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Ezekiel chapter 37

New International Version

1 The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. **2** He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.

3 He asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' I said, 'Sovereign LORD, you alone know.'

4 Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! **5** This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. **6** I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. **8** I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" **10** So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army.

11 Then he said to me: 'Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'

Psalm chapter 130

New International Version

1 A song of ascents. Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD;

2 Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. **3** If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?

4 But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you. **5** I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.

6 I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. **7** Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. **8** He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

Romans chapter 8

New International Version

1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, **2** because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. **3** For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, **4** in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. **6** The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. **7** The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. **8** Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. **10** But if Christ is in you, then even though

your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. **11** And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. Context Summary

Romans 8:1–11 begins with an enormous declaration about the grace of God: There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. After describing how this is possible, thanks to the life and death of Jesus, Paul compares two kinds of life. One is life in the Holy Spirit, for those who are in Christ, the other is a life lived according to the flesh. Those in the flesh, meaning non-Christians, are hostile to God. Christians have the Spirit; those who do not are not Christians. Because the Spirit is in us, we will be resurrected from the dead as Jesus was.

Romans 8:1, NIV: Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

What does Romans 8:1 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Romans 8 is one of the most powerful and popular chapters in all the Bible. In it, Paul describes with great detail what it means to live as Christian, both now and for eternity. The chapter begins, as well, with one of the most comforting statements in all the Bible.

The previous chapter ended with Paul crying out in frustration about his wretchedness and asking who would deliver him from his "body of death." He answered by giving thanks "to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:25). Now he states absolutely why the gospel is such good news for all who believe.

The Greek words translated as "there is therefore now no," as in the ESV, are very emphatic. The literal phrasing is *Ouden ara nyn katakrima*, which accomplishes two things. First, it ties this statement to the claim made in Romans 7:25, according to the word "therefore." Second, it definitively states a permanent, present, and complete lack of "condemnation," from a Greek word meaning "a sentence" or "penalty." In crystal-clear language, the Bible indicates

there is absolutely no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus. None. Zero. Paul's statement leaves no room for even a tiny bit of condemnation to sneak in.

In short, if you are "in Christ Jesus," God will never, ever condemn you for any sin whatsoever. The condition of this statement, however, is crucial: salvation is for those who place their faith in Christ (Romans 3:23–26). There is no other way (Acts 4:12), and those who reject this salvation will not be rescued from condemnation (John 3:18).

How can this be? Paul has already built the case in chapters 3–5 of this letter to the Romans. When we place our faith in Christ, God so closely identifies us with His Son that He gives us credit for Jesus' sinless, righteous life, and He accepts Jesus' death as payment for our death-deserving sin. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

So if God is judging us on the basis of Jesus' righteousness, how could we ever be condemned? God would never condemn Jesus, so He will never condemn those who are seen by God as being in Christ. And how do we come to be "in Christ"? Only by faith (Romans 5:1, Ephesians 2:8–9).

Romans 8:2, NIV: because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

What does Romans 8:2 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul wrote in the previous verse that there is absolutely no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. This verse begins to describe why that is true, and it has much to do with the Holy Spirit. This is only the second mention of the Holy Spirit in Romans, but merely the first of about 19 mentions of the Spirit in chapter 8!

Why is there no condemnation from God for those in Christ Jesus? The law—or principle—of the Spirit of life has set us free in Christ Jesus from the law—or principle—of sin and death. The word used twice as "law" in this verse does not

refer to the law of Moses, about which Paul has written so much in Romans. Instead, it describes the idea of a universal truth.

The first truth or principle is the Spirit of life. Put another way, the Spirit of God always gives or brings life. That notion has set Christians free only in Christ Jesus. Without faith in Christ, we will not be justified by God (Romans 5:1), and if we are not justified we will not receive the Spirit who brings life. Put positively, because we have faith in Christ, God has given to us His Spirit that brings life. That has set us free from the law or principle of sin and death.

That second law is just that sin always, always leads to death. It is the reason we were all condemned to eternal death and separation from God in the first place (Romans 3:23; 6:23). The only way to escape from the law of sin and death is to access the law of the Spirit of life through faith in Christ.

Romans 8:3, NIV: For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh,

What does Romans 8:3 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

This verse continues to explain how it is possible that there is no condemnation from God for those who are in Christ Jesus by faith. This was stated in emphatic terms in verse 1, in a statement flowing directly from Paul's reference to Christ at the end of chapter 7.

Paul has built a clear case that the law of Moses cannot save those who live under it. Instead, the law simply shows that we cannot keep the law (Romans 7:7–12). We cannot escape our sinfulness and make ourselves acceptable to God. He had to step in to save us, and He did. He did what the law—truly, our inability to keep the law—could not do.

What did God do? He sent Jesus, His Son, to earth in a human body just like all the other human bodies. Except Jesus' body was not full of sin (Hebrews 4:15). He never sinned. God sent Jesus in a body so that He could condemn all sin through the punishment of that one sinless body.

As the following verse will show, God did this because it was necessary to fulfill the law's requirement of death for sin and life for righteousness.

Romans 8:4, NIV: in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

What does Romans 8:4 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul is continuing to explain how it can be that God will never condemn those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). In the previous verse, he showed that God acted to save us from the law of sin and death. We were stuck. We all sinned, and we were all condemned to die.

To change this, God sent His Son Jesus to earth as a man who had no sin Himself (Hebrews 4:15). He was sent for sin, to receive God's condemnation of death for sin once for all in His own sinless body (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Now Paul explains that this was necessary in order to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. After all, the law of Moses was given by God. It is His law. He fulfilled the requirements of His law by paying out on His own Son the death we had earned with our sin so that justice was done. Sin was paid for.

This was not a universal action for all people as a group. This death for sin was personal. It was Jesus' death for our sin. The requirement of the law is fulfilled in us, individually. Our personal sin has been paid for by Jesus' personal death.

Now, Paul concludes, we are the people who no longer walk—or live—by the flesh. We are not self-propelled. Christians walk and live by the Spirit. This does not mean that Christians never sin in our flesh (1 John 1:9–10). It means that we don't live that way (1 John 3:4–6). All of the life in us comes from God by His Spirit. To the extent that we live at all, we live in the Spirit's power.

Romans 8:5, NIV: Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

What does Romans 8:5 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul introduced a big idea in the previous verse. He wrote that Christians do not walk—or live—according to the flesh but according to the Holy Spirit. He didn't say that Christians should walk by the Spirit. He said that we do. It is no longer our path, our nature, to walk by the flesh.

But what does that mean? What is the difference between walking by the Spirit and walking by the flesh as we used to do before we were Christians? That's the question the next few verses will answer.

Paul first describes this difference as being about where we set our minds. In other words, what do our minds dwell on most intently? Those who are not Christians, who live by the flesh, think only and ever of things of the flesh. This makes basic sense, but what does it mean? The flesh, as Paul uses the term here, refers to the wants and needs driven by the physical body, and the spiritual approach of this fallen world. Those who walk by the flesh must focus only on meeting those necessarily selfish wants and needs, day after day, year and year.

Those who live by the Spirit, Christians, set their minds on the things of the Spirit. The Spirit is the Holy Spirit, God's Spirit, who comes to live in and with Christians when they trust in Christ. The Spirit of God in us, not surprisingly, is thinking about godly things. Since we are now alive by the Spirit's power, we begin to think about godly things, too—things that reach beyond meeting our basic human wants and needs of the moment.

Does this mean the Christians never thinks of things of the flesh or that we never sin? No. Instead, it means our minds are set, pointed, elsewhere. Focus on the flesh, on our sinful, self-serving desires, is not who we are, even when we find ourselves drawn that way.

Romans 8:6, NIV: The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

What does Romans 8:6 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul is describing the difference between living by the flesh—selfish, sinful human wants and desires—and living by God's Spirit. He has written that those who are in Christ live by the Spirit.

One difference is that those who live by the flesh set their minds on things of flesh and those who live by the Spirit on things of the Spirit. Setting our minds on one or the other leads in two different directions. A focus on our sinful, selfish desires—the flesh—leads to death. That's the law of sin and death from verse 2. Sin always leads to death. Focusing on the things of the Spirit leads to life and peace. That's the law of the Spirit of life, also from verse 2.

Notice this: The law of the Spirit of life is what frees us from the law of sin and death. Paul is showing here, though, that God does not intend for it to stop there. We have not just changed status from "death" to "life." We have changed roads from "the road to death" to "the path of life." The idea is that we will keep going down this road. That's what Christians do. They keep their minds focused on the Spirit's things because that's the way we're going. That's who we are now. We have left the death-way behind.

Romans 8:7, NIV: The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

What does Romans 8:7 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul has written that a non-Christian's mind is set on the things of the flesh. That means his or her thoughts are focused on meeting sinful, selfish wants and needs and nothing else. This way of thinking, like all sin, leads to death.

Paul goes further in this verse. The mind set only on the flesh in this way is anti-God. It is against God. It must serve self above all else, including God. This is the mindset of "the world," which says, "Submit to God's law? But what if that keeps me from getting what I want?" No, Paul writes, the mind set only on serving self cannot submit to God's law. That person is not capable of obeying God, no matter how religious he or she might be.

