

The Resurrection of Lazarus

John 11

April 11, 2021

The story of the death and resurrection of Jesus is the centerpiece of inspired Scripture. Without these events, there is no organizing center that draws the diverse narratives of the Bible together into a single, unified message. In our last two messages celebrating **Palm Sunday** and **Resurrection Sunday**, we focused attention on the significance of these events as they are recorded in **John's Gospel** and **Revelation**. We first noted on Palm Sunday how the story of Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem is told in a divine paralleling of **John 12** and **Revelation 12**—the *former* viewing it from the standpoint of earth and the *latter* viewing it from the standpoint of heaven.

Then we observed on Resurrection Sunday how John in his Gospel takes us on a *walk through the tabernacle of Moses* to show us how **Jesus is now the incarnation of the tabernacle of God with His people**. He progressively unveils how Jesus fulfilled everything pictured in each of the pieces of furniture of the tabernacle moving from the Outer Court into the Holy Place and finally into the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle structure. He announces in this review that Jesus has now become our altar of sacrifice, our laver of cleansing, our table of shewbread, our lampstand, our altar of incense, and finally our mercy seat!

The first and last pieces of furniture encountered in a walk through the tabernacle are especially significant. The **altar of burnt offering** where lambs were sacrificed to cover the sins of the offerers becomes a picture of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice for sinners on His cross, while the **ark of the covenant** with its golden lid of the **mercy seat** was overshadowed by the fashioned likenesses of cherubim with wings spread looking down upon the blood of a sacrificial lamb sprinkled annually by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. Interestingly, in the OT the **altar** and the **mercy seat** were the only two places where God announced to Israel, **"There will I meet you!"** The altar and the mercy seat were the only places of communion between God and man in the OT. ***Translated into their NT fulfillment in Jesus, the only two places that God has appointed to meet us are the cross and the empty tomb—the death and the resurrection of His Son. These two together tell the story of our redemption!***

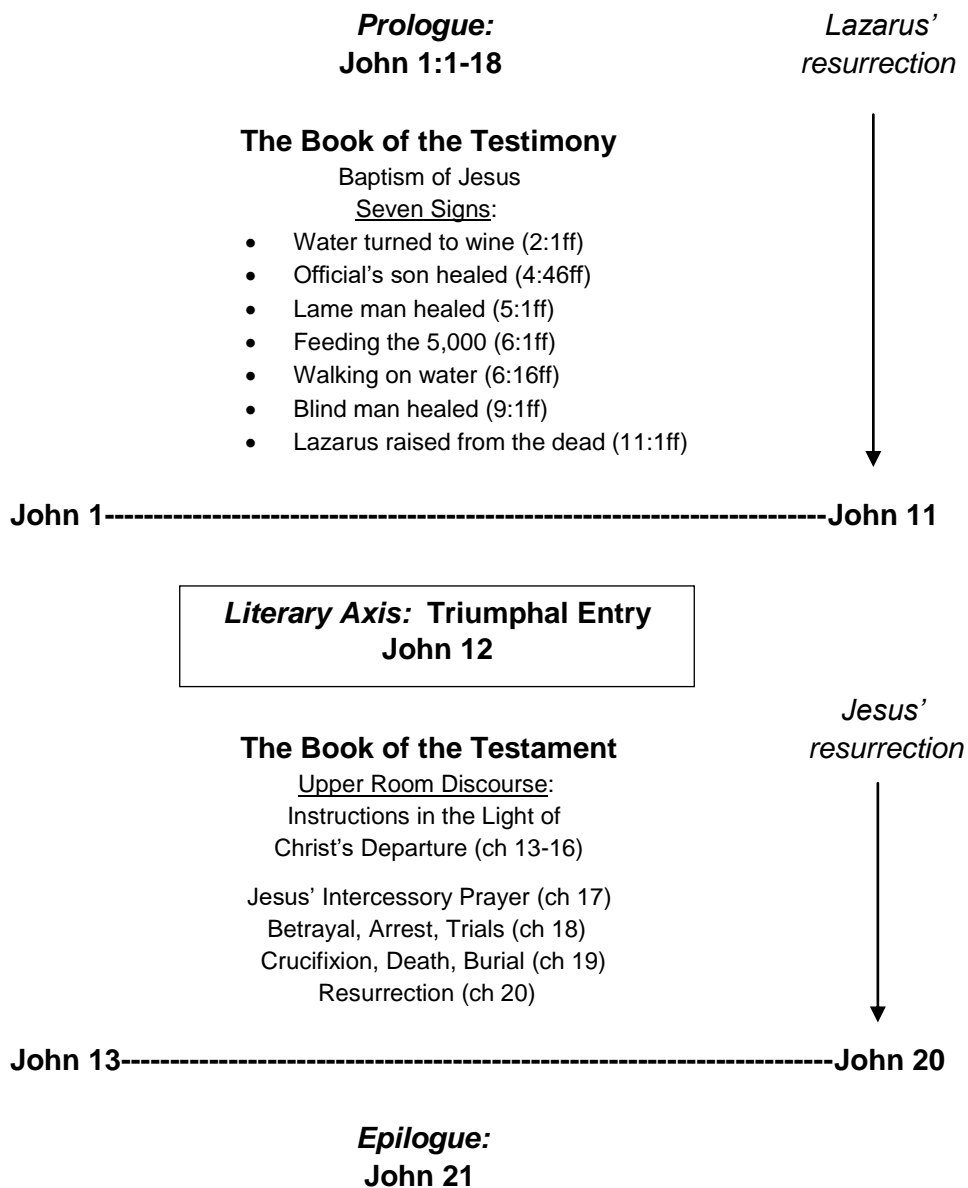
We also noted last week that the first one who was allowed to behold the new Holy of Holies created by the resurrection of Christ was Mary Magdalene, not Caiaphas the High Priest! A woman of no regard in Israel was shown the true Holy of Holies at the empty tomb. It is the place where death was swallowed up in victory! It was this Mary who had been oppressed by seven demons (Lk 8:2) but was miraculously cleansed and restored to purity by Jesus. It was this same Mary who was now the first to enter the Holy of Holies established by the death and resurrection of Jesus! ***The message is clear: If the way into the Holy of Holies was cleared for her, it was cleared for all sinners like her!***

