

OpenTheo

John 11:1 - 11:44



Gospel of John - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg delves into the biblical story of Lazarus from John 11:1-44. Jesus' love for Lazarus and his decision to delay his arrival despite Lazarus' sisters' request is analyzed, along with the concept of soul sleep and resurrection. Gregg explores the disciples' lack of faith and Jesus' expressions of grief and groaning at Lazarus' death, which ultimately lead to his resurrection, and ends with an analogy on being born again and the changes that come along with it.

Transcript

Let's look at John chapter 11. We're introduced in this chapter to Mary and Martha for the first time in the Gospel of John, though they are known to us also from other Gospels. Luke, in particular, has a little story about them in Luke chapter 10, where Mary and Martha are somewhat contrasted.

And Mary and Martha in this story seem to fit the same character description that we have in the Synoptic Gospels, which makes it more believable that these are not fictions, that these are real people. And we read about them in the very opening verse of chapter 11. Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.

It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Now that's an interesting inclusion here. The writers of the Gospel often assume a knowledge of later events than those that they have recorded yet.

This anointing of Jesus' feet with oil and the wiping of them with her hair is recorded in the next chapter, chapter 12. But he speaks here as if we already know that story. And perhaps the early readers did, because Jesus, we know, said on that occasion, wherever the Gospel is preached, this thing that she has done will be told in remembrance of her.

And so it's possible that Mary doing this act was extremely well known to people who had heard the Gospel. Even though John has not told the story in detail yet, he assumes his readers have heard about her. Of course, every time the Gospels mention Judas

Iscairiot, even the earliest references say, he is the one who betrayed Jesus, which of course happened much later.

So the Gospel writers assume that their readers know some of the plot that has not yet been recorded and some of the actors in it. So he says, this is that Mary, the one we're talking about here, Mary of Bethany. There are lots of Marys in the Bible, by the way, lots of Marys in the New Testament.

So he clarifies, this is that Mary who did that thing, who anointed his feet with perfume. We'll talk about that later in chapter 12. But her brother Lazarus was sick.

Therefore the sisters sent to Jesus, saying, Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick. They referred to Lazarus as the one that Jesus loved. One interesting feature of the Gospel of John that comes up later is that the author, or at least the testimony behind the whole storytelling of the book, is said to be somebody who is the disciple whom Jesus loved.

And there's been speculation as to who this disciple whom Jesus loved was, though the early church was unanimous in believing it was a reference to John. And when you look into it and look at all the evidence that would point in one direction or another, it does appear that John is the one who is called the disciple whom Jesus loved. But we do not read of that phrase, the disciple whom Jesus loved, prior to chapter 11.

And the first disciple that Jesus is said to have loved was Lazarus. The sisters refer to him as the one that you love. And therefore there have been some, I've only heard this in recent years, but there are some who speculate that the disciple whom Jesus loved was Lazarus, not John.

And that we're told that right here. That we're told that Lazarus is the disciple that Jesus loved. And that all the references elsewhere in the Gospel to the disciple that Jesus loved follow after this one.

The upshot of that is that Lazarus would be the writer of this Gospel. Because in chapter 21 we are told that the disciple whom Jesus loved is the one who testified to these things. And who wrote these things.

And that's what it says in 21-24. On the surface that sounds like an intriguing theory. However, I don't think it holds up.

Because the disciple whom Jesus loved, as we shall see in later chapters, was actually in the upper room at the Last Supper. The other Gospels tell us that was a private supper with Jesus and his twelve. Which means that the disciple that Jesus loved would have to be among the twelve and Lazarus was not.

Of course some would say, well there might have been Lazarus there in addition and the other Gospels just don't mention it. But see, for there to be a disciple that is so

intertwined in the life of Jesus and with the other disciples, and the other Gospels never to have mentioned him at all, would be very peculiar indeed. Because the disciple whom Jesus loved, who is mentioned later in the Gospel of John, is not only with him in the upper room, he is also one of the first to get to the tomb after the resurrection.

He is standing at the cross. He is the one who sees the blood and the water pour out of Jesus' side and testifies to that. He is the one that Peter looks over and shows us what this man is going to do.

And Jesus said, if it is my will that he tarry until I come, what is that to you? You go and preach the Gospel. In other words, the disciple that Jesus loved is very much present in the apostolic company. Very much present in the key events that have to do with Jesus' life and death and resurrection.