It's important to be clear. Paul's teaching here does not allow for the possibility that a Christian might live in the Spirit sometimes and in the flesh at other times. Christians *live in* the Spirit. Period. Even when we are diverted or distracted by sin (1 John 1:9–10), that's not because it is *who we are*. That's not the path we're on—sin is a deviation from who we are in Christ (1 John 3:4–6).

Romans 8:8, NIV: Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

What does Romans 8:8 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul has just written that non-Christians, those who live by the selfish, self-reliant, sinful flesh, are not capable of submitting to God. That makes sense. After all, living for myself, by definition, means not living for another, including God.

That's why Paul now writes what sounds like a harsh statement: Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. It's important to remember two things here. First, Christians are no longer people who are "in the flesh." Our status has been changed through faith in Christ to "in the Spirit." Second, when Paul talks about the "flesh" in Romans, he is not just talking about sexual sin, or greed. That's often how we think of sins of the flesh. The flesh includes *all* self-serving sins.

Paul also introduces into the conversation the idea of how God feels about people. He is pleased with those who are in Christ *because He is pleased with Christ* (Matthew 17:5). Our identity with Christ makes all the difference. He is not pleased with those who are only in themselves with their sinful focus on themselves.

We want to be careful here. It is true that God loves the world (John 3:16), but He has expressed that love by sending His Son to make it possible for all who believe to be included in His family. God is pleased by human faith in Him. Without faith, it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6). God's holiness does not allow for those who reject Him and His Son (John 3:18) to be part of this salvation (John 14:6)

Romans 8:9, NIV: You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.

What does Romans 8:9 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul has been describing the difference between those who live by their own self-reliant, selfish, sinful "flesh" and those who live by the Spirit of God. Paul's description leaves no room for anyone to both live by the flesh and live by Spirit. Christians *live* by the Spirit, even if we are sometimes distracted by sin. A true believer in Christ can sin (1 John 1:9–10), but sin is not the normal pattern of behavior for someone who is in Christ (1 John 3:4–6). Non-Christians live by the flesh, serving themselves.

Now Paul makes it clear to his readers, Christians living in Rome, that he understands them to be in the Spirit and not in the flesh. Paul identifies them as Christians, with a stipulation: this is true "if" the Spirit of God lives in you. In modern English, we tend to assume that the word "if" implies doubt, when sometimes it simply connects two ideas. This phrase might be better read as a condition which is assumed to be true. In other words, "You are in the Spirit *since* the Spirit of God dwells in you."

The reverse is also true: If someone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he or she does not belong to Christ. Paul leaves no room for Christians who do not have God's Spirit with them. God gives His Holy Spirit to every Christian. Without the Spirit, we are not Christians (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Timothy 1:14).

Notice that this verse very much supports the idea of the Trinity. God is three persons in one: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Spirit here is referred to both as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ, though it is the same being. In addition, the Spirit of God is said to live in Christians in this verse and Christ is said to be "in you" in the following verse. This corresponds to the idea of three different persons in one Godhead.

Romans 8:10, NIV: But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

What does Romans 8:10 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

This passage has indicated that the presence of God's Holy Spirit in a person is necessary for that person to be a Christian. Every truly saved, born-again believer—every real "Christian"—has the Spirit. Without the Spirit, that person does not belong to Christ.

Now Paul writes two things that are true of those with Christ living within them. On the one hand, the body is dead because of sin. This likely means that our human, physical, temporary body is dying and will eventually die as the result of sin in us and in the world. Our bodies are not yet renewed—though they will be (1 John 3:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

On the other hand, the Spirit is life—or gives life—because of righteousness. This phrase is a little trickier to translate. Some Bible teachers understand the Greek word for Spirit here, *pneuma*, as a reference to our human spirits. In that case, this verse would read that our spirits are alive. Others translate *pneuma* here as God's Spirit once more, meaning that that the Spirit gives us life. In the original Greek, there was no punctuation, and no lowercase letters—meaning there is no quick-and-easy way to know the writer's intent. Context is key.

In either case, the idea is that having Christ in us means that we are spiritually alive, in the Spirit, even though our sin-ridden bodies are still dying because of sin. Without Christ, without the Holy Spirit, we are spiritually dead. There is no spiritual life in us. The fact that there is spiritual life in us is because of righteousness. That does not mean it is because we are righteous. It means that we have been given credit for Christ's righteousness (Romans 5:21).

Romans 8:11, NIV: And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

What does Romans 8:11 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul wrote in the previous verse that Christians are spiritually alive, because of God's Spirit with us, but that our physical bodies are dying and will die because of sin (Romans 5:12).

Now, though, Paul assures his Christian readers that their physical bodies will be resurrected, as Christ's was (1 Thessalonians 4:16). More specifically, he says that "if" —which in this context means "since"—God's Spirit is in you, that same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies (1 John 3:2).

Paul is clear: Resurrection is a work of the Holy Spirit of God. That's one of the things He does. He raised Jesus from the dead, and He will do the same for all who are in Christ when the time comes. This continues the theme from this passage: that those who are saved, in Christ, are absolutely and totally free from any threat of condemnation.

John chapter 11

New International Version

1 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 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. **6** So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, **7** and then he said to his disciples, 'Let us go back to Judea.'
8 But Rabbi,' they said, 'a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?'
9 Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. **10** It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have 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 (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. **18** Now 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. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; **26** and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'

27 Yes, Lord,' she replied, 'I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.'

28 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?'

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 believe, you will 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.'

45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. **46** But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

Context Summary

John 11:1–16 sets up the most spectacular of Jesus' earthly miracles: the resurrection of Lazarus. Jesus is given word that Lazarus is sick but delays several days before leaving to see the family. As it turns out, by the time this message gets to Jesus, Lazarus has already died. The disciples assume Jesus won't go back to Judea, since local religious leaders want to kill Him. When Jesus plans to head into dangerous territory, His followers are frightened and pessimistic. The following passage will show Jesus arriving four days after Lazarus had passed away.

John 11:1, NIV: Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

What does John 11:1 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Lazarus, Martha, and Mary are a brother and two sisters apparently very close to Jesus (Luke 10:38–42; John 11:5). Other passages in the New Testament suggest Jesus visiting their home (Matthew 21:17), speak of Mary lavishing Jesus with expensive oil (John 11:2), and show the sisters referring to Jesus as their "teacher" (John 11:28). Scripture does not explicitly say what the

relationship was between Jesus and Lazarus, though all accounts point to them being very close (John 11:3; 36). Since Lazarus is said to have been at home, and is not mentioned in other incidents related to Jesus, he was clearly not travelling with Jesus.

Despite sharing a name, the Lazarus resurrected by Jesus is not the same person as the Lazarus mentioned in Jesus' Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19–31). At the very least, the brother of Mary and Martha does not appear to have been poor, since he was able to host Jesus and His followers during their travels. There is still an interesting connection to that parable, however. In Luke, Jesus points out that some people are so hardened against truth that they wouldn't even believe if someone was resurrected (Luke 16:27–31). The gospel of John proves this true, as Jesus' enemies will react to Lazarus' resurrection by seeking to have both him and Jesus killed (John 11:53; 12:9–11).

John 11:2, NIV: (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.)

What does John 11:2 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Mary is the sister of Martha, and of Lazarus, the man who has fallen ill. She is described as the one who anointed Jesus with precious oil, on at least one and possibly two occasions (Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–7). Luke describes a likely prostitute who did something similar (Luke 7:36–50). That happened at the home of a Pharisee. Mary's anointing occurred at the home of Simon the Leper, and possibly also at her own home. Lazarus' sister is not the same woman who anoints Jesus in Luke's story.

Other passages show that Mary and Martha are devoted followers of Jesus (Luke 10:38–42), though they apparently do not travel with Him. Scripture gives no details about the relationship between Jesus and Lazarus. All we know is that Jesus cares greatly for him and his sisters (John 11:5). Jesus will show great emotion when approaching Lazarus' grave later (John 11:35). Observers will interpret this as grief for a friend (John 11:36), but it may also have been for the sake of Mary and Martha. The next verse also suggests they had a very close friendship (John 11:3).

John 11:3, NIV: So the sisters sent word to Jesus, 'Lord, the one you love is sick.'

What does John 11:3 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

Mary and Martha are close followers of Jesus (Luke 10:38–42), though they do not travel with Him. They live in Bethany, which is only two miles—about three kilometers—from Jerusalem. This makes it extremely close to the religious leaders who are committed to having Jesus silenced. Presently, Jesus is in Bethabara, some twenty miles—about 32 kilometers—from the city. A fast-moving messenger could cover this distance in less than one day. This message provides some of the meager details about Jesus and Lazarus' relationship found in Scripture (John 11:5).

The content of this message echoes Jesus' mother when seeing the lack of wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1–3). In both that instance, and this letter, no demands are made of Jesus. A need is stated, and nothing more. This speaks to both the faith and humility of Jesus' mother, as well as Lazarus' sisters.

