



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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John 11:11-16 Commentary New American Standard Bible

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse [*International Bible Study Commentary*](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [*International Bible Study Forum*](#).

(John 11:11) This He said, and after that He *said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep.”

Jesus called His followers “friends.” In John 15:14-15, Jesus said to His disciples, “You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” Jesus called Lazarus His friend. Jesus never stopped loving Lazarus and always considered Lazarus His

friend even though He did not heal Lazarus immediately or prevent him from dying. Jesus did not rush to Lazarus' aid from a lack of friendship, or a lack of friendship with Mary and Martha. As Jesus' sheep and friends, Jesus does not abandon us when we are in danger or sick, even if our danger or our sickness leads to our death. A believer's circumstances or unchanging situation do not reveal a lack of friendship with Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 5:8, Paul teaches that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. No one needed to tell Jesus that Lazarus had died, and even though Lazarus had died, Jesus still called him His friend and planned to go to him and help him: to raise him from the dead.

(John 11:12) The disciples then said to Him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.”

The disciples did not recognize that Jesus spoke of “death” in a figurative language as “sleep.” By calling death sleep, Jesus gave and gives comfort to all those who believe in Him, become His friends, and face death or the death of a loved one. When we go to sleep, we expect to wake up again rested and restored for a new day of new opportunities to serve the Lord and others as well as find happiness in the new day that the Lord has made. In Psalms 118:24, we read, “This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” As followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, at the very moment of our death we rise to a new day of eternal blessedness that the Lord has made; so, we can rejoice in it. In that sense, death is like

going to sleep while expecting a better day. The Holy Spirit told John in Revelation 14:13, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them.’” Those who “die in the Lord” will find rest for they are blessed. Our labors for the Lord Jesus and others are important to the Lord. At death, we will rest from our labors, but our works remain important to Jesus and others. Though a death may be lingering and painful, a follower of Jesus Christ can die with the expectation of seeing Jesus Christ face-to-face and spending eternity with God the Father, Jesus Christ, and all His friends.

(John 11:13) Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep.

John reveals that Jesus had to explain what He was talking about. Jesus was going to go help a man who had died. He could help him because Jesus is “the resurrection and the life” (see John 11:25). They had seen Jesus heal others with a word and even bring back to life someone who had recently died. Now, they were going to travel to Bethany and see Jesus raise from the dead someone who had been dead four days and whose body had suffered decayed during his time in the tomb. Unlike Lazarus, though dead, Jesus’ body did not decay (see Acts 2:27, 31). Jesus’ disciples would learn that Jesus had the compassion and the power to help anyone in any situation and that Jesus would always do the right and wise thing; thus, Jesus

would demonstrate the glory of Almighty God and His power to save.

(John 11:14) So Jesus then said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead,

At that time, the disciples did not know what Jesus planned. They did not know that He planned to raise Lazarus from the dead. He only told them Lazarus was dead, and they knew it would take a day or more to travel to Bethany. Perhaps they thought that Jesus would go and comfort Mary and Martha. They knew that Jesus could have healed Lazarus from a distance. They knew He knew what people were thinking and how some were grieving. They must have been puzzled and wondered why Jesus needed to endanger His life and their lives if Lazarus was already dead or why Jesus had not healed him earlier and saved them all from possible death. In the next verse, Jesus will partially answer their puzzlement without telling them in advance everything He planned to do. Jesus did not need to tell them all His plans or give them all His reasons for His decisions. He told them what He and they would do together one step at a time, for He was their Lord and Teacher who knew the best way to lead and teach them. He would tell them only what they needed to know when the time was best for them to receive new truths by word and example. Soon, He would show and tell them simultaneously more about himself and how they could perfectly trust Him to do what was best for them and all His followers. Jesus does the same today as He teaches

and leads His followers. The sheep of His pasture follow Jesus, not because they always know His destination and plans, but because they know by experience and from the teachings in the Bible that He loves them and they can trust Him.

(John 11:15) and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him.”

Jesus was not glad that Lazarus had died and that his death had brought grief to Mary and Martha, but Jesus was glad that the death of Lazarus would work for the good of Lazarus, Mary, Martha, His disciples, and so many others. Memorize and always remember these words of Paul in Romans 8:28, “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” Jesus was glad that by raising Lazarus from the dead, His disciples and others would see and believe that He was “the resurrection and the life.” By believing in Him, they would be forgiven their sins and receive the gift of eternal life. They would see Jesus do the impossible, but it was possible for Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead because Jesus is the Creator and Sustainer of life. Later, Jesus would raise himself from the dead, which was an even greater miracle because Jesus, unlike Lazarus, would never die again.

(John 11:16) Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also

go, so that we may die with Him.”

Thomas, who would initially doubt Jesus' resurrection (and become known throughout the rest of history as “Doubting Thomas”) expressed the possible and most likely consequences of Jesus returning to Jerusalem (see John 20:24-29). Yet, Thomas encouraged the other disciples to accompany Jesus and him to Jerusalem at the risk of their lives. They might die with Jesus, but Jesus and His message are worth dying for. As we will learn, Jesus did not lose by capture or death any of His disciples except Judas who betrayed Jesus as the Scriptures foretold (John 18:7-9). After Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples courageously preached in the name of Jesus and later sacrificed their lives for the Good News of the Son of God who came into the world to save sinners who repented of their sins and placed their faith in Him. Only John, the writer of this gospel, died of old age, but he did suffer exile on the island of Patmos where he received and wrote the Book of Revelation.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why do you think Jesus called Lazarus *their* friend? What does it mean to you to think of yourself as a friend of Jesus?
2. How can someone become a friend of Jesus?

3. Why do you think Jesus referred to or compared Lazarus' death to being asleep? How does that comparison make you feel?
4. Why was Jesus glad that He was not in Bethany to heal Lazarus?
5. What did Thomas say to encourage the other disciples to go with Jesus? Would his words have encouraged you to go with Jesus?

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