And yet for someone to be that close to Jesus and the apostles, and the other three Gospels to be able to write their entire accounts without ever mentioning him, does not seem likely. The writer of this Gospel seems to use the appellation, the disciple that Jesus loved, as a substitution for mentioning himself by name. One reason that we would say John is likely to be the disciple that Jesus loved, besides the fact that it was the tradition of the early church, is that John is one of the very few of the apostles who is not named by name elsewhere in the book.

We have the names of Peter and Andrew and Philip and Nathaniel and Thomas. We have actually at least seven or eight of the twelve named by name in the Gospel. But among those few that are not named is John.

And it would appear that the disciple whom Jesus loved is the way that the author spoke of himself, instead of mentioning himself by name. And yet Lazarus is mentioned by name. He'd be one of the ones that would not be the disciple whom Jesus loved, if that disciple is deliberately a replacement for mentioning himself by name.

Lazarus is known by name here. So, although his sister said the one you love is sick, that doesn't mean that he is the one that the Gospel refers to as the disciple that Jesus loved. After all, we are going to read only shortly thereafter, that Jesus loved Lazarus and Mary and Martha.

And no doubt a great number of other people too. Jesus loved everybody actually. The fact, that's in verse five, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

So, when the sisters referred to Lazarus as the one who you love, no doubt Lazarus was a good friend of Jesus. One that shared a hearty and affectionate fellowship with Jesus. That Jesus had expressed love and friendship with.

But the reason for mentioning him in this way is to induce Jesus to do something to help him. This is the man that is your good friend. This is the man you love, remember? And

he's sick.

He needs you. This, in contrast to people that Jesus did not know, and therefore didn't specially love, who were healed all the time, strangers. When there were strangers who were sick, Jesus healed them very frequently.

This case is someone who he loves. This case is someone who's a good friend. And that is the reason for mentioning that Lazarus is the one he loves.

It's in contrast, I think, to people that Jesus healed, whom Jesus neither knew nor specially loved, because he didn't have any acquaintance with them. So, they're making an appeal to him. You know, as you would heal people that you don't know, that you aren't friends with, we hope that you may give special priority to this one who is your friend, who is sick and needs you right now.

Then Jesus, when he heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it. Now, that apparently is the message he sent back. The sisters sent Jesus the message about Lazarus' sickness, and Jesus apparently sent this message back.

This sickness is not unto death. It's unto the glory of God. That seems to be not true, because a few days later, Lazarus died.

And almost certainly, Jesus knew at this point that that was going to happen. He seemed to know what the outcome was going to be. He said, this is going to turn out for the glory of God.

Now, in this case, it would not glorify God through a healing. If Jesus felt that a healing, in this case, would most glorify God, he would not act as he did. That is, he waited another two days to do anything about it.

He seemed to know what was going to happen. As it says in John chapter 6, when he asked Philip how they would feed this great multitude, John says, but Jesus already knew what he would do. So here, I think John could have added, Jesus already knew what he would do.

But why do you say this sickness is not unto death? Certainly, Lazarus died, but that wasn't the final outcome. The final result of this sickness, the final chapter of this story, is not going to be this man dead, but him alive. And God glorified in his resurrection.

He didn't say that the man won't die. He was just saying this sickness will not end up in death. That's what he's saying.

It will end up beyond death. So this is going to be a different kind of miracle, because Jesus is apprised in advance. He has time.

He can heal the man, but he won't. He has something else in mind. Now, that being so, we can certainly say that those who tell us that Jesus healed everybody who was sick, who wanted him to, they're mistaken.

Here's a very good example of a man who was sick. Jesus was approached with the request to come and do something for him. He could have done it, but in this case, it wasn't God's will for Lazarus to be well, it was God's will for him to die.

Of course, there was another miracle to be experienced after his death, but it makes it very clear that there may be a higher purpose in someone being sick, and even in them not being healed, that God may have. It may not always be his will to heal. It is his will that he be glorified.

The sickness is unto the glory of God, whether it ends up with Jesus healing, or with the man dying and being raised from the dead. By the way, we will be raised from the dead, too. Therefore, it may be, in some cases, God's will for our sickness to end up in death, but God will be glorified when we're raised in glory.

When we're raised from the dead, Lazarus simply had a shorter wait after his death than we will have. Now, Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus. So, when he heard that he was sick, he stayed two more days in the place where he was, which gave him time to die.

Now, that's strange that it would say that. Jesus loved these people, therefore he denied their request. He loved Lazarus, therefore he didn't go and heal him.

That's essentially what it says. It's because he loved them. Sometimes we have to be told that Jesus loved someone because his actions don't seem like it.

If John had just said, well, Jesus heard the request, sent the message back, and then waited for Lazarus to die, I think, well, he must not have loved Lazarus as much as Mary and Martha thought. He didn't care enough to go and help him. But, that's why John says, well, that is true, he didn't go and help him, but it's not because he didn't care enough.