Later verses will lay out a timeline that fully explains what is about to happen. As it turns out, Lazarus will already have died by the time Jesus receives this message. After waiting two days, and travelling for a third, Jesus will arrive when Lazarus has been dead for four days.

This timeline is also key to understanding Jesus reply, as seen in the following verse. At the moment this messenger speaks to Jesus in Bethabara, Lazarus has already died back in Bethany. Yet Jesus will send back reassurance, knowing the message will not get to Lazarus' family until well after they've seen their brother die. This, as with all of Jesus' actions, is done for a particular purpose.

John 11:4, NIV: 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.'

What does John 11:4 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Mary and Martha are supporters of Jesus (Luke 10:38–42), though they do not travel with Him. They live in Bethany, around two miles or three kilometers from Jerusalem. Jesus is in Bethabara, twenty miles away, when a messenger from the sisters comes saying His beloved friend is sick (John 11:1–3). A dedicated messenger could cover that distance in less than one day.

Later verses will indicate that Jesus delays two full days, then travels to Bethany, which takes somewhat more than a day. If Jesus eventually arrives four days after Lazarus has died, it means that when the messenger reaches Jesus, Lazarus is already dead. He would have passed shortly after the message was dispatched. And yet, Jesus sends him back with a comforting reply, implying that Lazarus' illness won't lead to death!

This apparent paradox presents many questions and lessons. The statement would have been extremely difficult to understand, at first. Mary and Martha would have mourned and buried their brother, then gotten word from Jesus saying Lazarus' illness would not lead to death. It's possible to translate the Greek of Jesus' reply as "this sickness is not to *end in* death," and later events show that this is likely what He meant. The reaction from Mary and Martha probably would have been the same either way.

Similarly, God's command for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac would have been difficult to understand without the benefit of hindsight (Genesis 22:1–2, 12–14). Jesus' response shows that God's love is not condescending or indulgent. Pain still happens, and we will not always understand. And yet, despite our ignorance, God works out everything for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

John 11:5, NIV: Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

What does John 11:5 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Scripture is light on details about the relationship between Jesus and these three siblings. We see Mary and Martha following Jesus' teachings (Luke 10:38–42), and He presumably lodged at their home several times (Matthew 21:17). Several other verses in this passage allude to Jesus' close friendship with Lazarus (John

11:3; 36). This connection explains why the sisters would have sent an urgent message to Jesus when Lazarus fell ill.

Jesus' reply in the prior verse, as it turns out, comes after Lazarus' death. In fact, by the time the messenger got to Jesus in Bethabara, Lazarus would have died earlier that same day. We can piece together a timeline from the rest of this passage, showing that Jesus' response to the sisters is given *when Lazarus is already dead* (John 11:4). Although their brother is already buried, Jesus will reassure them that his illness won't lead to death.

This demonstrates the nature of God's loving truthfulness. Hearing Jesus' reply would have been confusing, much as Abraham would have been confused when he was commanded to sacrifice his own son (Genesis 22:1–2). However, God has plans in mind that human beings can only fully grasp in hindsight (Genesis 22:12–14; John 11:41–44).

John 11:6, NIV: So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days,

What does John 11:6 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus has been given an urgent message from some close friends, indicating that Lazarus is desperately ill (John 11:1–3). This message is coming from Bethany, two miles—about three kilometers—from Jerusalem, to Bethabara, about ten times as far away. This is a about two days of regular travel, a little less than one day for a rushed messenger. According to the timeline given in this passage, for Jesus to arrive four days after Lazarus' death (John 11:17), Lazarus is already dead when the news reaches Jesus in Bethabara. And yet, Jesus sends back a reply comforting the sisters (John 11:4), which they would not have gotten until after Lazarus was expired and buried.

Even so, Jesus' decision to wait two more days was probably taken by the disciples to mean He had no plans to return to Bethany. That city was very close to the religious leaders of Jerusalem, making it a dangerous location for Jesus and His followers (John 5:18; 10:39; 11:8). What they don't realize is Jesus is acting out the promise given in His response to Mary and Martha—that this event

is meant to showcase the glory of God. By the time Jesus arrives in Bethany, there will be absolutely zero doubt that Lazarus is entirely, completely, and undoubtedly dead. His resurrection will be a spectacular miraculous sign.

John 11:7, NIV: and then he said to his disciples, 'Let us go back to Judea.'

What does John 11:7 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

In prior verses, Jesus was given a rushed message stating that his beloved friend Lazarus was ill (John 11:1–3). That came from Mary and Martha in Bethany, about twenty miles or 32 kilometers from Jesus' current location in Bethabara. Rather than leave, Jesus sent the messenger back with words of comfort (John 11:4). The disciples probably assumed that Lazarus would recover, and that Jesus was not returning to Judea since local religious leaders were looking to have Him killed (John 5:18; 10:39; 11:8). What they don't know is that Lazarus was dead before the messenger even reached Jesus, and that God has a spectacular miracle in mind.

Jesus' unexpected order to return to Bethany in Judea a full two days later would have been shocking to His disciples. In their minds, the time to attempt a rescue mission for Lazarus is long over. Returning would only put Jesus at risk of arrest or stoning. His purpose, as seen later, is to ensure that Lazarus' miraculous resurrection is entirely credited to the glory of God (John 11:4, 41–44).

John 11:8, NIV: But Rabbi,' they said, 'a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?'

What does John 11:8 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus has responded to an urgent message about His friend, Lazarus (John 11:1–3). Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, live very close to Jerusalem, in Bethany. Based on Jesus' initial response, His disciples probably assume Lazarus will recover (John 11:4). Further, they know that Jesus had left Judea to avoid the murderous intent of local religious leaders—a group the gospel of John

frequently refers to as "the Jews." After two days of staying in Bethabara, already two days' journey from Bethany, they would have assumed the issue was settled.

However, Jesus has determined to return to Mary and Martha's home (John 11:7). This is in keeping with His comforting response, given to the messenger sent by the sisters (John 11:4). While we have the benefit of hindsight, nobody else in this story knows what is going to happen, other than Jesus. Jesus' message to Mary and Martha would have arrived after their brothers' death, and the disciples can't understand why Jesus would walk back into hostile territory. From their perspective, this is virtually a suicide mission (John 11:16).

John 11:9, NIV: Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light.

What does John 11:9 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

Verses 9 and 10 contain Jesus' cryptic remark to the disciples, after the confusion over His intent to go back into Judea. It has been two days since Jesus received a message saying His friend, Lazarus, was sick (John 11:1–3). Lazarus lives in Bethany, very close to Jerusalem and the hostile religious leaders who want Jesus dead (John 5:18; 10:39; 11:8). When Jesus sends back a comforting response (John 11:4) and waits two more days, the disciples would have assumed that was the end of the issue (John 11:6). To their surprise, Jesus states His intent to head back to see Mary, Martha, and their now-dead brother (John 11:7). Naturally, the disciples protest by pointing out how dangerous this is.

Jesus' answer in these verses hinges on the idea of walking according to the will of God. It's not unusual for God's commands to be perplexing. Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his own son (Genesis 22:1–2). Naaman was commanded to wash his leprous body in a muddy creek (2 Kings 5:1–12). Jesus has just told two sisters that their brother's illness will not result in death—and their brother had already died. But Abraham saw God's eventual plan (Genesis 22:11–14), Naaman was healed (2 Kings 5:13–14), and Lazarus will soon be resurrected (John 11:43–44).

In the same way, following God's will can seem dangerous, from an earthly perspective. To be sure, there are times when being a follower of Christ means

losing one's life for the sake of faith (John 16:1–2). But when God has other plans, then we can trust that His guidance will result in good outcomes. In this case, Jesus is pointing out that it's important to act while there is still daylight. That light prevents danger which comes after dark. Since Jesus is "walking in the light"—according to the knowledge and will of God—His actions are only as dangerous as God intends them to be.

John 11:10, NIV: It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.'

What does John 11:10 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Here Jesus contrasts the idea of those who walk according to the knowledge of God—"walk[ing] in the day"—with those who ignore or rebel against God. His disciples are concerned because Jesus intends to travel back into Judea, close to the religious leaders who want Him dead (John 11:7–8). What they do not know is that Jesus means to resurrect Lazarus, providing yet another sign of His divine power (John 11:1–4, 41–44).

In the prior verse, Jesus spoke of the need to "walk in the day," since that light allowed a person to travel safely. Here, Jesus contrasts this with walking in the night. The lack of light presents danger—a person cannot see the path, or obstacles, or other hazards. This follows a common metaphor used in the Bible, where light represents the will and knowledge of God.

In short, Jesus is reminding His disciples that following God is always the "safest" course of action, even when the world sees it as foolish or dangerous. That's not to say that following God's will keeps Christians from all possible harm. Quite the opposite; obedience to Christ can result in persecution and death (John 16:1–2). Rather, it means that God is in control, and our most beneficial choice is to follow His lead. He'll provide as much protection as His will requires.

