

**International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
January 31, 2016**

**Lesson Text: John 11:38-44
Lesson Title: Death and Resurrection**

Introduction

John chapter eleven opens with an announcement that a man named Lazarus is sick (John 11:1). This may be just a statement of fact to us but to Lazarus and those who loved him it was serious. Sickness can go away or it can lead to death. In the case of Lazarus, it led to death.

Lazarus lived in the city of Bethany, a couple of miles from Jerusalem, with his two sisters Mary and Martha. It has been nearly two years since Jesus' famous visit to Bethany where Mary sat at His feet and heard His word while her sister Martha worried over the meal (Luke 10:38-42). After that momentous occasion, a closeness developed between Jesus and the residents of this humble home in Bethany. Perhaps Jesus stayed with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus when He came down for the feast days in Jerusalem. Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:3, 5). They were very close friends.

Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus concerning Lazarus' sickness, hoping He would come and perhaps pray or heal Lazarus (John 11:3). When Jesus heard Lazarus was sick, He intentionally stayed where He was two more days. That is an unusual thing, is it not? And does not make sense. The one you love is sick; therefore, you go to them or at least send a message of comfort, thoughts or prayers. Not Jesus. He has other plans for this occasion of sickness and death.

When Jesus arrived at Bethany, Martha rushed out to meet Him while Mary sat in the house absorbed in her grief. As soon as Martha goes into the presence of Jesus, she burst out with, "*Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died*" (John 11:21). Martha has faith in Jesus but like most of us she needed her faith strengthened and clarified, to help her realize Jesus' full authority. With Martha Jesus spent much time talking about the truths related to Lazarus' present condition of death. To Mary, however, Jesus spoke no word but simply wept with her (John 11:35). Mary was the more sensitive of the two sisters, so Jesus simply joined her in deep grief. He then asked to be taken to the tomb (John 11:34). His actions there reveal much about our Lord.

Jesus Reacting to Death (John 11:38-40)

Verse 38

“Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.”

When Jesus saw Mary and the Jews weeping (John 11:33-35), He was moved within and “*wept*.” John simply recorded the words “*Jesus wept*” (John 11:35) because His tears contain more than words could ever express. His tears turned to “groans” as He approached Lazarus’ grave. Lazarus’ “grave” was “a cave.” At this particular time in biblical history graves were cut out of soft stone with an opening and a flat place on which to lay a body. A stone was then rolled over the entrance protecting predators or thieves.

The word “groaning” comes from a Greek word meaning “to snort like a horse.” The meaning behind the word is Jesus was deeply troubled or outraged, even angered. It is sometimes difficult for us to see this side of our Lord. However, our Lord was angered many times, but His was never a selfish anger. He never became angry because of what people were doing to him. Here Jesus was angered at what the crushing power of death was doing to the hearts of those he loved. Perhaps He was actually seeing inside the dark grave where the decaying body of Lazarus lay, with the full knowledge that sin had brought death in the world. He stands there in the presence of the reality of death and releases some sort of snorting sound expressing His sorrow and anger.

Verse 39

“Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.”

It is not certain who Jesus commands to “Take away the stone.” It could be the disciples or some of the mourners who came to mourn with Mary. This command is no trivial matter. In Judaism, contact with a dead body is defiling. Since Lazarus has “been dead four days,” those who removed the “stone” would have certainly smelled the decaying body. All of this personal involvement would only help confirm Lazarus was “dead.”

“Martha” objects to our Lord’s command to “take away the stone.” Her objection is based on the fact that too much time has passed. It has been “four days” and she knows “by this time he stinketh.” It would be painful and actually disgusting for the family and friends gathered to see the decaying body of Lazarus. Obviously Martha is not expecting Jesus to perform a miracle, and she certainly is not expecting Jesus to raise him from the dead.

Verse 40

“Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?”

Earlier in the story, Jesus had told Martha her brother would rise again (John 11:23). Martha knew this, but interpreted Jesus' words as taking place in the last day. Now Jesus says, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" With this question Jesus is directing Martha's attention from the *doctrine of the resurrection*, to a confidence in the *person of the resurrection*. By doing this, Jesus is seeking to stretch her faith.

