Son of God, is not unmoved by the suffering of others (such as the crowd’s), even though he sees the end from the beginning. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

11:36 Cf. v. 5. (CSB)

11:37 Their position was like that of Martha (v. 21) and Mary (v. 32), but they based it on Jesus’ ability to give sight to the blind (cf. ch. 9).

Perhaps faith was flickering in the hearts of some and they spoke out of confusion. Others may have shut out faith and aid the same words in mockery. (PBC)

11:28–37 When Jesus comes to Mary and Martha’s house and sees great mourning, He is moved to tears over the situation and because of love for His friends. For all people, death and the grave bring loss and the pain of separation. But for Christians, death is only a temporary interruption of the fellowship they share with others in Christ Jesus, who will raise believers up on the Last Day to everlasting life. • O living Savior, when my loved ones die, turn my sorrow into joy as I look forward to our reunion in heaven. Amen. (TLSB)

Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ **“Take away the stone,”** he said. **“But, Lord,”** said Martha, the sister of the dead man, **“by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”** ⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, **“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”** ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, **“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”** ⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, **“Lazarus, come out!”** ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, **“Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”**

11:38-44 Martha seems to misunderstand Jesus’ call to open the tomb, warning him of the smell, as though he only wishes to view the corpse. His audible prayer is to

reinforce the source of the miracle for those observing. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

11:38 CAVE – Burial chamber sealed by a stone. (TLSB)

11:39 *four days*. See notes on vv. 4, 17. (CSB)

The thought of raising a person after four days, when decay had set in, seemed impossible, even to Martha, who confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. (TLSB)

Martha, failing to apply the lesson Jesus taught her earlier (vv 23-26) objected. “He already stinks,” she warned. (PBC)

11:40 *glory*. See note on v. 4. (CSB)

Jesus guides the listeners back to the promise of his power and the fullness of his glory. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

11:41 LOOKED UP – This was the posture of prayer (cf. Mk. 6:41; Lk.18:13; Acts 7:55). (TLSB)

Jesus prays, making clear that this act is a work given him by the Father who sent him. Effected through the Word of Christ, this miracle, as well as his own resurrection, most vividly portrays the glory of his Godhead. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

11:42 Jesus’ prayed publicly so the crowd would know and believe that He was dependent on and obedient to His Father, who had sent Him. (TLSB)

Jesus seeks to turn the faith of the bystanders by praying to his heavenly Father, “I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

11:43 The command for Lazarus to “Come out” parallels John 5:28-29, where also at the sound of his voice “all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

11:44 *strips of linen*. Narrow strips, like bandages. Sometimes a shroud was used (see note on 19:40). (CSB)

Burial customs included wrapping a corpse with strips of cloth, effectively binding it. (TLSB)

a cloth. A separate item. (CSB)

them. People standing near Lazarus. (TLSB)

TAKE OFF THE GRAVE CLOTHES – Reflects Jesus’ sensitivity to personal needs (cf. Mk. 5:43). (TLSB)

Many English translations minimize the literal translation of “loosing” Lazarus from his burial cloths, which can be so vividly associated with the “loosing” of sin talked about in Mt 18:18. Literally, Lazarus was to be set free from that which bound him as we are also set free from the sin that binds us. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

11:38–44 By raising Lazarus, Jesus reveals God’s glory and that He is truly the resurrection and the life. Apart from faith in Christ, the fear of death brings hopelessness and despair. Believers, however, can eagerly look forward to the day when Jesus will call them from their graves to live with Him forever (cf 5:28–29). • O God of life, when death takes one I love, may the promise of our resurrection turn my sorrow into joy. Amen. (TLSB)

The Plot to Kill Jesus

⁴⁵ Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. “What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” ⁴⁹ Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰ You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” ⁵¹ He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, ⁵² and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. ⁵³ So from that day on they plotted to take his life. ⁵⁴ Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples. ⁵⁵ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. ⁵⁶ They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple area they asked one another, “What do you think? Isn’t he coming to the Feast at all?” ⁵⁷ But the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him.

11:45-50 The unbelief and animosity of the Council, in view of a tremendous miracle—that, by the way, they do not deny occurred—is nothing less than startling. Caiaphas, ever the pragmatist, settles on a course that will maintain the status quo. And how revealing is it that God has no place in their discussion! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

11:45 *many of the Jews ... put their faith in him.* Perhaps some who had been opposed to Jesus now came to believe (see note on 1:19; cf. 20:31). (CSB)

The effect of this miracle was that those present saw what Jesus did and believed. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

11:46 *Pharisees.* See notes on Mt 3:7; Mk 2:16; Lk 5:17. (CSB)

Some Jews apparently didn't know what to think. They reported the event to the Pharisees, most of whom were Jesus' enemies. (PBC)

11:47 *the chief priests and the Pharisees.* In all four Gospels the Pharisees appear as Jesus' principal opponents throughout his public ministry. But they lacked political power, and it is the chief priests who were prominent in the events that led to Jesus' crucifixion. Here both groups are associated in a meeting of the Sanhedrin (see note on Mk 14:55). They did not deny the reality of the miraculous signs (see note on 2:11), but they did not understand their meaning, for they failed to believe. (CSB)