John 11:11, NIV: 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.'

What does John 11:11 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus responded to an urgent message about Lazarus, sick in Bethany, by sending a comforting reply and waiting in Bethabara for two days (John 11:1–6). His disciples assumed this meant Jesus had no intention of going back towards Jerusalem, where religious leaders were waiting to pounce (John 5:18; 10:39). As it turns out, Jesus was only waiting in order to ensure that His upcoming miracle would be unmistakable. When He announces their return, the disciples are shocked and afraid (John 11:7–8). Jesus then responds by reminding them that God is in control; walking according to His knowledge—His light—is always the wisest course of action (John 11:8–9).

Here, Jesus adds another statement which would have been confusing to the disciples, at first. Sleep is often used in Christian contexts as a metaphor for physical death (Acts 7:60; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). Those who have faith in God see death of the body as a temporary, peaceful condition. Jesus' intent, right from the beginning, has been to raise Lazarus from the dead as another proof of His divine power.

In this context, though, the disciples would have been even more confused over Jesus' intent. After all, Jesus has waited two days, already. Now He speaks of waking up a sleeping friend. From their perspective, that is not something worth the risk of moving back into hostile territory. Their reactions, shown in the following verses, will be pessimistic, but also somewhat brave.

Jesus' plan here summarizes the general plot of the gospel: *God incarnate travels into hostile, unbelieving territory to make a dead man live!*

John 11:12, NIV: His disciples replied, 'Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.'

What does John 11:12 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

This statement corresponds to Jesus' remarks to the messenger who first brought news of Lazarus' illness (John 11:1–4). He sent back word to Mary and Martha that their brother's illness would not result in death. Lazarus' hometown of Bethany was close to hostile religious leaders (John 5:18; 10:39), and Jesus waited for two days after sending His reply (John 11:6). But now Jesus' reason

for going, according to the prior verse, is to "awaken" a sleeping friend. So far as the disciples were concerned, Jesus was confident Lazarus would be fine and there was no need to visit him. When Jesus plans to go, anyway, they are understandably shocked and worried (John 11:7–8).

It's clear the disciples misunderstand Jesus' spiritual message, and confuse it for a purely physical one. This is common in Jesus' interactions with others during His earthly ministry (John 3:4; 4:11; 8:31–33). Many of His statements and pronouncements are only fully understood with the benefit of hindsight, and the influence of the Holy Spirit (John 2:19–22).

Jesus means that Lazarus has actually died, and is to be resurrected (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). This misunderstanding is expressed directly in the following verse.

John 11:13, NIV: Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

What does John 11:13 mean? [[↑](#) See verse text [↑](#)]

Jesus often spoke of spiritual ideas using metaphors which were taken too literally. This is seen in His comments about the destruction of the temple (John 2:19–22), about spiritual rebirth (John 3:4), living water (John 4:11), and spiritual freedom (John 8:31–33). Sleep is a common Christian metaphor for death, when applied to those who die with faith in God (Acts 7:60; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18).

The disciples assumed Lazarus was merely sleeping to recover from illness (John 11:1–3). After all, Jesus sent back an encouraging reply to the messenger (John 11:4), then waited two days to decide to visit Lazarus (John 11:6–7). They're not keen on returning to Judea, since the local religious leaders want to kill Jesus (John 5:18; 11:8). When Jesus seemingly reiterates the idea that Lazarus is "sleeping," they're baffled as to why it's necessary to go there to wake him up.

What they don't understand, Jesus will partially explain in His reply, shown in the next verse.

John 11:14, NIV: So then he told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead,

What does John 11:14 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

To this point, Jesus has waited two days after receiving word about Lazarus' illness. He sent back a reassuring message to Lazarus' sisters. What the disciples don't know is that Lazarus was dead before the messenger arrived to speak with Jesus. They do know that the religious leaders of Judea want to kill Jesus, and so He has stayed out of that area. So when Jesus says it's time to go to Judea, to "awaken" Lazarus, they are confused.

Jesus' words here don't provide much explanation for the disciples. Jesus flatly tells them that His friend is dead. The disciples were hesitant to risk death just to wake a sleeping man. To go see a man who's already dead seems even less sensible. At the same time, these men know that Jesus has power. Even when others have fallen away, they've been faithful, even when they don't fully understand (John 6:66–69). The following verses will show that even if they're fearful, they're loyal (John 11:16).

John 11:15, NIV: and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.'

What does John 11:15 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus sent back an encouraging response when He was given news that Lazarus was sick (John 11:4). He then waited two days before announcing His intent to return to Judea, where men were seeking to kill Him (John 11:6–8). The disciples were understandably confused. Not only did Jesus tell Lazarus' sisters not to worry about death, He also said that Lazarus was asleep (John 11:11). In the prior verse, Jesus explained to the thick-headed men that Lazarus was dead.

Jesus notes that this is a good thing, at least as it applies to the disciples. This will become another example to strengthen their faith. Despite their confusion

and ignorance, these men have been loyal to Jesus even when others left (John 6:66–69). That loyalty will once again be rewarded as they will witness the most spectacular of the seven "signs" recorded in the gospel of John.

The disciples' devotion to Jesus doesn't mean they're enthusiastic about this decision. In the next verse Thomas, infamous as a "doubter" (John 20:24–29), suggests that they might as well go along so they can all die with Jesus. Sarcastic or not, the threat was real, and Jesus' followers are willing to face it.

John 11:16, NIV: Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

What does John 11:16 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus is heading back into Judea, a territory controlled by those who want to kill Him (John 11:8). His reason is to "wake up" His friend Lazarus, who has now been dead for several days (John 11:1–7, 17). Jesus points out that this delay is not an accident. One purpose is for the benefit of the disciples. The miracle about to happen is the seventh and most spectacular of those recorded in this gospel. The function of those miracles is to act as "signs" that point toward an important truth: that Jesus is God incarnate and following His mission from God.

The disciples have already shown that even if they lack wisdom, they sincerely believe in Jesus and are willing to follow more loyally than others (John 6:66–69). Loyalty does not require optimism, however. Thomas—the same disciple often criticized for doubting Jesus' eventual resurrection (John 20:24–29)—seems convinced that this is a suicide mission. All the same, he is willing to go, apparently resigned to his fate. Or, at least, he feels the need to express some "gallows humor" about what is happening.

Context Summary

John 11:17–27 describes Jesus' encounter with Martha, Lazarus' brother. By the time Jesus got word of Lazarus' illness, His friend had already died, but Jesus delayed a further two days before coming to see the family. Martha is both heartbroken and resigned. She is confident that her brother will see eternal resurrection. Jesus confirms His role in salvation as He comforts her; she

responds by affirming Him as the Messiah. This is the fifth of seven "I Am" statements by Jesus in this gospel. In the following passage, Jesus will meet with Martha and Lazarus' sister, Mary, expressing His sorrow for their pain.

John 11:17, NIV: On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

What does John 11:17 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The timeline explained in this verse sheds light on what happened in the prior passage. Jesus was about a day's journey from Bethany when a messenger was sent telling Him Lazarus was ill (John 11:3). He then waited two days before leaving (John 11:6) and arrived when Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days. Given a one-day walk to Bethany, Lazarus had died before the messenger even got to Jesus in the first place. When Christ sent back His encouraging message (John 11:4), He did so knowing His friend was already dead. That means His message came to Lazarus' sisters after they'd already buried their brother.

The long delay was not an accident. Modern medicine allows very precise measurement of heart and brain function. In the ancient world, it was not impossible for a person to seem dead, but recover. For that reason, death was often not considered "official" until a few days later. Jesus' three days and nights in the tomb corresponds to this custom. In Lazarus' case, many Jewish people considered the fourth day to be when the soul was considered truly gone.

In other words, Jesus has purposefully set up this scenario. The moment was not an accident, but an arrangement. As Christ stated to the disciples, the ultimate reason for His response is for the benefit of observers (John 11:15). What happens later in this chapter is the seventh and most impressive of Jesus' seven "signs," as recorded in the gospel of John. All those signs are meant to prove Jesus' divinity and power (John 20:30–31). This miracle, especially, has been arranged for maximum impact and proof of godly approval.

John 11:18, NIV: Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,

What does John 11:18 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

This verse reiterates why Jesus was not in Bethany at the time Lazarus fell ill. Religious leaders in Jerusalem have been attempting to kill Jesus, so He traveled outside their sphere of control (John 10:39–40). The hostility of these men was so great that the disciples were surprised at Jesus' intent to return (John 11:8). This statement also helps to explain why there were so many people there mourning with Mary and Martha (John 11:19).

Scripture doesn't give much detail about Mary, Martha, or Lazarus. It's possible that they were well-known on their own merits. It's also possible that the crowd gathered here had more to do with their relationship with Jesus than anything else. Scripture indicates Jesus spent a notable amount of time with them, and in their home (Matthew 21:17; Luke 10:38–39). Later statements prove the local people knew how close Jesus was to this family (John 11:36). Some of those who have come to "console" the family might, in fact, be here more out of curiosity than grief.