He actually loved him. We see a similar thing in Mark 10, when the rich young ruler has come to Christ, and Jesus gives what many people consider to be a hard word to him, which was that he should sell all he had and give to the poor, and come and follow Jesus. But, before Jesus says that, in Mark's Gospel, chapter 10, verse 21, Mark 10, verse 21, it says, Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, One thing you lack, go your way, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor.

The instructions Jesus gave were difficult. Too difficult for this man, he wouldn't do it. They'd be difficult for most people.

And, when Jesus gives a hard word like this, you might think, why does he have to be so hard on me? Why can't he make it easier? I thought he was nice. I thought he loved people. Why does he have to make their life miserable? Why does he have to make these demands on people? Well, Mark, just so we'll know, says, Well, Jesus looked at him and loved him and said this.

It was because he loved him that he gave these instructions that would be so unwelcome to the man. Likewise, it was because Jesus loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus that he didn't do what they asked. God may not always answer our prayers, but it will not be because of any lack of love he has.

It's because sometimes our prayers do not take in the full vision of what God believes will best glorify him and best serve the interests of those that he loves. And so, he has to deny our requests because he has something better in mind. Therefore, he remained two more days in the place where he was rather than going to Bethany.

Now, where was Jesus? He was on the other side of the Jordan. At the end of chapter 10, we read that he had gone across the Jordan because the anger of the Jews was becoming more and more dangerous. Twice now, if not three times, they've taken up stones intending to stone him, and he's barely escaped with his life.

The heat was up too high in Judea for him to be in the area where the Pharisees, his enemies, held great sway. So, he had gone across the river into Perea, the region we call Transjordan, which was not a place where the Pharisees had as much influence. And he spent several weeks there, apparently, because he had been in Jerusalem at the Feast of Dedication in late December, and he was going to be back in Judea to die in the spring.

So, he spent some weeks across the Jordan, and that's where he was. Mary and Martha knew where he was. They were in Bethany.

Now, Bethany was almost in Jerusalem. Bethany was like a mile and three quarters from Jerusalem. Just east of the city gates was the Mount of Olives, and just on the far slopes of the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem was Bethany.

There was a road that ran from Jerusalem to Jericho. Bethany was on that road just less than a couple of miles from Jerusalem. That's where Mary and Martha and Lazarus were.

So, for Jesus to go there would have put him in harm's way. And one might have assumed that the reason he didn't respond to their request, the reason he waited two days, was that he didn't want to go where he would be in danger. If he went to Bethany, he'd be right in the lion's den again, as it were.

One could have interpreted his actions, and Mary and Martha may have interpreted them, that here Jesus hears that his friend is in trouble, but Jesus would put himself in trouble if he came to help him. So, it was a choice. Does Jesus want to endanger himself

to assist his sick friend, or will he stay in a safe place? Remember what Jesus had said in the previous chapter about the shepherd and the hireling.

He said, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hireling sees the danger and runs away because he doesn't care. And it may have looked to the women, when they saw that Jesus didn't come, and their brother died, that Jesus had been like the hireling.

There was danger in Judea, so he just wasn't going there, even if he had a needy friend there. But that wasn't the right interpretation. Of course, Jesus was the good shepherd who had laid down his life for the sheep.

If he would not avoid healing Lazarus in order to stay personally, physically safe from harm, actually he came down there, and did put himself in danger, and did die. But it had to be the right time. And the right time meant it had to get worse before it could get better.

Lazarus was sick, apparently deathly ill, and Jesus was going to come and help, but it had to get worse first. They had to lose all hope. If Jesus had simply done another healing, it would be a great thing for Lazarus and his sisters, but for the most part, for the rest of us, it's just another healing, another cipher, another statistic.

Instead, he was going to do something more remarkable, which would inspire more faith, as we shall see in his comments to his disciples at this point. Verse 7, Then after this, after the two days, he said to the disciples, let us go to Judea again. The disciples said to him, Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone you, and are you going there again? And Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.

But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him. Now, what's that got to do with anything? Jesus actually gave a similar statement before he healed the man who was born blind. In chapter 9, verse 4, he said, I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day.

The night is coming when no one can work. When we were talking about that, I mentioned that daytime seems to mean the time of opportunity. And the time of opportunity is while you're alive.

The night comes for every man when he can do nothing more. His day is over. He dies.

His opportunities have ended. And therefore, as long as a man is alive, he needs to seize the opportunities that daylight presents, because the night will come which ends his opportunities. In Jesus' case, his own death.

