

# WEEK 10: JESUS RAISES THE DEAD

John 11:1–57



## The Place of the Passage

The miracles of Jesus display God's ministry in a sin-filled, broken world. The miracles of fertility, healing, destruction, and dominion all reflect the redeeming work of God in his creation with operations fitting the old creation, returning aspects of the physical world to its original (even if still broken) state. This miracle is the first of a smaller set of Jesus' miracles that display operations fitting the coming world, as Jesus redeems aspects of the physical world in alignment with the new creation. In the biblical story the ultimate opponent of life is death. As the apostle Paul writes, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26). Although the final consequence of sin in the old creation is death, the end of a created life (Rom. 6:23), in the new creation "death shall be no more" (Rev. 21:4).

This perspective is essential to seeing properly the significance of the miracle of Jesus in John 11, the raising of Lazarus. At a funeral for a friend, Jesus declares himself to be the one who is making all things new. This is a miracle of reversal (i.e., "renewal"), which means it announces the coming renewal of all things, the new creation. In this miracle Jesus reveals the primary purpose of his ministry and how he intends to redeem his creation from its greatest enemy: death.

**The Big Picture**

Jesus is the resurrection and the life, the one who has defeated death in preparation for the life of the world to come.

**Reflection and Discussion**

Read through the complete passage for this study, John 11:1–57. Then review the following questions and record your responses. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2045–2047, or visit [esv.org](http://esv.org).)

**The Setting (John 11:1–43)**

When Jesus heard that Lazarus was ill, he said that the illness was “for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (John 11:4). How does this miracle display God’s glory? How might God use our struggles and brokenness for his glory?

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Why does Jesus refer to Lazarus’ death as “sleep” (see 11:11–15), and what does this teach Christians about the nature of new life that Jesus provides?

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Based upon her comment in verse 24, Martha seems to have a correct view of eschatology (the doctrine of “last things”), but Jesus focuses her thinking and expectation onto himself (11:25). What does Jesus mean when he says that he is

“the resurrection and the life” and that the person who believes in him “though he die, yet shall he live” (11:25)?

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What is the significance of Jesus’ weeping at a graveside, especially when he is about to raise Lazarus from the dead (11:35)?

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### **The Miracle (John 11:38–44)**

What does Jesus’ prayer to his Father before the raising of Lazarus teach us about this miracle, especially regarding the purpose of Jesus’ ministry (11:41–42)?

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How is Jesus’ command to Lazarus to rise and come out of the tomb a new creation act, especially when compared to God’s speaking creation into existence (e.g., the multiple uses of “and God said” in Genesis 1)?

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Jewish burials required the corpse to be wrapped tightly with many pounds of linen and materials (e.g., a mummy). Why does John go into detail about how the

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resurrected Lazarus came out of the tomb bound in linens from head to toe and needing to be released (John 11:44)? How is the scene both comical and insightful?

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**The Conclusion (John 11:45–57)**

Why does this miracle get such mixed reactions (11:45–46), and how could the religious authorities declare it to be a sign (11:47) and yet not respond in faith? How might this same response to Jesus occur today?

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In light of the purpose of miracles, what does this miracle teach Christians about the person of Jesus (who he is) or the work of Jesus (what he has done for us)?

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Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections have for you.

**Gospel Glimpses**

**THIS ILLNESS DOES NOT LEAD TO DEATH.** Jesus receives the news about the serious illness of his friend Lazarus without panic or concern. When he hears the news, he responds by saying, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory

of God” (11:4). Behind Jesus’ statement is a core truth of the gospel: for the Christian, death is defeated. Christ’s resurrection is the “firstfruits” of our own future resurrection (1 Cor 15:20), with death as the “last enemy to be destroyed” (1 Cor. 15:26). Jesus explains this further to Martha in John 11:25: “Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.” The seemingly paradoxical nature of that statement reflects the radical inbreaking of eternal life into a world of death. This is the good news that the church preaches and, even more, that the Christian lives.

**JESUS LOVED.** Every Christian knows John 3:16, which describes God’s love for the world. This truth is one of the most powerful statements in all Scripture of who God is and how blessed we are. In this account of Lazarus, however, God’s love is made more personal. The narrator reveals Jesus’ response to the man who was seriously sick and to his family: “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (11:5). This statement is true for this family, but it is also true for every Christian in God’s family. God’s love of the world finds personal (and sacrificial) expression through the person of Jesus. If you believe in him, the amazing grace of the gospel is that Jesus loves you!