The presence of so many people is also part of Jesus' arrangement of this event. He has already claimed that Lazarus' illness doesn't lead to death, and that it's for the sake of God's glory (John 11:4). Jesus waited so that He would not arrive until Lazarus' death was beyond any possible doubt or dispute (John 11:17). As the next verse shows, He has also chosen a moment with a large audience.

John 11:19, NIV: and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

What does John 11:19 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus has arrived, very deliberately, four days after His beloved friend Lazarus has died (John 11:1–4; 11:17). This was a purposeful choice by Jesus, and one made for a specific reason (John 11:15). Not only is there no question that Lazarus is really, truly dead, there is a sizable crowd here to see what happens next. The gospel of John describes these miracles as "signs," which are intended

to prove Jesus' divinity (John 20:30–31). The situation created here fits that objective perfectly: everything has aligned to make this an unmistakable show of godly power (John 11:42).

John's choice of terms in this verse raises questions. Jesus was not in Bethany when Lazarus fell ill. He was across the Jordan river avoiding the hostile religious leaders of Jerusalem (John 10:39–40). Bethany is right next door to Jerusalem (John 11:18). In the gospel of John, the term "the Jews" is most often used as a reference to those religious leaders. As such, this verse might imply that many who came to comfort Mary and Martha are Jesus' enemies. Participating in mourning may have been part of their religious obligations. It also might have been a chance for them to remind everyone that Jesus had claimed Lazarus' illness would not lead to death (John 11:5).

However, John also uses the term "the Jews" in reference to those who follow the leaders of Jerusalem. In this case, John probably means those kinds of people. While it's possible that officials of the Pharisees or Sadducees might have arrived—for whatever reason—it's more likely that the people assembled here are just common folk grieving with neighbors.

John 11:20, NIV: When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

What does John 11:20 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Several passages in Scripture show the contrast between the personalities of Mary and Martha. In summary, Martha is a "doer," and Mary is a "thinker." Martha comes across as practical and direct, and Mary is passionate and devoted. In an earlier meeting (Luke 10:38–42), Martha was frustrated by Mary's choice to sit and listen to Jesus while she was busy as a hostess. Mary was also involved in anointing Jesus with expensive oil; that happened at least once (John 12:1–7), and possibly on two separate occasions (Mark 14:3–9). A similar incident involving a prostitute, however, is not the same person as Martha and Lazarus' sister (Luke 7:36–50).

The unique character of these women is also reflected in their reaction when Jesus arrives. This verse explicitly says that Martha was aware that Jesus was

approaching. Whether or not Mary knew, at this moment, the Bible does not say. It would be consistent with their respective personalities, however, for Martha to rush to meet Jesus while Mary sits and cries.

Later verses suggest that Mary might not have known, yet, that Jesus was coming. Martha's comment in a later verse might mean Mary waited until Jesus specifically called for her (John 11:28). Or, it might imply that Martha went to see Jesus without telling her sister that He had arrived. As the next verse shows, Martha immediately confronts Jesus with her heartache—she may have wanted to do this without the added drama of her sister's tears. The presence of many other people, also, might have inspired Martha to attempt a private meeting with Jesus, rather than announcing His presence (John 11:30–31).

John 11:21, NIV: Lord,' Martha said to Jesus, 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

What does John 11:21 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Scripture shows that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus had a close relationship. Jesus has spent a noteworthy amount of time with this family (Luke 10:38–42; Matthew 21:17). When Lazarus fell ill, his sisters felt it was necessary to send a messenger to Jesus (John 11:3). That message appealed to Jesus' friendship with their brother. Jesus' response was a reassurance that Lazarus' illness would not lead to death (John 11:4). However, based on the timeline shown in this chapter, that response would have arrived back to Mary and Martha *after* Lazarus had already been dead for a day or two (John 11:17).

Given all of that, it's understandable that Martha's initial words to Jesus can be interpreted in one of two ways. This might be an accusation. Martha might be implying it was Jesus' fault for not being there when Lazarus was ill.

However, Martha would have been aware of the time it took a messenger to travel. She would have known that by the time Jesus heard about Lazarus' illness, it was already too late. Her statement here, tied what she says next, seems more an expression of sadness mixed with hope. In full context, her meaning is something like, "this is not how I hoped things would be, *but...*"

What she says to Jesus in the following verse is a thinly-veiled request (John 11:22). Though she's in mourning and being careful, it's clear Martha is still willing to trust in Jesus and His decisions.

John 11:22, NIV: But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.'

What does John 11:22 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Martha began her words to Jesus with something that could easily be taken as an accusation: "if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21). Jesus had left the region to stay away from local religious leaders in nearby Jerusalem (John 11:18). When Lazarus fell ill, Jesus received a message from Martha and Mary, Lazarus' sisters (John 11:3). However, Jesus waited two days to begin His return trip (John 11:6), arriving four days after His friend was already dead and buried (John 11:17). While she certainly realized her brother had died before the message even got to Jesus, it wouldn't be unexpected for her to be frustrated.

However, Martha's words here show that she's not criticizing Jesus. Rather, she's expressing faith in His power, and her trust in His will. Her prior statement indicated she's not happy with the situation—her current statement indicates she's willing to trust God to make things right. At no point does she directly ask Jesus to bring her brother back. This parallels the behavior of Jesus mother, Mary, at His first miracle in Cana. There, she made no demands, but only told Jesus what the problem was (John 2:3) and then encouraged others to obey Him (John 2:5).

As later verses show, Martha's practical and careful personality is still in full effect. Even when He goes to open the tomb, she's cautious and unsure (John 11:39). That does not stop her from boldly and confidently expressing her faith that Jesus is the Promised One (John 11:27).

John 11:23, NIV: Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'

What does John 11:23 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Several days earlier, Jesus received a message from Martha and Mary telling Him that His friend, their brother Lazarus, was sick (John 11:1–3). His response was that the sickness would not lead to death (John 11:4). Technically, His earlier statement can be translated to mean the sickness would not "end in" death, which makes perfect sense given what's about to happen (John 11:43–44). Either way, it's reasonable to think Mary and Martha would have been puzzled by that answer.

According to Scripture, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus had experience with Jesus' teachings (Luke 10:38–42). This gives context to Martha's comments that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus's death (John 11:21), and that God would give Jesus anything He requested (John 11:22). Mary's treatment of Jesus strongly suggests she had deeply considered Jesus' message, and understood it better even than most of the disciples (Mark 14:3–9). The sisters' close attention to Christ means they would have been aware of His references to resurrection (John 6:39–40).

As with any follower of Christ, though, knowledge and faith didn't lead to perfect understanding. When Jesus tells Martha that Lazarus will rise, she responds with a careful, conservative answer (John 11:24).

John 11:24, NIV: Martha answered, 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'

What does John 11:24 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Mary and Martha are close followers of Christ's teachings (Luke 10:38–42). In earlier statements, Jesus has spoken about those who believe in Him experiencing an eventual resurrection (John 3:15–16; 6:39–40). That discipleship has clearly given these sisters great faith in Jesus, even in the face of doubts (John 11:21–22). Just as Jesus' mother didn't demand a specific solution (John 2:3–5), Martha didn't come right out and beg Jesus to raise her brother from the dead (John 11:17). So, when Jesus reassured her that Lazarus "will rise" (John

11:23), she most likely took that to mean Jesus did not intend to perform a miracle at that moment.

In other words, Martha's response here might come with a hint of disappointment. Her mention of God granting any request made by Jesus resulted in Him saying "your brother will rise again." He did not say, "I'll ask God to bring him back." Rather than despairing, or reacting in anger, Martha's answer implies that she has an eternal perspective (Hebrews 11:13–16). She knows that, even if death wins this battle, it has already lost the war (Hebrews 11:39–40).

Martha's next words with Jesus back up the suggestion that she's faithful, even amidst her doubt and pain. Those are inspired by the fifth of seven "I Am" statements made by Jesus in the gospel of John.

John 11:25, NIV: Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;

What does John 11:25 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

When her brother succumbed to illness, Martha pointed out her belief that God would answer any request made by Jesus (John 11:22). In context, that was a thinly-veiled appeal for Jesus to bring Lazarus back from the dead (John 11:17). Like Jesus' mother, however, Martha was more focused on simply telling Jesus the problem (John 2:2–5) than demanding a specific solution. His response, that Lazarus would "rise again," echoed statements made by Jesus in His earlier teachings (John 6:39–40). Those mentions of resurrection often referred to the last days, or the end times. Martha's familiarity with Jesus' message (Luke 10:38–42) probably caused her to interpret His comment as a gentle, reassuring, "no." That is, she probably thought Jesus meant, "He'll live again, someday" (John 11:24).

Here, Jesus continues the conversation with the fifth of seven "I AM" statements as found in the gospel of John. In Exodus 3:14, God referred to Himself using the expression "I AM." This is a statement of God's absolute, necessary, and eternal existence. That is the definition of God: the One who "just is," who "must be." Jesus used the same terminology several times, to connect His message and

ministry to that of God. In doing so, Jesus laid claim to being God, and equal with God (John 20:30–31).