MEETING OF THE SANHEDRIN – The Sanhedrin was made up of 71 members, with the requirement that each be at least 30 years old, of good reputation, and know the law. They were the supreme council of the Jewish people. They are called into session (perhaps a regular session, but with a special agenda). Their concern is how to deal with the “Jesus problem.” Note how they disdain using his name; they refer to him as *houtos ho anthrōpos* “this fellow.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

WHAT ARE WE ACCOMPLISHING – Their question (*poioumen* —present tense) “asks what really is being done and thus implies that actually nothing at all is being done about Jesus. (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961], 822). Jesus has become a problem for their purposes and they are spinning their wheels trying to change the situation (Jn 12:19; Acts 4:16–17; 5:25). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

HERE IS THIS MAN – *outos o anthropos* means this fellow. They show a real disdain for his name. The Jewish authorities never want to use Jesus' name. One can trace that through all four Gospels. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

PERFORMING MANY MIRACULOUS SIGNS – This was, especially evident as Jesus was performing many signs and miracles. John uses *semeion* (sign) 17 times to refer especially to the miracles of Christ. Especially notable was his most recent and dynamic miracle, the raising of Lazarus, who had been dead four days. This happened almost in their own backyard, and the area was buzzing with talk of Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

Note the tragic mistake of the Jewish cabinet. “These leaders openly admit the most glorious Messianic deeds and yet do not dream of believing” (Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 823). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

11:48 IF WE LET HIM GO ON – “If we let him go on like this” implies that they think they are in charge of circumstances and simultaneously demonstrates how desperate they really are. “We can’t maintain the status quo!” Note how they project into the future—“will believe” and “will come and take away.” *topon*, translated “place,” could refer to their country as a whole, the capital city, or the Temple. Lenski believes it best refers to the ruling position of the Sanhedrin (Lenski, 824). They were worried about self-preservation. If they were to continue to be in charge, they needed a nation to rule. Note the word is *ethnos*, not *laos* used for a group of people. If Jesus gathered too many followers, a riot or rebellion might ensue, the Romans would crack down, and the Sanhedrin would be out of business! This could not happen! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

place. Probably the temple (see NIV text note and Ac 6:13–14; 21:28), though sometimes the Jews used the expression to denote Jerusalem. (CSB)

Romans reacted harshly against rebellions, riots, and disorder in general. Jewish leaders feared that if Jesus stirred up the mob, the Romans would destroy the temple (“our place”) and the Jewish nation. (TLSB)

11:49 Caiaphas. High priest c. A.D. 18–36. He was the son-in-law of Annas (18:13), who had been deposed from the high priesthood by the Romans in A.D. 15. (CSB)

High priests were ordinarily chosen for life, but that was often not the case under Roman rule. (TLSB)

high priest that year. Means “high priest at that time.” The high priesthood was not an annual office but one supposed to be held for life. (CSB)

You know nothing at all! A remark typical of Sadducean rudeness (Caiaphas, as high priest, was a Sadducee). Josephus says that Sadducees “in their intercourse with their peers are as rude as to aliens.” For Sadducees see notes on Mt 2:4; 3:7; Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27; Ac 4:1. (CSB)

The question is still before them: How can they control things to prevent this from happening? The answer is to come from their highest religious leader, the high priest Caiaphas (18:14). Caiaphas’ regular name was Joseph. He served as high priest from A.D. 18 to 36. “That year” underscores the fact that during this tumultuous, decisive year it was Caiaphas who occupied the chair of high priest. It does not restrict his service to this single year. Unfortunately, the high priests were often corrupt and did not measure up to the standard of service that the Lord intended (Hos 5:1; Micah 3:4; Mt 27:20, 41). Caiaphas belittles their understanding and ability to produce a creative and helpful solution. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

11:50 KNOW NOTHING - Caiaphas chides them again for not considering the perfect and obvious solution. Here it is: “Make a small sacrifice of one man’s life (Jesus) in

order to gain the greater good of preventing the whole nation from perishing.” That means we can get back to our business as usual. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

better. Caiaphas was concerned with political expediency, not with guilt and innocence. He believed that one man, no matter how innocent, should perish rather than that the nation be put in jeopardy. Ironically, the Jews went ahead with their execution of Jesus, and in A.D. 70 the nation still perished. (CSB)

THAT ONE MAN DIE FOR THE PEOPLE – *Huper* here has the connotation of substitution, “instead of.” What a noble concept Caiaphas had; eliminate the one who interferes with us and spare the rest of the nation! There was not unanimous consent to this idea. At least Joseph of Arimathea did not agree (Lk 23:51), and Nicodemus’ agreement is also doubtful. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

His concern was political, but God made his words prophetic. He wanted to preserve a nation on earth, which would be destroyed 40 years later anyway. Jesus, Caiaphas’ intended victim, came to establish a nation that can never be destroyed – namely, the nation of God’s children found everywhere in all times. (PBC)