Now, he says, are there not twelve hours in the day? What he seems to be saying is,

your day is going to be as long as it should be. God gives twelve hours in every day, and he gives as many hours or days of a person's life as he wishes. And as long as there's an hour of daylight, that's an hour to be working.

As long as there's life in you, then that's a time when you should be continuing to be productive in doing the will of God. And so he says, it may be that my life is endangered, but I'm not going to retire early. I'm still alive.

The sun's still shining. There's still opportunity to work. These things he said, and after that, he said to them, our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.

Now, sleep as a metaphor for death is fairly common in the scripture. Daniel chapter 12 says, many who sleep in the dust shall arise. And if this is a reference to the resurrection, as many people believe, then sleeping in the dust is a reference to death and being buried.

But for the most part, the idea that death is sleep is a New Testament idea. The doctrine of soul sleep is popular among many. That is the idea that when you die, you're unconscious and you don't know anything until the end of the world when Jesus raises the dead, and then you wake up to your own conscious awareness.

You have not had any passage of time. You cease to have consciousness of any kind. And when you die, and then you come back to consciousness at the end of the world.

There may be hundreds of years have transpired from the day of your death to the day of the resurrection, but it wouldn't make any difference to you. You wouldn't know the difference. It's like when you go to sleep and wake up again, and somehow you've had such a sleep that you don't even remember the passage of the time at all.

Sometimes you might doze off for a few moments and wake up and even deny that you were asleep because you don't remember the time you were snoring. Everyone else knows you were asleep, but you deny it because you don't think you were. And some people think death is going to be like that.

You go to sleep. You don't know anything. You wake up, and it's just fine.

You're in a new body. You're glorified. That's the doctrine of soul sleep, and it takes much of its encouragement from passages like this and others where Jesus and the apostles spoke of dead people as sleeping.

Jesus spoke that way also earlier than this when he went into Jairus' house and Jairus' daughter had died. And there were mourners there. And she said, what are you mourning about? She's not dead.

She's only asleep. And they laughed him to scorn knowing she was dead. Sleep and

death have something in common with each other, hence the metaphor.

Paul uses the term too. He says those who sleep in Christ, he will bring with him when he comes. And he says, I show you a mystery.

We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed. He means not all of us will die. It's fairly common in the New Testament.

What is the connection between sleep and death? As I said, those who believe in soul sleep believe that this means that when you're dead, you're unaware of anything. You have no consciousness. Like when you're asleep.

Well, wait a minute. Is that like when you're asleep? Is your mind inactive? Now, sometimes you sleep so deeply that you wake up, and you don't know you're asleep. But much more commonly, most people would say that when they're asleep, they do have mental activity.

We have dreams. We're not completely oblivious. After all, when the alarm goes off, we hear it, and we recognize that means wake up.

We're not unconscious. We're just somewhere else. When you're in a dream, you're in another reality.

In your dream, you're not lying in your bed. You are actively doing something, interacting with other people and seeing things. There's another world you're in, in your consciousness, but you're not unconscious.

And therefore, if Jesus or Paul wished to convey the idea that when people are dead, they're unconscious, sleep would not really be the right metaphor to choose because it really would not convey that idea. But what does it convey? One thing we know about sleep is that when people are asleep, they usually wake up. They're expected to wake up.

While it is true some people die in their sleep and don't wake up, certainly, it's expected that they'll wake up. In other words, sleep is temporary. This has nothing to do with what the mental state of sleep of a person is.

It has to do with the fact that when someone goes to sleep, that's not the end. They come back awake again. That's what sleep is known to be, generally speaking.

And to call death sleep would suggest that when someone is dead, they seem to be permanently gone. But it's really not a permanent state any more than sleep is. There is a resurrection.

Those who have died will get up again, just like those who sleep will wake up again. Without any reference to what they are thinking in the interim, it's more to do with the

fact that this is not really the end. And so, when Jesus said of the girl, she's not dead, she's asleep, what did he do? He raised her from the dead.

He says, our friend Lazarus is asleep, I'm going to go wake him up. What he means is he's going to raise him from the dead. When Paul says, we shall not all sleep, we'll be changed, he says, for the dead in Christ shall rise.

Sleep is like death, in that dead people are going to get up someday. And that is apparently the meaning of the metaphor. And so Jesus uses it here.

It's not the first time. He has used it in the case of Jairus' daughter, but the disciples are not yet used to the idea that Jesus speaks of death this way. It's not apparently something he'd done very often.

And the disciples said, Lord, if he sleeps, he'll get well. Sometimes it's actually a good sign. And what they need most is to be able to sleep.