This particular "I Am" statement puts a personal emphasis on human salvation. Unique among other claims about eternity, the gospel explains that the ultimate fulfillment of human desire is a person. It's not knowledge, or accomplishment, or some state of being. It's the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Jesus does not merely claim to speak about "the life," He *identifies* as "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Just as drowning people want a rescuer, not advice on swimming, condemned sinners need a Savior, not spiritual self-help.

In saying this, Jesus is not contradicting Martha's earlier statement about her brother. Instead, He's continuing to set up the message behind his seventh "sign," found later in this chapter. To do this, He makes wordplay with the ideas of life and death, fleshed out in the following verse.

John 11:26, NIV: and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'

What does John 11:26 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

In the prior verse, Jesus once again referred to Himself using the "I AM" terminology. This echoes the statement made by God in Exodus 3:14. When Moses asked God to identify Himself, the response was an expression of God's necessary, absolute, perfect existence. God "just is." Jesus' words in the prior verse tie that idea to a very personal concept of salvation. Rather than making mankind's redemption a matter of learning or effort, God grounds our hope in a person: "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Jesus expands that idea with a wordplay on the ideas of life and death. Jesus' other teachings emphasize the concept of "eternal life" (John 3:16; 5:24; 10:28). Those who place their faith in Christ have a life which cannot be taken away (John 10:29), and which exists beyond the death of the physical body (2 Corinthians 5:1–5). The Greek phrase Jesus uses here is exactly the same as in John 10:28, and means something which will "never, ever" occur.

Jesus is speaking to Martha, one of Lazarus' sisters (John 11:1–3). His question to her uses a verb—an expression of action—rather than a noun. The term translated as "believe" here is from the Greek root word *pisteuo*, referring to "faith." Prior comments by Martha show that she's willing to put trust in Jesus (John 11:22), likely based on having heard His message in the past (Luke 10:38–42). When asked if she has faith in Christ and His promise of resurrection, she responds with a clear statement of Jesus' status as God and Messiah (John 11:27).

John 11:27, NIV: Yes, Lord,' she replied, 'I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.'

What does John 11:27 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

In the prior two verses, Jesus expressed the fifth of seven "I AM" statements found in the gospel of John. That claim included His role as one who brought resurrection and life to those who believe in Him. Afterwards, Jesus asks Martha (John 11:20–26) if she believes this to be true. Her answer, found here, is the fifth of seven times in John's gospel where someone attests to the divinity of Jesus.

Martha and her siblings, Mary and Lazarus, are followers of Jesus (Luke 10:38–42). She is aware of His teachings on eternal life (John 6:39–40). Based on what she has seen and learned, Martha is willing to put her trust and faith in Christ. That includes willingness to follow Him even while grieving a loss she knows God could have prevented (John 11:21–22). The way she answers Jesus' question (John 11:26) shows that her faith is both powerful and informed. Martha labels Jesus with four main titles: "Lord," "Christ," "Son of God," and the One "coming into the world."

Calling Jesus "Lord" shows that Martha considered Him her ultimate authority.

Calling Jesus "Christ" is a reference to His role as the *Messiah*, or the "Anointed One." This is the person promised by Old Testament Scripture to come and rescue Israel.

Calling Jesus "Son of God" also refers to Jesus' role as Messiah. When calling the disciples, Jesus was given this same title by Nathanael (John 1:49). That was the first of these seven "witnesses" to Jesus' divine nature. Martha's words here are the fifth.

Calling Jesus "who is coming into the world" also ties Jesus to godly prophecy. In the next chapter, when Jesus enters Jerusalem, people will use a similar phrase to announce Him as a king, referring to Zechariah 9:9.

The gospel of John uses a verb—an action word—for "belief" nearly one hundred times. It does not use any nouns—object words—for this idea. Here, Martha's statement of her belief uses a Greek tense that implies something which happened in the past and continues: "I have believed and continue to believe.

Context Summary

John 11:28–37 contains the meeting between Lazarus' sister, Mary, and Jesus. Lazarus had died even before word reached Jesus that he was sick. Even so, Jesus waited until four days had passed to arrive in Bethany. Mary repeats her sister Martha's lament that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus from dying in the first place. The crowd—probably including mourners and hostile observers loyal to local religious leaders—say the same thing. Heading to the tomb, Jesus weeps: expressing sorrow for the pain of others, despite knowing that His visit here will end in Lazarus' resurrection.

John 11:28, NIV: 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.'

What does John 11:28 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Martha has just met Jesus after His arrival in Bethany. This came four days after her brother, Lazarus, had died of an illness (John 11:1–17). In that conversation, Martha expressed her faith in Jesus' divine power. When Christ referred to Himself as "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25–26), Martha affirmed this belief and referred to Jesus as "Lord," "Christ," and "Son of God."

Lazarus has two sisters. The other, Mary, is still at home while Jesus and Martha have their conversation (John 11:18–20). Other Scriptures show that these two women are close followers of Jesus (Luke 10:38–42). The Bible tells us that Jesus didn't merely "tolerate" their presence, He actively encouraged them. Mary was described as sitting at Jesus' feet—this was often literal, but also used as a reference to being a student of a teacher (Acts 22:3). When Martha goes to summon her sister, she uses that very term: "teacher." Jesus' relationship with these women was not patronizing or shallow. Mary, especially, seems to have grasped the meaning of Jesus' teachings better than many others (Mark 14:3–9).

It's possible that Mary didn't know Jesus had arrived until Martha's summons. Martha might have come to see Jesus so she could speak with Him free from a very-emotional Mary. It's also possible that Mary was well aware of His arrival and was simply too overcome to leave the house at that time. Either way, now is the time for her to speak with "the Teacher."

John 11:29, NIV: When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

What does John 11:29 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Prior verses indicated that Mary, sister to Lazarus and Martha, was still in the house, weeping, when Jesus arrived in Bethany. Her immediate response to a summons (John 11:28) is not surprising. Scripture describes her as a devoted student of Jesus (Luke 10:38–42), who seemed to grasp the meaning of His message more clearly than some of the disciples (Mark 14:3–9).

Martha has already discussed her anguish over Lazarus' death (John 11:17–27). It's possible that she left the house without telling anyone—even Mary—that Jesus was in town. That might have been to avoid bringing a crowd along with her. Mary, on the other hand, will make a dramatic exit and invite curiosity from those who have come to mourn (John 11:31). That, in turn, will add a larger audience to the miracle Jesus has come here to perform (John 11:11; 11:43–44).

John 11:30, NIV: Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

What does John 11:30 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

When Jesus left this region, it was to avoid local religious leaders who sought to kill Him (John 10:38–40). That threat was dire enough that His disciples were surprised at His decision to return (John 11:8). Since Lazarus has died, there are numerous local people meeting their neighborly obligations to mourn with his surviving sisters, Martha and Mary (John 11:17–19). Martha somehow learned that Jesus was in the area, apparently without anyone else knowing. That might even have included her sister (John 11:20). Their meeting included an expression of Martha's faith and Jesus' divinity (John 11:21–27).

After meeting with Jesus, Martha made a "private" comment to Mary that Jesus wanted to see her (John 11:28). In response, Mary is said to have made a sudden exit. This probably contrasted with whatever quiet escape Martha had made—the following verses show that many of those in the house reacted to Mary's departure by following her.

John 11:31, NIV: 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.

What does John 11:31 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

In the gospel of John, the term "the Jews" usually refers to the religious leaders of Jerusalem. It can also mean those people who loyally followed their teachings. These events take place in Bethany, a small village very close to Jerusalem (John 11:18–19). The death of Lazarus (John 11:17) has brought many local people to mourn along with Mary and Martha, as was traditional. Whether some in this crowd are religious leaders such as Pharisees or Scribes, Scripture does not say. It's entirely possible that some of Jesus' critics would come. Mary and Martha were known to be friendly with Jesus (Luke 10:38–42). Skeptics may have wanted to point out that Jesus either could not or did not prevent the death of His friend.

That hostility is why Jesus was not in the area when Lazarus died (John 10:38–40). Apparently, Martha's earlier meeting with Jesus was discreet. She might even have left the house without her sister, Mary, knowing that Jesus was in town. When Mary is summoned by Jesus, in contrast, she makes a dramatic exit.

That sudden departure raises curiosity in the people who have come to mourn. These people, so far as we know, aren't aware that Jesus is in town. They follow Mary—and as the upcoming verses show, that leads them to become an unexpected audience for a miracle.

John 11:32, NIV: 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.'

What does John 11:32 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

When Lazarus fell ill, Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus (John 11:1–3), who was not in the area (John 10:38–40). For reasons which will become clear later (John 11:15; 11:43–44), Jesus delayed His arrival until four days after Lazarus had died (John 11:17). The first to greet Him was Martha, who said the exact same thing to Jesus: expressing her belief that Jesus could have prevented this tragedy from happening.