11:51-53 It seems the Holy Spirit made use of Caiaphas’s pragmatism to turn an apostate high priest into an unwilling prophet—not unlike Balaam (Numbers 22–24). Three things are of special note here: First, Jesus’ upcoming death is salvific, but for more than just the nation that Caiaphas has in mind. It will include all God’s children (see Jn 1:12–13). Second, his substitutionary death will gather, not scatter (see Jn 10:16; 12:32–33). And last, the active planning of Jesus’ execution, now set in motion by the Council, is what Jesus had in view all along. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

11:51 *as high priest.* Caiaphas was not a private citizen but was God’s high priest, and God overruled in what he said. (CSB)

prophesied. His words were true in a way he could not imagine. Prophecy in Scripture is the impartation of divinely revealed truth. In reality Caiaphas’s words meant that Jesus’ death would be for the nation, not by way of removing political trouble, but by taking away the sins of those who believed in him. (CSB)

Caiaphas is compelled by God to utter more than he intends or knows. Like Balaam of old, he must speak what God puts in his mouth (Num 23:12). Despite abuses of the priestly office, the Lord abided with the ministry He established. (Mt. 23:2) (TLSB)

John gives us the real reason Caiaphas spoke that way. How easily we forget that man proposes, but God disposes! The very words that Caiaphas uttered, intending to save his own hide and the power of his Sanhedrin friends, were given by God to him to utter! This is dramatic irony at its best, a character uttering words truer than ever imagined! God has sometimes used rather unusual means as his media messengers. Consider

Balaam (Numbers 24). The Lord honored the high priestly office by allowing Caiaphas to prophesy thus, even though Caiaphas had no idea how powerfully true his words were in God's plan of salvation. Lenski calls this an unconscious, "peculiar case of verbal inspiration" (Lenski, 829). This is pure Gospel! There will be a substitution. Jesus will be the one life substituted for the benefit of the whole Jewish nation, not by avoiding the threat of Roman retaliation for some potential future uprising, but by removing the devastating destruction of sin's results. The imperfect high priest Caiaphas thus unwittingly prophesied about the perfect High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 7:26–27). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

11:52 *for the scattered children of God.* Jesus' death would have effects far beyond the nation (cf. 1:29; 3:16; 4:42; 10:16; etc.). (CSB)

All believers in Jesus Christ, born anew by the Holy Spirit through water and the Word (cf 1:12-13; 3:1-6). St Bernard of Clairvaux states, "We see flourish again under our eyes the wood whereon the Lord of Glory hung, who died not for His own nation only...He, yes, He Himself draws you, who loves you as His own flesh, as the most precious fruit of His cross, as the most worthy recompense of the blood He shed" (SLSB, p. 165). (TLSB)

MAKE THEM ONE – God's plan brings blessings beyond the border of the "nation." God has designed that salvation and life with him are gifts given to all who will receive him by faith, wherever they may live in the world. They may be scattered around the face of the globe, but rest assured the Lord knows those who are his. More important than being subjects of Rome or under the rule of the Sanhedrin is God's gracious outreach to make them "children of God" (Rom 8:16; Jn 10:16; Acts 18:10; 1 Jn 3:1). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

Interestingly enough, when God reaches down with his powerful love to reunite sinners with himself, a growing horizontal kinship also ensues. This is not a partnership along lines of race, ethnicity, or politics. It results from the Gospel bringing and binding us together (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 10:17; 12:12–13; Gal 3:28), making us "one holy Christian church." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

11:53 **THEY PLOTTED TO TAKE HIS LIFE** – The decision was made. All that was left to do was to devise the mechanics of executing the decision, executing Jesus. They plotted—formed a conspiracy (Mt 12:14; 26:4; 27:1; Luke 6:11). They forged ahead with their plan, deluded into thinking they have things under their control. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

11:54 *he withdrew.* Jesus was not to die before his "time" (see note on 2:4), but he would not act imprudently. Knowing the attitude of his opponents, he withdrew. He would die for others, but in his own time, not that of his enemies. (CSB)

Ephraim. If it was the city known as Ophrah, it was about 15 miles north of Jerusalem. (CSB)

11:55 *Passover*. See notes on 2:13; 5:1. (CSB)

ceremonial cleansing. Especially important at a time like Passover, because without it, it would not be possible to keep the Feast (cf. 18:28; see note on 2:6). (CSB)

Purification rites took place one week before the Passover. Nothing unclean could come into the Lord's presence (cf Lv 7:21; Nu 9:6). (TLSB)

This probably included washing their clothes, abstaining for sex (Ex 19:10-15), and avoiding anything, like a dead body, that would make them unclean (Nu 9:9-14).

11:56 *Isn't he coming ... ?* The question expected the answer "No." (CSB)

11:45–57 After Jesus raises Lazarus, Jewish leaders become hardened in their opposition to Him and plot to kill Him before the Passover. Unbelief hardens the heart, making a person callous to God's acts of grace, mercy, and compassion. By daily repentance and prayer, dedicate yourself to fulfilling your calling faithfully. Rejoice that nothing stopped Jesus from graciously giving His life for all people at God's appointed time and gathering His children to Himself. • Heavenly Father, draw me ever closer to You through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen. (TLSB)