Sleep is what will help them to recover most. And Jesus said, well, Lazarus is asleep, I'm going to go wake him up. And they're essentially saying, well, if he's asleep, isn't it better to let him sleep? After all, we're two days' journey away from there anyway.

Can't somebody else wake him up? You're going to travel two days to wake someone up from their nap? And it may be that sleep is good for them. Why wake him up? That's what they're saying. However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that he was speaking about taking rest in sleep.

Then Jesus said to them plainly, Lazarus is dead, and I'm glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless, let us go to him. Now, he didn't say, I'm going to raise him from the dead, although he's already said, I'm going to wake him up, so they might as well have deduced that.

But he says, he's dead. That's the state he's in right now. That's actually good.

I'm glad. I'm glad I wasn't there to heal him. That was intentional on my part.

Because this will be better for your faith. Seeing yet another healing would not make the impression on the disciples that seeing a man raised from the dead would. This man who'd been dead four days.

Now this is a unique case of Jesus raising the dead. He did raise other people from the dead, but not in situations like this. In the case of Jairus' daughter, she had just died.

The man had come to Jesus while she was still alive, and Jesus came directly to his house, but she died before he got there. And so he raised her from the dead. The woman whose son's name had died was being carried to be buried.

That means it was probably the same day. They didn't embalm people back then. They just buried them as quick as they could.

The heat would cause them to rot fast. They would die, they'd wrap them up, and they'd bury them, just like Jesus' body was wrapped up as soon as he was taken off the cross and buried. That was normal.

These other two cases we know of of Jesus raising the dead were people who had just died hours or moments earlier and were raised from the dead. The rabbis had a view, some of the rabbis, not all of them, but some of the rabbis taught that after a person dies, their soul lingers around the body for about three days. This was actually taught by some of the rabbis.

The soul lingers around the body for about three days, but after the third day it leaves and doesn't come back. Therefore, they thought, in the first three days after someone has died, there is a possibility of them spontaneously coming back. And perhaps there have been cases of that that were known.

There are cases of people who are pronounced dead and taken to the hospital and come back to life without any prayer, without anything that would suggest miracles. There are phenomena that we don't understand, including temporary death, apparently. But not someone who has been dead for days, many days.

Lazarus was dead for four days. That's why Jesus had to wait as long as he did. He had to wait until it was past the point of anyone having any hope that he could be even raised from the dead.

They knew that Jesus had raised the dead before, but only in cases where the people had just died. But Jesus waited for a case where it was past the limit, even in the thinking of the people. And He says, this is going to increase your faith.

I'm glad I wasn't there. We're going to go to Him. This is going to make you believe more.

Then Thomas, who is called Didymus. Now, Thomas, Tomah, in Aramaic, means the twin. Didymus means exactly the same thing, only in Greek.

Apparently, like Cephas. Cephas was Aramaic for rock. Peter was Greek for rock.

In Greek circles, Peter would go by the name Peter. In Aramaic-speaking Jewish circles, he'd go by the name Cephas. This man, whose name meant the twin, was known both by his Aramaic name and his Greek name, depending on probably what circles he was in.

And Didymus means the twin. Thomas means the twin in a different language. And he must have been a twin.

And Thomas, who was called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, let us also go that we may die with him. Now, this is the same one we call Doubting Thomas. And yet, we see that he's committed to Christ to the point where he's, if necessary, willing to die with Jesus.

Now, his comment could have been cynical. It's possible that he's saying, if Jesus has this death wish, well, we might as well go and die with him. Or, it might be that he was thinking more heroically.

You know, Jesus is going to do what he's got to do. He's going to be in danger. Let's go and risk our lives with him.

Maybe die with him, if necessary. He needs us to stand with him. We don't know exactly the tone of Thomas' words, but we know that it was a very real danger.

They had seen the stones in the hands of the Pharisees more than once. They knew that Jesus could be killed, if he went back there. And they knew that they could be killed too.

And Thomas says to his sons, let's go ahead and do that. If Jesus says we're going, we're going. If we're going to die, then we're going to die.

So, when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Now, Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother.

Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, and how she heard this we don't know, but there must have been messengers that Jesus sent ahead, or perhaps household servants could see him in the distance, or whatever. They told Martha that Jesus was coming. She learned of it before Mary did.

As soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him. But Mary was sitting in the house. Then Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you. Now, this latter statement almost sounds like she's expressing faith that maybe it's not too late after all. Although, at the point where Jesus was about to raise Lazarus, she did not express faith at that time.