In Martha's encounter, she also spoke of her faith that God would answer any request made by Jesus (John 11:21–22). That might have been a roundabout way of asking Christ to bring her brother back. The resulting conversation touched on her faith, and Jesus' divine nature (John 11:23–27). We're not sure if Mary had a similar conversation, here. Scripture does not promise to include every single detail (John 21:25).

One detail we can be sure of is that Mary has come with a crowd of witnesses. While Martha spoke with Jesus, Mary was back at home amongst many local mourners (John 11:18–19). Her sudden departure made them curious, so they followed her (John 11:31). Upcoming verses will include their reactions to the conversation between Mary, Martha, and Jesus.

John 11:33, NIV: When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

What does John 11:33 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The woman weeping is Mary, sister of Martha, and of Lazarus, who has recently died (John 11:17). "The Jews" who are present are local neighbors, possibly including some of Jesus' enemies from Jerusalem (John 11:18–19). When Martha heard Jesus had arrived, she apparently made a quiet exit and was able to speak to Jesus alone (John 11:20). Mary, on the other hand, responded to Jesus' summons with a hasty departure (John 11:31). That attracted attention and led to this much-more-public scene.

Millennia after the resurrection of Jesus, many people in the west take His humanity for granted. Ancient pagan deities were either emotionless, or unconcerned with human problems. The idea of a god who would be *sympathetic* to mankind was foreign to people of that era. Only Judaism, with God's frequent analogies about marriage, depicted a deity who invested real emotion in people.

Two Greek phrases are used in describing Jesus' reaction to this scene. One is *enebrimēsato tō pneumati*, translated as "deeply moved in His spirit." This phrase will be used again in verse 38. The implication is not entirely sorrowful: a similar phrasing describes the indignant response to Mary's anointing of Jesus with oil (Mark 14:5). In this context, Jesus isn't angry at the people for being sad—He's angered that they have something to be sad about. His "spirit" is disturbed by what's happening. As a fully-human man, Jesus understands what it means to suffer loss (Hebrews 4:15–16). He knows that this is the result of sin; that death is a consequence.

The other Greek expression used here is *kai etaraxen heauton*, translated as "greatly troubled." This features the same word used to describe the waters of the pool in John 5:7. It would be fair to describe Jesus' mood here as "agitated."

As this incident unfolds, Jesus will continue to express very human emotions. That compassion for mankind's suffering is a unique aspect of Judeo-Christianity.

John 11:34, NIV: Where have you laid him?' he asked. 'Come and see, Lord,' they replied.

What does John 11:34 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Scripture often shows God asking questions of human beings. In every case, the point is not to gain information—God already knows. The purpose of God asking questions (Genesis 3:9; 4:9) is the same as a parent who asks questions of a child, such as "what did you do?" or "should you be touching that?" Here, Jesus follows that pattern by asking to be shown where Lazarus' body is buried (John 11:17). As with other moments, this is an opportunity for the surviving sisters—Martha and Mary—to further validate their faith through action.

In the prior verse, Jesus was shown to be troubled and agitated by the emotions of the crowd. The following verse proves that Jesus wasn't unhappy with their sorrow. Rather, He is indignant at the fact that they experience sorrow, at all. The purpose of Jesus' earthly ministry was to resolve the problems of sin and death (John 10:10). His experience as a fully-human man allows Him to sympathize with our struggles in a meaningful way (Hebrews 4:15–16).

John 11:35, NIV: Jesus wept.

What does John 11:35 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

John 11:35 is infamously referred to as the "shortest verse in the Bible." It's worth mentioning that chapter and verse divisions were not part of the original Scriptures. John, who wrote this gospel, did not intend these two words—three in Greek—as a distinct statement. Despite being short, this phrase describes something incredible about the nature of God and the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Jesus has arrived a few days after the death of a good friend, Lazarus (John 11:17). Lazarus' sisters are in mourning, as are other friends and neighbors (John 11:18–19). Jesus has come here with the intention of raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:11–15). That fact, alone, gives this verse a context which boggles the mind. Christ is here to restore the dead man, but He still feels

compassion for the mourners (John 11:33). That feeling is strong enough to produce tears.

Ancient deities were often stoic: they didn't express emotions. Those who did weren't the slightest bit concerned about human happiness. They saw humans as tools, toys, or slaves. Judaism, alone, presented a God who invested real love and compassion into His creations. The fact that Jesus—who is God incarnate (John 1:1–4)—experiences human sorrow, at all, is reason enough to be amazed. This moment speaks to His humanity, and His ability to sympathize with our pain and suffering (Hebrews 4:15–16).

The fact that Jesus weeps in this situation brings context to human pain and suffering. When bad things happen, we often ask, "does God even care?" This simple statement, "Jesus wept," proves that He does. Even when Jesus knew He was about to make right what was wrong, He still "felt" the pain of the people He was there to serve. Responding to tragedy, we sometimes ask, "If God really cared, why not stop this happening in the first place?" The Bible tells us even our hardest moments have a purpose in God's will (Romans 8:28). At the same time, Scripture tells us God truly, deeply understands the pain we feel while we wait for that plan to be completed (2 Corinthians 5:1–5; Isaiah 53:3).

Jesus is about to resurrect His good friend, bringing Lazarus back to his sisters and family. In the meantime, He weeps, sharing their pain and their sorrow. This response is described using a Greek term implying quiet tears, in contrast to the "wailing" described from the other mourners.

John 11:36, NIV: Then the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!'

What does John 11:36 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

"The Jews" referred to here are most likely the friends and neighbors of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha (John 11:17–19). The group may also include some of Jesus' religious critics from nearby Jerusalem. John uses this phrase—"the Jews"—mostly in reference to those religious leaders and their immediate followers. Prior verses show that Jesus was agitated at the pain the mourners were experiencing (John 11:33). Despite having come specifically so He could raise Lazarus from

the dead (John 11:11–15), Jesus still weeps in compassion over what has happened (John 11:35).

The depth of His emotion is shown here. The exact term used in the prior verse was a reference to quiet tears; it is usually translated as "weeping." Others in this passage have been labeled using Greek terms that might be rendered as "sobbing" or "wailing." Onlookers recognize it as genuine, however. In fact, the depth of Jesus' sorrow makes quite an impression on the assembled crowd.

That compassion is especially amazing, in that Jesus is God incarnate (John 1:1–4). Rather than being a distant, disconnected Creator, He is a compassionate and loving Savior.

John 11:37, NIV: But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

What does John 11:37 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

Here, observers make the same point offered by both Martha (John 11:21–22) and Mary (John 11:32). The reason those sisters had sent for Jesus when Lazarus fell ill was in the hopes that He would arrive and cure him (John 11:1–3). The remarks from the sisters, however, had a different tone and different context to this verse. In those cases, especially with Martha, there was a sense of trust and faith in Jesus' decisions. Here, the point is being compared to Jesus' emotional reaction to seeing the mourners and making His way to Lazarus' grave (John 11:33–36).

That comparison makes this more of a puzzled, critical comment than prior remarks. Jesus' last major "sign" was to miraculously grant sight to a man born blind (John 9:1–7). Fallout from that event, and the arguments which ensued, was the reason Jesus had moved away from Jerusalem (John 10:38–40). The crowd here, clearly familiar with that event, makes the common-sense assumption that had Jesus wanted to, He could have prevented Lazarus from dying.

That conclusion is not wrong. What the crowd does not know is that Jesus has specific plans for this incident. Jesus' delay in arriving was not an accident: it was

part of His plan (John 11:11–15). When He prays and calls out later, Jesus will directly state that what's happening is for the benefit of those who witness it. He certainly understands the pain this situation has caused. Yet He knows there is a greater good about to happen.

Here, again, Scripture confronts our natural habit of questioning God. The assumption behind the crowd's question is that Jesus *didn't want* Lazarus to live, or didn't care, since He let Lazarus die. The truth is that God has plans we can't always see or understand (Isaiah 55:8–9), but those plans have a purpose (Romans 8:28).

Context Summary

John 11:38–44 describes the seventh and final miraculous "sign" recorded in the gospel of John. This is by far the most spectacular, as Jesus restores life to a man who has been dead for four days. Lazarus' death is confirmed to the point that his family hesitates to open his tomb, fearing what a putrefying corpse will smell like. For the benefit of the crowd, Jesus prays loudly, then commands Lazarus to arise. Lazarus does so, still wrapped in his burial shrouds. This display of divine power only increases the resolve of Jesus' enemies to have Him killed as soon as possible.

John 11:38, NIV: Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.

What does John 11:38 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

This statement once again uses the term found in verse 33. A reasonable translation of the word is "indignant," since it's the same word used to describe the reaction of onlookers when Mary anoints Jesus with expensive perfume (Mark 14:5). Jesus is displeased—righteously angry—at the pain being suffered by these people. The infamously-short verse "Jesus wept" (John 11:35) proves that Christ is fully man, with the full range of human emotions. It also shows that God does, in fact, sympathize with human suffering (Hebrews 4:15–16). That fact is important, when we remember that Jesus has planned all along to come here and raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11:11–15).

