

Bible Nerd Guide

John 11:1-45 The Raising of Lazarus

Key Theme

John 11 presents Jesus not only as one who gives life, but as **the embodiment of resurrection itself**, revealing that God's future victory over death has broken into the present.

1. Literary Context in John's Gospel

John 11 is widely understood as the **climactic "sign"** in the Gospel before Jesus' own death and resurrection.

The Flow of John's Signs

- Water → wine (John 2)
- Healing the official's son (John 4)
- Healing the paralytic (John 5)
- Feeding the 5,000 (John 6)
- Healing the blind man (John 9)
- **Raising Lazarus (John 11)**

This final sign escalates everything:

- Previous miracles restore life or function
- This miracle **reverses death itself**

Narrative Turning Point

Immediately after this event:

- Leaders decide Jesus must die (John 11:53)

Scholars like **N. T. Wright** emphasize that this moment functions as a hinge:

Jesus gives life... and in doing so, sets in motion the events that lead to his own death.

2. Structure of the Passage

John 11 is carefully structured to build tension and meaning.

A. The Problem Announced (11:1-6)

- Lazarus is sick
- Jesus delays

B. The Journey and Misunderstanding (11:7-16)

- Disciples misunderstand “sleep”
- Jesus speaks of death and purpose

C. Martha’s Encounter (11:17-27)

- Confession of faith
- “I am the resurrection and the life”

D. Mary’s Encounter (11:28-37)

- Grief intensifies
- Jesus weeps

E. The Sign at the Tomb (11:38-44)

- Stone removed
- Lazarus raised

F. The Aftermath (11:45-53)

- Many believe
- Leaders plot to kill Jesus

This structure creates a movement from:

Delay → Death → Revelation → Resurrection → Opposition

3. The Delay of Jesus (11:5-6)

John states:

“Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So... he stayed where he was two more days.”

This is one of the most theologically striking statements in the Gospel.

The Logic of the Text

- Jesus loves them
- Therefore, he delays

This challenges assumptions about divine action.

Scholarly Insight

Many scholars (e.g., **Craig Keener**) note that this suggests:

God's purposes are not always aligned with immediate relief of suffering.

Instead, Jesus acts with a view toward:

- revealing God's glory (11:4)
- deepening faith (11:15)

4. Martha's Confession and Johannine Christology

Martha says:

“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” (11:24)

This reflects **mainstream Jewish belief** of the time.

Second Temple Jewish Context

Many Jews (especially Pharisees) believed in:

- a future bodily resurrection
- occurring at the end of the age

Jesus' Response

“I am the resurrection and the life.” (11:25)

This is one of John's “**I am**” (**ἐγώ εἰμι**) statements.

Greek Insight

ἐγώ εἰμι (“I am”) echoes:

- Exodus 3:14 (“I AM WHO I AM”)
- A divine self-identification

John repeatedly uses this phrase to reveal Jesus’ identity.

Theological Shift

Jesus does not deny future resurrection. He **re-centers it around himself**.

Resurrection is no longer only:

- an event in the future

It is now:

- a reality embodied in a person

Scholars like **Scot McKnight** and **N. T. Wright** emphasize this: Jesus brings **future hope into present reality**.

5. Mary, Grief, and the Emotions of Jesus

Mary falls at Jesus’ feet and repeats Martha’s words:

“Lord, if you had been here...”

The repetition highlights shared grief.

Jesus’ Emotional Response

John describes Jesus as:

- “deeply moved” (ἐμβριμάομαι)
- “troubled” (ταράσσω)

These terms can carry strong emotional connotations, including:

- indignation
- agitation
- sorrow

“Jesus Wept” (11:35)

The shortest verse in the Bible carries profound theological weight.

Scholarly Reflection

N. T. Wright and others note: This is not simply sympathy.

It is a sign that:

- God confronts death as an enemy
- Jesus enters into human suffering fully

This moment aligns with broader biblical theology:

Death is not “natural” in the sense of being good, it is an intruder into God’s good creation (cf. Genesis 1-3).

6. The Tomb and Burial Context

John describes the tomb as:

- a cave
- with a stone laid across it

This matches **first-century Jewish burial practices**.

Key Cultural Detail

Martha says:

“There will be an odor.”

This reflects:

- the reality of decomposition
- the finality of death

The Four-Day Detail

The mention of four days is significant. Some Jewish traditions held that:

- the soul lingered near the body for three days

After that:

- death was considered irreversible

John emphasizes: This is not a resuscitation. This is a **true reversal of death**.

7. The Raising of Lazarus as a “Sign”

John consistently calls miracles “**signs**” (σημεία).

This indicates that they point beyond themselves.

What Does This Sign Reveal?

1. Jesus has authority over death
2. The resurrection age is beginning
3. God’s glory is revealed through Jesus

Important Distinction

Lazarus is raised... but he will die again.

This is not yet **final resurrection**.

Instead, it is:

- a preview
- a foreshadowing

8. Intertextual Connections

A. Ezekiel 37 The Valley of Dry Bones

God brings life to dead bones.

Themes:

- restoration
- divine breath
- life from death

B. Daniel 12:2

“Many who sleep in the dust... shall awake.”

Resurrection hope emerges clearly.

C. Elijah and Elisha Narratives

- 1 Kings 17
- 2 Kings 4

Prophets raise individuals from death.

However:

- Jesus surpasses them
- His authority is intrinsic, not delegated

9. The Voice That Raises the Dead

Jesus calls:

“Lazarus, come out.”

Theological Insight

In Jewish thought, God’s word is **creative and life-giving**.

Genesis 1:

- God speaks → creation responds

John 1:

- The Word becomes flesh

John 11:

- The Word speaks → the dead respond

Personal Address

Jesus calls Lazarus **by name**.

This highlights:

- personal relationship
- individual calling

10. Romans 8 Connection: Resurrection Life Now

Paul writes:

“The Spirit... who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you.” (Romans 8:11)

Key Theological Idea

The resurrection is:

- not only future
- but already at work in believers

Michael Gorman's Contribution

Gorman's participationist theology emphasizes: Believers **participate in the life of Christ**.

This includes:

- present transformation
- future resurrection

11. The Irony and the Cost

After the miracle:

“They made plans to put him to death.” (John 11:53)

Theological Irony

Lazarus is raised... but Jesus will be killed.

Substitutionary Pattern

This moment anticipates a deeper exchange:

- Jesus gives life
- at the cost of his own

Scholars like **N. T. Wright** frame this as: Jesus stepping into death in order to defeat it from within.

12. Major Theological Themes

1. Jesus as Resurrection and Life

Not merely a mediator, but the source of life itself.

2. Already / Not Yet

Future resurrection hope is brought into present reality.

3. Death as an Enemy

Jesus confronts death, not as something neutral, but as something to overcome.

4. Divine Timing

God's delay is purposeful, not indifferent.

5. Faith in Tension

Belief coexists with grief and confusion.

6. The Cost of Life

The raising of Lazarus leads directly to Jesus' death.

Final Summary

John 11 is not simply a miracle story.

It is a theological revelation that:

- Jesus is the embodiment of resurrection life
- God's future victory over death has begun in the present
- death itself is not ultimate
- and the life Jesus brings comes at the cost of his own life

The raising of Lazarus stands as both:

- a sign of what Jesus can do
- and a preview of what he is about to accomplish through his own death and resurrection