Jesus promised Martha if she would "believe" she would "see the glory of God." Martha must realize whatever Jesus does in this situation of death is ultimately for the "glory of God." Martha must get her attention off of the corpse and focus it on Christ. Everything is about God's glory. Lazarus' resurrection was about God's "glory," not Lazarus getting a second chance at life or Martha and Mary getting their brother back.

Question: Do you want to see your problems solved, or God glorified?

Death Reacting to Jesus (John 11:41-44)

Verse 41-42

"Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me."

Martha finally gives in and "they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid." After the "stone" is removed, "Jesus lifted up his eyes" toward heaven and began to pray. Martha has just testified she believes whatever Jesus asks of the Father, He will give to Him (John 11:22). Jesus prayed, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me." This public prayer was for the sake of those gathered around the open tomb. It was an occasion for public thanksgiving and for Christ to declare His oneness with the Father at all time and in all situations. If Christ had not prayed where everyone present could hear him, the crowd may have attributed Lazarus' resurrection to someone else. Upon hearing Jesus' words, they are now able to give God and Christ the glory for everything about to happen.

Jesus was not asking the Father to raise Lazarus, but thanking Him for hearing His prayer. God "always" hears the prayers of His Son! What specific prayer Jesus is referring to is hard to identify. It could possibly be a prayer He prayed upon receiving news of Lazarus sickness in John 11:3-4. The Father may have answered a prayer He prayed there for this sickness to be a means by which the Son of God may be glorified. It could also be a reference to His prayer here at Lazarus' tomb "that they may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 11:42).

Verse 43-44

“And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.”

Having prayed, being heard by the Father and those standing at the tomb, Jesus “cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.” Matthew Henry is credited as the first to say, “If Jesus had not specified Lazarus and just said, ‘Come forth,’ everyone in the graveyard would have raised up!” The “loud voice” speaks of authority and accessibility to the Father. Christ does not mumble these words underneath His breath. No one comes away from Lazarus’s tomb wondering who raised him from the dead. It is the voice of the Lord and His power that conquered death at Lazarus’s tomb. Jesus is the cause of Lazarus’ rising from the dead!

Lazarus comes out of the tomb “bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin.” Still being wrapped in his graveclothes signifies Christ has restored life to the old body of Lazarus. When Christ rose from the dead, He left His graveclothes in the tomb, including the napkin which had been wrapped around his head (John 20:5-7). Why? Because Christ came out of His tomb with a glorified body. Lazarus’ resurrection on this occasion is about restored life. He, like all of us who have been saved by grace, will have a resurrection like Christ in the future when we will receive a glorified body.

“Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.” Again, the witnesses to this resurrection are very much involved in the outworking of the miracle. Those who rolled away the stone most likely saw and smelled the decaying body of Lazarus. They also witnessed Jesus calling Lazarus out of the tomb, and they helped remove Lazarus’ graveclothes so he could express and enjoy the life Christ had given him.

Conclusion

Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Their humble home in Bethany was a haven of rest for Him as He ministered to the multitudes. Word of Lazarus’ sickness and death did not take Him by surprise. Although Jesus knew Lazarus’ sickness would ultimately be for God’s glory, He nevertheless grieved and wept as He stood at Lazarus’ grave. He felt what Mary and Martha felt and He experienced their sadness and sense of loss (Hebrews 4:15).

As Christians we share life’s sorrows and joys. When our brothers and sisters in Christ suffer sickness or the loss of a loved one, we sympathize and weep

with them. We also share the hope of resurrection through Jesus Christ. While Christ no longer raises the dead as He did at Bethany, He does promise a future resurrection for all who have died in Christ (Romans 6:5; Titus 2:13; Revelation 20:6).

On that long ago day at Bethany, Jesus broke the power of death and Lazarus arose to live again. We know Lazarus died again at some point and went home to be with the Lord. However, his death and resurrection on this special occasion points to the death and resurrection of Jesus which guarantees new life to all who believe by faith and trust Him for salvation (Romans 10:9-10).

Amen.