As in the case of Jesus' own burial (Mark 15:46), stone caves with large rocks were frequently used as burial chambers. Funerals in the ancient world were often performed very soon after death. Compared to modern technologies, it was extremely difficult to keep a corpse from festering. This is why, by the time Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has already been in the tomb for four days (John 11:17). It's also why, in the next verse, the ever-practical Martha will express concern about opening the grave.

John 11:39, NIV: 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.'

What does John 11:39 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

What Jesus asks for here is not a minor request. One can only imagine the reaction if someone came to visit the grave of a recently-departed friend and commanded survivors to "dig him up and open the coffin." That, however, is the equivalent of what Jesus is asking Mary and Martha to do.

In that era, embalming techniques were not nearly so effective as they are today. Martha's concern is not just practical, it's emotional. Seeing the corpse of a loved one, even in the best circumstances, can be very difficult. No one can blame Martha for being unsure about the idea of seeing her brother's body after four days of decomposition.

The fact that Lazarus is so obviously and clearly dead is part of Jesus' plan (John 11:11–15). He purposefully delayed His return to Bethany (John 11:6) in order to perform this very miracle. The assembled crowd, who followed Mary when she left to see Jesus (John 11:31), is also part of that arrangement. What happens in the next few moments is the most spectacular of Jesus' miracles as recorded in the gospel of John. As with other "signs," the purpose of this situation is to prove that Jesus is divine and empowered by God (John 20:30–31).

John 11:40, NIV: Then Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?'

What does John 11:40 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Jesus is reassuring Martha by reminding her of their prior conversation (John 11:17–27). Since Martha has spent some time learning from Him (Luke 10:38–42), this may also refer to other teachings she has absorbed. The reason for her doubt is that her brother has been in the grave for four days (John 11:17). For practical and emotional reasons, she's not eager to see the putrid corpse of her loved one (John 11:38–39).

From the start of this incident, Jesus arranged various details to set up this very moment. That includes waiting until well after Lazarus has died (John 11:6), arriving only when death was beyond doubt (John 11:17), and allowing a crowd to form (John 11:19; 11:31). The next few verses will show Jesus praying very publicly, specifically so that what happens won't be lost on those who witness it. That fits with the purpose of miracles recorded in the gospel of John: they are "signs" meant to prove Jesus is divine (John 20:30–31).

John 11:41, NIV: So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

What does John 11:41 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Stones used to cover burial plots in the ancient world were neither small nor convenient. The purpose of the cover was to keep scavengers away from the body, and to deter thieves. Wealthier people could afford larger tombs, which could come with correspondingly larger stone caps. The borrowed tomb used by Jesus after His crucifixion had a stone large enough that a group of women knew they'd need help to move it (Mark 16:3). The stone over Lazarus' grave might not have been as large, but moving it was not something one could do without a lot of effort and energy.

The "they" referred to here almost certainly means the assembled crowd. Many people from Jerusalem have come to pay their neighborly respects to Mary and Martha (John 11:18–19). Quite a few of them followed Mary when she went to see Jesus (John 11:31). Those same people are now at Lazarus' graveside,

observing what happens (John 11:35–37). With a crowd that size, it would have been easily possible to muster enough muscle to open the grave.

Jesus begins His prayer with thanksgiving to God. As He'll point out in the following verses, the purpose of these words is for the benefit of the audience. The gospel of John refers to Jesus' miracles as "signs." These are incidents with a specific message and meant for a specific reason: to prove that Jesus Christ is God (John 20:30–31).

John 11:42, NIV: 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.'

What does John 11:42 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus' words in this part of His prayer express the primary purpose of miracles: demonstrating divine approval of some message or idea. Jesus has arrived when Lazarus' death is absolutely beyond dispute (John 11:39), and He now speaks in front of a crowd of witnesses (John 11:31, 35–37). By making this declaration, Jesus is giving context to the upcoming miracle (John 11:43–44).

The gospel of John uses the term "signs" when describing Jesus' miracles (John 2:11; 4:54; 6:14). What happens in the next verse is the seventh and most spectacular of these signs. As with all of Jesus' supernatural acts, the purpose is to prove His divine nature (John 20:30–31). Some of Christ's miracles were relatively private, such as turning the water into wine in Cana—few people knew Jesus was involved. Some were public, but abrupt, such as giving sight to the blind man (John 9:1–7).

People respond to God's miraculous signs in varied ways. This is much the same way they respond to the mundane physical signs we see on streets and in buildings. When printed signs offer warnings or guidance, some accept what is said. Others notice, but don't take the message seriously. Some ignore it entirely, thinking it does not apply to them. Others deliberately ignore warning posters because they don't like the restriction. Jesus makes this miracle *extremely obvious*, and as a result, the reaction from His most hateful critics is extreme as well. Instead of accepting the meaning of the miracle, the religious leaders of Jerusalem will seek death for both Jesus and Lazarus (John 11:53; 12:10–11).

John 11:43, NIV: When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!'

What does John 11:43 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

All the details described in chapter 11 were intended to set up this moment. Jesus has purposefully arrived at Lazarus' grave when death is beyond all possible doubt (John 11:39). There is a crowd of onlookers (John 11:35–37). Jesus has openly and clearly given credit to God, and God's approval of Jesus, for what is about to happen (John 11:41–42). All of this fits the purpose of Jesus' miracles, which are meant to be "signs" proving that He is divine (John 20:30–31). This was Jesus' intent from the beginning (John 11:11–15). Verses 43 and 44 contain the seventh of seven such "signs" as recorded in the gospel of John.

As with any message, people can choose to accept or ignore what they're told. By making this miracle outrageously public, Jesus is forcing witnesses to "take sides." As it turns out, some of His most hateful critics will only respond with more anger and more violence (John 11:53; 12:10–11).

A common joke told about this incident involves Jesus' use of Lazarus' name. Just as with modern graveyards, ancient people tended to place their dead in common areas (Mark 5:1–3). This means the now-opened grave of Lazarus is not the only one nearby. It's been said—only somewhat in jest—that if Jesus hadn't specified who He was talking to, *everyone* buried there would have "come forth!"

John 11:44, NIV: 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.'

What does John 11:44 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

Some of Jesus' miracles were done with little or no preparation, such as granting sight to a blind man (John 9:1–7). Some were done with few people knowing

there was a miracle at all, or that Jesus was even involved (John 2:7–10). Some took time to develop or become obvious (John 6:9–14). In contrast, Jesus has set this miracle up for maximum dramatic impact. This is the seventh of seven "signs" indicated by the gospel of John. The purpose of those signs is to prove that Jesus is divine (John 20:30–31).

In keeping with that purpose, Jesus predicted the outcome of His visit to the disciples (John 11:11–15). He waited to arrive until Lazarus' death was absolutely beyond debate (John 11:39). He allowed a crowd to form (John 11:31; 35–37). He publicly prayed to God, connecting His power to the Father's approval (John 11:41–42). And He gave a dramatic, authoritative command for a dead man to leave his grave (John 11:43).

One can only imagine the bedlam erupting after Lazarus did exactly that. In front of many witnesses, Jesus opened a grave and called out to a putrefying corpse —and that person walked out of the tomb alive and healthy, still tangled in grave clothes. Unique among His many miracles, this was a moment of deliberate spectacle. The impact on the people, even those who did not witness it, is immense. Many of those who greet Jesus a few days later, at the triumphal entry (John 12:12–19), are inspired by His ability to raise the dead.

As the next verses show, many of those who witnessed the miracle interpreted it correctly: they believed in Jesus (John 11:45). Others did not (John 11:46). Still others are so hardened and stubborn that they seek an extreme response of their own (John 11:53; 12:10–11).

John 11:45, NIV: Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

What does John 11:45 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus has just performed the seventh of seven "signs" as recorded in the gospel of John (John 20:30–31). This was the most highly-arranged of Jesus' miracles. Raising Lazarus for the sake of witnesses was His intent all along (John 11:11–15). He deliberately waited until death was beyond all doubt (John 11:39). and made a clear statement that He was operating with divine power (John 11:41–

42). In response to His command, a dead man came back to life and was restored to his family (John 11:43–44).

Another part of the spectacle is the crowd of witnesses. When Lazarus' sister made a hasty exit, curious mourners followed her (John 11:31). These were locals and neighbors from in and around Jerusalem (John 11:18–19). A major factor in this miracle's impact was the presence of these otherwise-neutral observers (John 11:35–37). John's choice of terms here is not an accident. In this gospel, he uses the phrase "the Jews" to refer to the religious leaders of Jerusalem and their immediate followers.

Many who witnessed Jesus' unmistakable miracle interpret it exactly the way they were meant to: as a sign of Jesus' divine authority. Contrary to the claim that some people "just need evidence," the reaction of others shows that even obvious miracles aren't enough for the stubborn (Luke 16:31). At least some react with skepticism and "tattle" to their leaders (John 11:46). Those leaders, for the most part, respond to extreme evidence of Christ's identity with extreme violence (John 11:53; 12:9-11). Seeing some of their own converted to Jesus' side would have been enraging for these proud men.