

John 11:1-16

Jesus has performed six “signs” up to this point. Each sign pointed to his identity as the one who was sent from the Father and as being one with the Father. The signs up to this point have been: turning water into wine (2:1-11), healing the official’s son (4:46-54), the healing of the cripple (5:1-18), the feeding of the multitude (6:1-15), walking on water (6:16-21), and healing the man born blind (9:1-41). This chapter is the seventh sign and the last act of Jesus’ ministry before he is crucified. It is the high point of his pre-passion ministry.

Three new characters are introduced in the first verses of this passage: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. While it has not been the practice of this class to look to other Gospels to increase our understanding of the Gospel of John, we can learn more about Mary, Martha, and Lazarus from turning to the Gospel of Luke. First, for the identity of Mary we will read Luke 7:37-38, 10:38-42. Then for Lazarus, we can consider Luke 16:19-31.

What happened to a man named Lazarus in the parable from Luke 16?

How is Lazarus referred to in John 11:3? Has anyone else received this name directly up to this point in the Gospel?

John identifies Mary as the one who anointed Jesus’ feet with oil. However, this does not happen until the next chapter. What implications can you draw from this? In other words, why does John assume the reader of his gospel will already know that Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with oil before he tells them about it?

According to the words of our Lord in John 11:4, how is God glorified? When does this ultimately happen?

What is strange about Jesus waiting two days to go to Lazarus?

Jesus responds to the statement about Lazarus' illness by doing nothing. Notice a similar response by Jesus to similar requests in 2:4 and 7:3-10. To whose requests alone does Jesus respond?

It is assumed that those who are loved by Jesus become terminally ill. In America, there is a large movement from within the church to accept "faith healings." While God can perform miracles of healing, this group goes so far as to say that those who are not healed if they ask for healing are weak in the faith or have no faith at all. What is wrong with this belief? What can we do to minister to people who believe they do not have faith because their prayers for healing have "not been answered"?

11:8 is the last time the disciples will call Jesus "Rabbi." We cannot know for certain it was the raising of Lazarus from the dead that caused this change in perspective, but it very well might be that in the raising of Lazarus from the dead, the disciples of Jesus saw him as more than a teacher.

(11:9-14) Jesus knows what he is getting into in returning to Bethany. He knows that it is still "daylight" and that he has work to do before it is night. (Note 13:30- "and it was night.") His time has not yet come. He also knows (supernaturally) that Lazarus has died. He is not going to the bedside of an ill friend; he is going to a tomb to raise the dead.

(11:16) "Thomas looked death in the face and chose death with Jesus rather than life without him" (NICNT, 484). There are several ways of looking at Thomas' statement: "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

- Thomas believes Jesus is going to his death by going to Bethany. And as the New International Commentary says Thomas "chose death with Jesus rather than life without him."
- Thomas believes Jesus is going to his death by going to Bethany. He is frustrated with the rash behavior of Jesus and his comment here is meant to be sarcastic. (Which would make sense given that the disciples are still unaware that the purpose for Jesus coming into the world is to lay his life down for the sheep. However, it would not explain why the disciples actually made the trip to Bethany with Jesus.)
- Thomas is talking about dying with LAZARUS. Jesus is going to wake Lazarus from the sleep of death and Thomas recognizes his need to be freed from his eventual death as well. (This casts the best construction on what Thomas is saying, but might give him too much credit for understanding what Jesus has said.)