This was the story we looked at last week! This morning we are returning to John's Gospel to note yet another pattern that he embeds in his story of Jesus. What we are learning about John's Gospel is that there is no one structural pattern that by itself fully explains the way that John tells the amazing story of Jesus in both his Gospel and the book of Revelation.

We noted, for example, in our message on Palm Sunday how John makes his Gospel and Revelation companion volumes in telling his story of Jesus. The two books track with each other in the stories they tell, one from earth's viewpoint and the other from heaven's. **John 12** relates the story of Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem and the immediate events following it, and the matching text of **Revelation 11:15-12:10** reports the sounding of the seventh trumpet in heaven—a war trumpet announcing victory over the Dragon and his angels who were being cast out of heaven at the same time as the Triumphal Entry on earth. We

noted from the striking overlap of vocabulary in **John 12** and **Revelation 12** that these two texts are reporting the same event, one on earth and the other in heaven, and both chapters also constitute the literary axes of their respective books.

I want to return to look more closely this morning at the structure of John's Gospel. The Triumphal Entry in **John 12** is the **centerpiece** and **literary axis** around which the two halves of the Gospel are arranged. On either side of the Triumphal Entry at the pivotal center of the book, the author neatly arranges what has been titled the **Book of the Testimony** in John 1-11, and the **Book of the Testament** in John 13-21. So John's Gospel is arranged as a literary bifid with two halves pivoting around John 12 as its literary axis. **John 1-11**, the first half of the Gospel, is **John's Book of the Testimony**, authenticating Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, by seven miraculous signs. Note the following structure of John's Gospel.



Further evidence that the Triumphal Entry in John 12 forms the central pivot of the book is seen in the fact that it is marked off by two ceremonial events involving feet: Mary anoints the feet of Jesus, and Jesus washes the feet of His disciples. **John 12** opens with Mary of Bethany anointing the feet of Jesus with costly

perfume and wiping His feet with her hair **before** His Triumphal Entry, while Jesus washes the feet of His disciples **after** His Triumphal Entry at the Last Supper. These foot anointing/washing narratives contain clear echoes of each other, and by drawing attention to each other, they highlight the Triumphal Entry that stands between them.