She was concerned that this might end up being an embarrassment. If you open the tomb, we're just going to all smell the stench. She didn't seem to believe that Jesus would raise him.

But she's expressing her faith, saying, I still believe in you. I don't know why you didn't come. If you'd come, it seems like I wouldn't have lost my brother.

But I'm still at your service, and whatever you say, I know God will honor what you do and what you say. And Jesus said to her, Your brother will rise again. Martha said to him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

And Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

Do you believe this? And she said to him, Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world. She said, Lord, if you had been here a few days ago, things would have been okay. My brother would have been healed.

I'm sure you would have been able to heal him, and he would not have died. And so she said, well, he's going to live again. She said, oh yeah, I know in the last day, the resurrection, everyone's going to rise then.

I know he'll live again at that time. She says, Lord, if you'd been here in the past, that would have been good. Or in the future, I know it's going to be good.

But right now, she doesn't have any confidence for the moment that things are good. And so he speaks in the present. He says, I am the resurrection.

Not that I will be, but I am. The resurrection of the last day is just me in operation. And I'm here now.

So it's not necessary to wait until the last day, as long as the resurrection is among you. He who is the resurrection and the life. Now, the statements he made after that have been interpreted various ways.

When he says, he who believes in me, though he may die, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in me, shall never die. Some believe that what he's saying is this.

There will be a resurrection. And he who believes in Christ, though in the interim he may die, yet the day will come when he'll live. Jesus will raise the dead at the last day.

And although believers will in fact die, like everybody else will, yet the time will come when they will live again in the resurrection. And then verse 26, whoever lives and believes in me, shall never die, is thought to mean, and once they have come to life again in the resurrection, and they are now alive again, they will never die. The resurrected life will be permanent and eternal.

That is at least one way these words can be taken. I see it differently. I see the first of these statements to be connected to his statement, I am the resurrection.

And the second of them to his statement, I am the life. He says two things, I am the resurrection and I am the life. With reference to the first, I am the resurrection, anyone who believes in me, even though he dies, will rise again, he will live again.

Because I am the resurrection, your belief in me guarantees that you will not permanently stay dead, you will rise. But because I am the life, and that's right now too, whoever is alive currently and believes in me will never die. That is, you have eternal life now.

You don't have to wait for the resurrection to have eternal life. I am the resurrection and therefore, of course, those who believe in me will live again, even though they die in between time. But I am also the life, and if I am here, there is life.

And the life is eternal life. And whoever believes in me, who is alive, will never really die. They may die physically, but they will not really die.

And Jesus had said something like that more than once. Like back in John chapter 5, again, a context where the resurrection is in view, He says in John 5, 24, Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in me, who sent me, has everlasting life and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. There is a resurrection that has already taken place in the believer.

They were spiritually dead and they've come to life. That life, He says, they have is eternal life. They will not really ever die.

Your spirit will never die. You will never die. Now, you live in a body.

It's as if the body is simply something that is a house that we live in or a tent that we live in. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul said, we know that if this mortal tent of ours were dissolved, we have a house eternal in the heavens made without hands. And he's saying that we are an entity that lives currently in a tent in this body.

And if this tent is destroyed, we, as an entity, live somewhere else. That's the context where he says that to be, if we're absent from the body, we're present with the Lord. Well, if I can be absent from a body, then who am I? My body is not who I am.

How could I be absent from me? I am something and my body is something else and I live in my body. I am present in my body. Paul said, knowing that as long as we are present in the body, we're absent from the Lord.

But we're willing, yea, eager to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. We are something other than our body. We live in the body.

We can be present in it or absent from it. Remember, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12, he says, I knew a man whether in the body or out of the body, I don't know, he said. God only knows that.

But he was caught up in the third heaven, this man. And twice, Paul says, whether in the body or out of the body. Well, how could a man possibly be out of the body if the body is

him? Obviously, Paul believed that there is a spirit, there is a part of man that is not his body.

And he can be in it or out of it. He can be in the body or out of the body. So, Jesus gives us eternal life.

And though our body dies, we don't die. We step out of the body like you shed a set of dirty clothes after you've been working all day in the garden and you're covered with dirt and stuff. You just take off your clothes and step out in the shower.

The clothes are, you know, they go in the hamper to be taken care of later on. But you go on. Your life goes on.

And so the body is something we take off at death. And though we die, we'll live again. In fact, if we live now, in a sense, we will never die if we believe in Christ because He is the life and that is eternal life and we have Him.

He that has the Son has life. He that has not the Son has not life, John tells us elsewhere. And she affirmed this though she didn't quite understand what he was getting at.