### Whole-Bible Connections

**FALLEN ASLEEP.** In verses 11–15 Jesus and his disciples define “sleep” in very different ways. Jesus speaks of Lazarus’ death as “sleep,” but the disciples assume he is referring to taking a nap. The confusion surrounding this one word is the point: in the presence of Jesus death is redefined! In the New Testament “sleep” is used more than three times as often to refer to death as to physical sleep. While this use of “sleep” is not original to Scripture, it was the Bible that cemented this understanding of death in light of Christ. For the one who is the resurrection and the life (11:25) death is described best as sleeping, since he has authority over both life and death (5:22–29). This helps explain Paul’s encouragement that Christian grief for those who have died is not like those “who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13), for death is altogether redefined in the presence of the resurrection and the life.

**THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.** When Jesus refers to himself as the resurrection and the life, he is combining two biblical truths that usually point in different directions. “Resurrection” is generally applied to the future in Scripture, whereas “life” is generally applied to the present, or even to the past in regard to one’s origins. The combination of these terms in reference to Jesus creates a powerful overlap of biblical thinking. This means that the present, for example, is safely wrapped in the comfort, certainty, and security of the perfect future of God’s gracious providence. But that which secures the present to the future is Jesus, the one who not merely provides resurrection and life but *is* the resurrection and the life. Because of Jesus, then, the Christian’s future hope is an already-but-not-yet present reality, an inaugurated eschatology.<sup>1</sup> This gives purpose and provision of the new creation to every present moment.

## Theological Soundings

**JESUS WEPT.** When our Lord arrived at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, the narrator describes his reaction: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). This is one of three descriptions of the emotional response of Jesus in this miracle account. This description is a remarkable insight into the humanity of Jesus. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, has entered into his creation, becoming like the creatures he created, and ministers among them. Jesus had to become “like his brothers in every respect” (Heb. 2:17), so that he could properly and pastorally minister to us and then redeem us and intercede for us. The doctrine of the humanity of Jesus can be difficult to reconcile with equally important doctrine of the divinity of Jesus, but it is important to understand properly the ministry of Jesus. Jesus truly and personally can relate to our sadness and suffering, for he has experienced it with us.

**FATHER, I THANK YOU THAT YOU HAVE HEARD ME.** This miracle provides a helpful perspective from which to understand the divine relations within the Trinity,<sup>2</sup> specifically between God the Father and God the Son. Before commanding Lazarus to rise, Jesus prays to his Father and thanks him for hearing his prayer (likely an earlier prayer—maybe even a prayer spoken privately amid his earlier-described grief). The spoken prayer of the Son reviews the union that exists between the Father and the Son and the mission they share. The Father sent the Son into the world and empowered the Son, even as the Son does the work assigned to him by the Father—and all in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. In the least this teaches Christians that the work of Jesus is the work of the Trinitarian God. It should also comfort the Christian, knowing that, just as the Son interceded on behalf of Lazarus to the Father, so also does he intercede for all Christians (Heb. 7:25).

## Personal Implications

Take some time to reflect on what you have learned from your study of John 11:1–57 and how it might apply to your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

### 1. Gospel Glimpses

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## 2. Whole-Bible Connections

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## 3. Theological Soundings

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## 4. John 11:1–57

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### As You Finish This Unit . . .

**Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Take some time to reflect on the importance of this biblical truth, especially as you think of ways this truth applies to those facing the reality of death.**

### Definitions

<sup>1</sup> **Inaugurated eschatology** – “Eschatology” refers to “last things” and generally refers to what will happen at the end of all things when Jesus comes a second time. But the New Testament teaches that with the first coming of Christ the final age or latter days were launched. We are those “on whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:11). The “eschaton,” the final age, has dawned in Jesus. This is what is also referred to as the “already / not yet” of biblical theology.

<sup>2</sup> **Trinity** – The Godhead as it exists in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is one God, yet he is three persons; there are not three Gods, nor do the three persons merely represent different aspects or modes of a single God. While the term Trinity is not found in the Bible, the concept is repeatedly assumed and affirmed by the writers of Scripture (e.g., Matt. 28:19; Luke 1:35; 3:22; Gal. 4:6; 2 Thess. 2:13–14; Heb. 10:29).