The Foot Anointing/Foot Washing Narratives

Mary's Anointing of Jesus' Feet John 12:1-8	Jesus' Washing of the Disciples' Feet John 13:1-30
12:1 "six days before the Passover "	13:1 "Now before the Feast of the Passover "
12:2 "There they made Him a supper "	13:2 "And supper being ended"
12:2 "Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him" Cf. 11:3 Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus: "He whom you love is sick"	13:23 "Now there was reclining on Jesus' breast one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved "
12:3 "Mary...anointed the feet of Jesus"	13:5 Jesus "began to wash the disciples' feet "
12:3 "Mary... wiped His feet with her hair"	13:5 Jesus "began...to wipe the disciples' feet with the towel"
12:4 " Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, would betray Him "	13:2 "the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him "
12:5-6 Judas says: " 'Why was not this fragrant oil sold...and given to the poor '... he had the money box "	13:29 "For some thought, because Judas had the money box , that Jesus had said...that he should give something to the poor "

Jesus washing the feet of His disciples also opens the second large section of John's Gospel—the **Book of the Testament**. Up to this point Jesus had been revealing Himself to the world as the Son of God. He did so by seven miraculous signs authenticating His identity as the Christ, the Son of God. However, in **John 13** Jesus' focus shifts to the cross, through which He will ultimately find glorification by His Father. The **Book of the Testament** opens with the Upper Room Discourse (chapters 13-16) where Jesus instructs His disciples in the light of His departure. Then follows Christ's Gethsemane prayer (chapter 17), and the account of His passion, death and resurrection (chapters 18-20). The book then closes with a post-resurrection story that highlights the restoration of Peter after his denials of Christ (chapter 21).

The **Book of the Testimony** is built around miracles that are public and proclamatory (intended for the multitudes), the **Book of the Testament** is more private and instructional (intended to prepare the twelve for His departure from them). The structural patterns of the **Book of the Testimony** and the **Book of the Testament** both climax with an emphasis on the resurrection! In fact, John tells the story of Lazarus' resurrection in **John 11** in a way that clearly anticipates the greater resurrection of Jesus in **John 20**. Note the following:

John 11	John 20
(11:3) "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."	(20:2) "And so she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved "
(11:16) " Thomas therefore, who is called Didymus ," is skeptical about the trip to Bethany	(20:24-25) "But Thomas , one of the twelve, called Didymus ," is skeptical about the resurrection
(11:23) Jesus declares to Martha: "Your brother shall rise again "	(20:9) "For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead"
(11:25) "He who believes in Me shall live even if he	(20:8) "So the other disciple . . . entered then also,

dies”	and he saw and believed ”
(11:31-33) The guests suppose that Mary is going to the tomb to weep	(20:1, 11) “ Mary ” goes to “ the tomb ” and “ weeps ”
(11:34) Jesus asks, “ Where have you laid him? ”	(20:15) Mary asks Jesus, supposing He is the gardener, “Tell me where you have laid Him ”
(11:39) Jesus said, “ <i>Take away the stone</i> ”	(20:1) Mary “saw the stone already <i>taken away</i> ”
(11:44) Lazarus “came forth, bound hand and foot with <i>wrappings</i> ; and his <i>face</i> was wrapped with a cloth . Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him and let him go.’”	(19:40) “they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen <i>wrappings</i> ; (20:6-7) “Simon Peter . . . entered the tomb; and he beheld the linen <i>wrappings</i> lying there, and the face-cloth , which had been on His head”

In the remainder of our time this morning, we want to move in for a closer look at the story in **John 11**, noting, first of all, how the story unfolds in five movements.

- A** Jesus delays His return to Bethany; Lazarus dies; his death is mourned 11:1-19
- B** Martha comes out to meet Jesus: “*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*” 11:20-22
- C** Jesus declares, “*I am the resurrection and the life...Do you believe this?*” 11:23-27
- B’** Mary comes out to meet Jesus: “*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*” 11:28-32
- A’** Lazarus comes out of the tomb 11:33-44

The story of Lazarus’ resurrection in **John 11** is intended to prepare the believing and harden the unbelieving when the greater resurrection of Jesus occurs soon afterward.

- In **A** (11:1-19), the focus is on Lazarus, his sickness, his death, and Jesus’ intentional delay in returning to Bethany. In **A’** (11:33-44) everything centers on the reversal of Lazarus’ death in his dramatic resurrection from the grave.
- In **A**, the sisters sent word to Jesus, saying, “Lord, he whom you **love** is sick,” and at the end of the story in **A’** the Jews remark as they witness Jesus weeping at the grave, “See how he **loved** him” (11:36).
- As the story opens in **A**, Jesus says that Lazarus’ sickness is “for **the glory of God**” (11:4), and in **A’** Jesus declares, “Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see **the glory of God?**” (11:40).