She said, yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ. You're the Son of God who was to come into the world. That I know.

I don't understand what you mean near the resurrection and the life and those things, kind of mystical stuff, but I know you're the Messiah and therefore I'm affirming my faith in you even though I'm disappointed that you didn't do what we asked you to do. Verse 28, And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, the Teacher has come and is calling for you. Secretly because she figured that Mary would like to have private audience with Jesus and she didn't want to publicly announce that Jesus was there because then all the crowd would be coming out to see Him.

So she hoped that Mary would get a chance to see Jesus more or less alone. And so quietly she tells Mary, but it doesn't work. As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him.

Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha had met Him. Then the Jews who were with her in the house and comforting her when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, she's going to the tomb to weep there. So they thought they were there to comfort her and they figured, well, she's going to go back to the tomb again.

We'll go there with her and console her there as well. So they ended up following her and finding Jesus when she found Him. Then when Mary came where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would

not have died.

Now that's exactly the same words Martha had said. And it sounds like it's almost a mantra. It sounds like it's probably something they had said to each other numerous times.

If the Lord had been here, our brother would not have died. If only Jesus had been here, he wouldn't have died. That was the one thing that was the first thing out of their mouth when they saw Jesus because that was no doubt what they had been thinking, basically bemoaning the fact that Jesus had not answered their prayer, had not come when they called.

Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the Spirit and was troubled. And He said, Where have you laid Him? And they said to Him, Lord, come and see. And Jesus wept.

Then the Jews said, See how He loved Him. And some of them said, Could not this man who opened the eyes of the blind have kept this man from dying? Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave and a stone lay against it.

And Jesus said, Take away the stone. Martha, the sister of Him who had died, said to Him, Lord, by this time there is a stench for He has been dead four days. And Jesus said to her, Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God? Jesus is entering into this situation with all His emotions.

He is weeping with these people. He is groaning. He is troubled.

And there have been different suggestions as to what was causing all this emotion in Jesus. Some feel that for Him just to be sad, like everyone else was sad, would be inappropriate this time because He knew what they didn't know. I mean, yeah, it's a sad thing that His friend died, but hey, He's going to be rising.

You might think that Jesus would be kind of chuckling to Himself, realizing, hey, little do they know that their weeping is going to turn to joy just in a few moments. Instead, He's weeping, too, and groaning. And because some feel like Jesus, knowing what was going to happen, would not really be sad, thought, well, maybe He's sad about something else.

Some people say, well, He's weeping at their lack of faith. He's groaning and troubled at their lack of faith. Well, I don't know that they have exhibited unusual lack of faith on this occasion.

They're acting the way people would normally act. Even godly people would act. They're mourning a death.

They haven't expressed any great lack of faith, not yet. Now, when Jesus said, roll the

stone away, Martha said, well, He stinks. That might be considered to be an expression of lack of faith, but so far, the only expressions of any kind have been statements of faith, from Martha, anyway.

And the other people haven't made statements of any kind. So, I don't really know that Jesus had any, you know, inspiration to be upset about people's lack of faith on this particular occasion. And we do find, in other occasions, Jesus was disappointed with people's lack of faith.

For example, the people at Nazareth, He marveled that they had no faith. But we don't read that He wept over it or groaned or any of that. My own thought is that Jesus was weeping sympathetically with these people weeping, and not just them.

Because this wasn't just a case of this one man who had died and was going to be raised at this point, but just being confronted with death as a general category and seeing the suffering and the weeping and the heartache that it brought into the world, just seeing these people weep over the loss of somebody that they loved, and realizing how many times this weeping had been multiplied so many times over, millions and millions of times, as every person dies and loved ones weep. Death is a painful thing, and death is the result of sin. And Jesus, no doubt, was just affected by those kinds of thoughts, that this was so unnecessary.

If there had not been sin, there wouldn't have to be death. And yet there has been sin, and there's been only a history of pain and sorrow and suffering and death. And this thing could well have been what moved Jesus to tears.

In any case, he groaned more than once in himself. He was troubled. He wept.

And that's, no doubt, in sympathy with those who were weeping. And the others looking on said, oh, see how he loved him, because Jesus actually burst into tears. That's what the word wept means.

It's an aggressive aorist, which means something like he burst into tears. So, something there at the tomb made him just burst into tears. And people just assumed that it was because he loved Lazarus so much.

And it can't be just that, because as I said, he knew he was going to raise Lazarus. You burst into tears if you love somebody and you've lost them and you don't think you're going to see them anymore. But if you know they're going to rise from the dead, you're kind of tickled.

