

# “The Last Sign: Raising Lazarus in Bethany”

John 11:1-44  
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Rev. Richard L. Haney  
Fairfield Presbyterian Church

## **Introduction** Story: San Lazaro, Belize

This 7<sup>th</sup> sign in the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel, like the apocalyptic Seventh Seal, brings us to the final level of revelation about Jesus before his Passion. Part I of John’s Gospel we have called the *Book of Signs*; Part II is the *Book of Glory*. John understands *glory* and Jesus being *glorified* as the Good Shepherd laying down his life for his sheep... Glory is not simply the church or the world praising God or giving him glory—glory also has to do with God’s true nature, his substance--his weightiness. And Jesus is ultimately and fully revealed as the suffering servant who incarnates God’s grace and truth (OT picture of *YHWH*; full of *hesed* and *emet*).

John carefully selected signs that point to the *word-made-flesh* and portray the incarnate Son of God as the one who brings light and life to our world. Do you remember the Prologue to this Gospel? Verse 4 reads, “*That which had come to be in Him was life, and this life was the light of men.*” The 6<sup>th</sup> sign (the healing of the man born blind) highlighted for us that Jesus is the **Light** of the world; now the raising of Lazarus will show us that Jesus comes to bring **Life** to those who receive him, who believe in his name. Recall once again John’s purpose statement (20:31); “*I have written these signs that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you might have life in his name.*”

The raising of Lazarus is a story in two acts.

The setting identifies Lazarus of Bethany who has fallen ill. This word comes to Jesus where he is resting with his disciples in the desert. He decides “to wait” before going to Bethany—the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus (11:1-6).

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (2) It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. (3) So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” (4) But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it.” (5) Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. (6) So when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two day longer in the place where he was.

**Act I** Jesus decides to return to Judea and discusses Lazarus’ “death” with his disciples. “His delay” ultimately will help their belief (11:7-16).

(7) Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go into Judea again.” (8) The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?” (11) Thus he spoke, and then he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake

him out of sleep.” (12) The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” (13) Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. (14) Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead; (15) and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

Jesus’ journey had two themes: the journey to *Judea* into hostile territory will lead to danger and opposition and ultimately Jesus’ sacrificial death whereas the journey to *Lazarus* will lead to Lazarus’ life restored.

## **Act II** Jesus in Bethany of Judea (11:17-44).

### Scene 1: Jesus speaks to Martha

(17) Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. (18) Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, (19) and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. (20) When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary sat in the house. (21) Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. (22) And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.”

(23) Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” (24) Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” (25) Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,, (26) and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (27) She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world.”

### Scene 2: Jesus speaks to Mary

(28) When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” (29) And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. (32) Then Mary, when she came where Jesus was and saw him, fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

(33) When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved and troubled; (34) and he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” (35) Jesus wept. (36) So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” (38) Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

### Scene 3: Jesus speaks to Lazarus

(39) Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” (40) Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” (41) So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. (42) I knew that thou hearest me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that thou didst send me.” (43) When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” (44) The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

When events turn bad, when people become ill... When it seems God doesn’t care because He apparently is absent... When Jesus doesn’t respond as expected and hoped for... what do you think or do? John recounts this story and offers it as a

*sign* in the midst of the ongoing battle between belief and unbelief. So what is the **significance** of Lazarus being raised?

1. A sign of God's glory and power (7<sup>th</sup> sign, greatest miracle)
2. An occasion for glimpsing the reality behind the sign – Jesus' own death...gateway because He "gives life by giving his life"

*\*resuscitation vs. resurrection*

3. life comes through **faith**, faith comes from seeing who Jesus is--not just Messiah, but also Son of God, also *the resurrection and the life*. (Martha and Mary finally saw and believed! But it was not easy even for them. Martha only saw Jesus as a true prophet but needed to see him as Lord over life and death.)
4. reminder – God doesn't disappoint us, ultimately!

How does Jesus raising Lazarus help us see God's perspective on life and death? It is instructive to notice how Jesus was moved, vexed, grieved, distressed by—by what? By the grief of those around him or by the unbelief around him or Satan representing the realm of death? God is not unmoved by death. He cares about us and about all that we experience--including our suffering and sorrow. Jesus wept but he did not mourn.

Death is not what GOD wants for us. The entire gospel of John has celebrated the theme that Jesus comes to bring *life-abundant* and *eternal*. Now we hear him say, looking to the cross and beyond the cross-" *I am the resurrection and the life.*"

But the new kind of life God has in store for us-*resurrection life*-requires that we leave this deathly life behind. And so death becomes a dying to this sin-ridden, finite and fallible way of life. It is the *way* or the *means* to eternal life. Death is the gate to the heavenly horizon.

## CONCLUSIONS

First, this earthly life is not ultimate-it isn't everything God has in store for us. We ought not to be totally satisfied by it nor should we cling to it. And we should not over value it. Another world, another life, another dimension awaits us.

Secondly, we need not fear death nor be tyrannized by it but the *experience* of death itself is not something we need to affirm or desire. Even Jesus recoils at the sight of it--Jesus, the author of life. Jesus, whose perspective is comprehensive, sees death as a necessary evil but an evil, nonetheless. He understands what depths

of grief accompany death.

In performing the Lazarus Sign he shows us what he intends to do with death—He overcomes it and casts it out. “*Oh Lord, Unbind us from its power. Liberate us from its hold on us.*” And how does he overcome death? You know the answer. *He gives life by giving his life...*

3. God is in the LIFE business. And we, as God’s ambassadors, also are called to affirm, nurture, celebrate and promote life—in and through Christ, the Life-giver. We represent Jesus, the Light and the Life. And so our mission does not separate ministry to souls versus ministry to bodies. We are *embodied* souls or *en-souled* bodies. Thus our ministry to one another is holistic just like our Lord’s ministry. And our ministry witnesses to faith in Christ, the Life-Giver and our ministry efforts call people to faith in Jesus who brings light and life to his followers.

**STORY** Orenbyck’s potato harvest in Salyeh, Kazakhstan.

\*See [John 5:20-29a](#)

**20**For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. **21**For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. **22**Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, **23**that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

**24**"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. **25**I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. **26**For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. **27**And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

**28**"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice **29**and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.