The story that unfolds in this chapter occurs just after Jesus had withdrawn from Jerusalem to the wilderness place beyond the Jordan where John had been preaching and baptizing as the Gospel opened. The wrath of the hostile Jews in Jerusalem accusing Jesus of blasphemy in **John 10** had moved them to attempt to seize and put Him to death by stoning, but He escaped from their grasp. Now an event is going to bring Jesus back into close proximity with those enemies in Jerusalem.

Lazarus, Mary, and Martha live in Bethany, a village less than two miles from Jerusalem. Jesus’ close friend, Lazarus, has suddenly become very ill and his sisters, Mary and Martha, sent a message to Jesus that his close friend and their brother was more than just sick, he was critically ill. Jesus’ response to their news was strange indeed. Instead of rushing back to Bethany, He intentionally delayed his return to Bethany. He makes a rather cryptic response to the news of Lazarus when in He says in vs. 4,

⁴This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.

His words appear at first to suggest that Lazarus' sickness is not life-threatening, so no need to worry. Jesus says, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God." Knowing what we know is coming in the story, it is clear that Jesus means that while Lazarus' sickness will, in fact, end in death, that will not be the end of the story. ***It is going to end in a dramatic display of the glory of God!*** Verse 5 is added to make clear that Jesus' delay does not mean He is indifferent to Mary and Martha's concerns. On the contrary, there was a very deep and affectionate bond between Jesus and this family. Yet despite the wrenching anguish that He knew His delay would cause the sisters, and the grim experience Lazarus himself was about to undergo, Jesus remained where He was until He sensed precisely what the Father was leading Him to do. Earlier, in **John 5:19** Jesus had said,

Most assuredly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner."

Jesus here was awaiting a revelation of the Father's direction, and when it came two days later, vs. 7 reports that Jesus said to His disciples, "*Let us go to Judea again.*" The report of Jesus' resolve to return was not good news to the disciples. They object in vs. 8,

⁸Rabbi, lately (i.e., recently) the Jew sought to stone You, and are You going there again?

The disciples remind Him of the hostility He had barely escaped only days before. Their concern for Jesus' safety likely involved fear for their own lives as well. But in the exchange that follows, Jesus compares His ministry to the urgency of working during the daylight hours when the One who is the light of the world is still with them. Jesus proceeded according to the mindset He has voiced in **John 9:4-5**,

"As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent Me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

The protests of the disciples are quieted by the urgency in Jesus' words. Then when the disciples learn that Lazarus' sleep is actually the sleep of death, Jesus says to them,

¹⁵I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless (i.e., notwithstanding all your hesitancy) let us go to him."

The disciples are scheduled for yet another faith-expanding moment in what will happen upon their return to Bethany! As the disciples' arguments against returning to Judea fade away, we hear one final whimpering word from Thomas, the doubter, adding his pessimistic conclusion to the whole matter when he says,

¹⁶"Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

The scene then fast-forwards to the moment when Jesus and the disciples arrive in Bethany. Lazarus has been in the tomb now four days. Many had come to mourn with Martha and Mary over the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet Him while Mary stayed at the house. Mary and Martha had obviously been discussing what might have happened if Jesus had arrived before Lazarus died because the same precise words are on their lips when they each by themselves first see Jesus. Here Martha says it first.

²¹"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

But then she adds as if daring to ask for the impossible,

²²"But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

Then the central exchange of the chapter takes place as Jesus dialogues with Martha to prepare her faith for what is coming.

²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into world."

Jesus' words in this exchange carry a double meaning, referring both to the final resurrection and to what He was about to do in the case of Lazarus. Martha's mindset had been fixed only in the first of these meanings, which did nothing to lessen the pain of her sadness in the present moment. Jesus had earlier in His ministry had declared that "*the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live*" (Jn 5:25). But such words remained only in the realm of the life to come in Martha's thinking.

Then Martha returns home and tells Mary,

²⁸"The Teacher has come and is calling for you."

Jesus remained in the same place outside the village where He first met Martha, and Mary rushes out to meet Him. As she approaches Jesus, she falls at His feet weeping and repeats the same words Martha had earlier said,

³²"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw her weeping and all the mourners who had followed Mary also weeping,

³³He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. ³⁴And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵Jesus wept. ³⁶Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!"