So, his tears must have been directed toward a broader contemplation than just his love for this man and these few people. But he probably saw in this one instance the microcosm of all the suffering that death brings and that sin has brought into human history. And so he said, move the stone.

And Martha said, well, you know, it's been four days. That's a long time. For a body, it would be fairly decayed in that amount of time.

You know, if you've ever had like a dead mouse in your car or a dead rat behind the wall of your house, you know how bad that smells? Imagine a corpse, something as big as a human body rotting that much. Just opening that cave with that dead body in there, anyone close enough to it to move the stone would be almost overwhelmed with the horrible smell that would come out. Martha was aware of this.

And Martha's thinking, you know, Jesus, if this doesn't work, if you don't raise Lazarus from the dead, it's just going to be an embarrassing, offensive thing to expose ourselves to his rotten corpse. And Jesus said, I told you that if you would believe, you'd see the glory of God. Remember when I first sent you the message back, I told you that this would end up for the glory of God.

Now you need to believe me. And so she apparently gave her approval or else they did it without her approval. It says they took this, took away 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. Apparently he had prayed previously about this, perhaps silently, and is affirming verbally for the sake of the onlookers that this is the Father's doing. The Father has heard his prayer.

And 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. Now when he had said these things, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he who had died came out, bound hand and foot with grave clothes.

We know that Jesus rose from the dead also, but he didn't come out bound with grave clothes. In fact, when the disciples came to the empty tomb, they found the grave clothes were still lying there on the slab where Jesus had lain as a dead corpse. In fact, they weren't just lying there, they were lying there in the position they would be in as if he had just kind of passed through them.

Jesus' resurrection was not like this. Jesus' resurrection was a glorification of his body. His body was made to come supernaturally back to life and apparently as it could pass through walls, it could also pass through grave clothes.

So he was able to get up and leave the grave clothes behind. But Jesus was the first ever to experience that kind of resurrection. Those who were raised from the dead before him weren't glorified.

And they were just brought back to life. They just returned to mortal life in their normal bodies. That means that the grave clothes would still be attached.

When his body got up, he was all wrapped up. Now, a man wrapped up in grave clothes could hardly walk or see. His face would be wrapped.

His body would be wrapped almost like a mummy. I mean, dead people don't have to move, so when you wrap them up, you're not wrapping them up with the mind that they need to have a little room to move here. And so when he got up, he was all bundled up and bound.

And so it says that Jesus said to them, Loose him and let him go. And thus ends the narrative of the raising of Lazarus. It's hard not to see this like the other miracles that John records as sort of acted miraculous parables.

When Jesus fed the multitudes, it was like he's the bread of life. When he turned water into wine, he's the true vine. Here, he's the resurrection and the life.

And the man that he brings to life is a parable. I mean, it's a true story. This really happened.

But Lazarus is like the individual that Jesus described in John 5.24. He that hears my words and believes in him has eternal life. He has passed from death into life, spiritually. When Jesus says, Come forth, when you hear the gospel and you hear his call in your heart and you respond, you come to life.

Once you come to life, you're still, as it were, wrapped up in your grave clothes. You're still bound up in habits and behaviors that you'd had when you were dead. They're not appropriate for a living person.

They only restrict the kind of life that you're born again into. And you have to be set free. And Jesus says, Unbind him and let him go.

It wasn't enough just to bring him back to life. He had to be released from that which was binding him. And so, there is, in addition to evangelism, there's a ministry of discipleship.

Because if you are my disciples, Jesus said you'll know the truth and the truth will make you free. People need to be freed up from their habits, from their misguided notions. Now they're alive, they have to think differently and act differently.

And they need to be freed up from the old strictures. And so the unbinding of Lazarus after he came from the tomb alive is specifically mentioned as a separate command Jesus gave. It could have been passed over, but no doubt it is intended to be part of the whole acted parable here.

That a man who comes to life, once he has life, he still has other changes have to be made. Other ministry needs to be done to him besides just bringing him to life. He's got

to be disciplined.

He's got to be trained. He's got to be released from the patterns of sin in his life. He's got to be delivered, maybe even from demons or at least sinful bondages.

The ministry of loosing him is the ongoing ministry. It's like fishers and men pull fish out of the sea, but someone has to clean the fish. Evangelism isn't the only part.

There's also the ministry that transforms a person into a behavior suited to their new life. And loosing a man from his grave could be seen as an analogy to that. Now the rest of this chapter talks about the response of Christ's enemies hearing this story and of other people, people who were friendly toward him hearing this story.

The impact of the story was twofold. Some people believed in him and some people wanted to kill him the more because of it. But we'll have to wait until later to take those verses.