The mourners were struck by the depth of feeling Jesus showed. His deep love for Lazarus could not be hidden. Jesus here was giving concrete demonstration to what He will later teach His disciples in the Upper Room.

"By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

Then some of the mourners reveal the limits of their faith,

³⁷And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?"

It seems as if the common belief in the minds of first century Jews, including Martha and Mary and all the mourners gathered around them, was that all the miracles of Jesus were confined to miracles of healing that rescued from death, or prevented death, but once death occurred, there was no miracle power to deliver from death's grip. The final victory over death, as Martha had stated, will occur at the last day! But then, what did Jesus mean when He said, "*the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live*" (Jn 5:25). Jesus was intent on showing His power over death in His first coming as He will again in His final coming.

³⁸Then Jesus, again **groaning** in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.

The verb "groaning" is used a second time in this context. It was first used in vs. 33, and now occurs again here in vs. 38. This Greek verb is a word filled with the deep emotion that moved Jesus to tears at the sight

of Lazarus' grave in vs. 35. The verb describes a complex cluster of emotions that includes being deeply moved by grief and sorrow, while also being stirred with intense displeasure, revulsion, and angry outrage at the chaos, pain, and suffering that death creates in His Father's world. As a word that embodies the collision of **grief** and **righteous rage**, it moves Jesus to command,

³⁹"Take away the stone!"

Martha immediately warns,

"Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

Jesus then sternly reminds her,

⁴⁰"Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

The glory of God in this setting obviously refers to the manifest presence of the power of God that will swallow up death in victory and turn it into life!

⁴¹Then they took the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴²And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me."

Many in Israel had refused to acknowledge that the miracles of Jesus were exclusively a direct expression of the will and power of His Father in heaven. The masses had been confused by the wicked lie of the scribes and Pharisees that His mighty works were wrought by the power of Beelzebub (another name for the devil) directing and empowering Him, and not the power of the one true living God. Now Jesus by His prayer publicly invoking the name of the Father in heaven was reinforcing whose power flowed through Him in all His miracles, including the miracle of conquering death in the gift of resurrection life!

⁴³Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth!"

Jesus' command strikingly in the original Greek contains no verbs, only two adverbs! "Lazarus, out here!" And the instant obedience of death to the command of the Son of God is immediately reported!

⁴⁴And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth, Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

The eerie sight of a corpse now quickened by resurrection life, still in grave clothes, and lumbering forth clumsily from his grave, but clearly with the powerful surge of new life that could not be denied! Death had been left behind and Lazarus lived again!

⁴⁵Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.

The professional mourners who had come to mourn with Mary saw something that changed their lives forever. The raising of Lazarus created a new, unstoppable momentum concerning Jesus that spread through all Judea like wildfire! It was a momentum that will lead directly to the multitudes leading and welcoming Him into the east gate of Jerusalem in His Triumphal Entry that begins the story of Passion Week that is just around the corner!

One final note as we mount on eagles' wings to take a bird's eye view of this whole story. Jesus had said in **John 5:28** that *"the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear the voice of the Son of Man and will come forth."* When Lazarus hears Jesus' voice, he comes forth! His resurrection, therefore, is the pattern for all who believe, who will someday hear that same voice and "come out." John 11 resonates with this theme of "coming out." Jesus **comes out** of the land beyond the Jordan to return to Bethany. The Jewish mourners **come out** from Jerusalem to comfort Martha and Mary. Martha **comes out** of the house to meet Jesus. Mary later also **comes out** of the house to meet Jesus. Lastly, Lazarus **comes out** of the tomb! His "coming out" trumps all the others!

John 11 thus celebrates a "coming out" party, that concludes with the joy of Lazarus **coming out** of the grave! The same joy that was celebrated in **John 11** is appointed for us as well. The resurrection will be the greatest **coming out** party in all of history as time merges with eternity, and the **new creation** is celebrated by a **new humanity** that will dwell in the **New Jerusalem** in a **new heavens** and **new earth**! We will all sing a **new song** of our redemption. We will be clothed in **new garments of righteousness**.

Everything about our new life will have cast off all semblance of our old life. In this new creation, the second law of thermodynamics, the law of entropy, will be canceled. We will not grow older in heaven; we will only grow newer. The concept of oldness will be washed away in a world where change only makes better because it only makes newer! This is the new world that awaits us in the resurrection. It was purchased in the atoning death of our Savior and secured in His resurrection that now stands as the living guarantee that resurrection glory is our future as well! Hallelujah! What a Savior!