



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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John 11:17-27 Commentary New International Version

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 11:17) On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

Because Lazarus was sick, without asking Jesus directly to come heal him, his family sent messengers to tell Jesus that the one He loved was ill. He could have healed Lazarus from a distance, as He had healed others; instead, Jesus waited until Lazarus had died before returning to Bethany (John 11:1-6; Luke 7:1- 10). To teach His disciples and others that He was the resurrection and the life, Jesus wanted to raise Lazarus from the dead in their presence. Jesus planned His arrival time, and Lazarus had died four days earlier when Jesus arrived outside Bethany. Some Jews believed that the departed soul would linger near their dead body for three days before departing for the place of the dead (called "Sheol" in the Old Testament). Because Lazarus had been in the tomb four days, those who believed the soul remained near their dead body for three days would have also believed that the soul of Lazarus had definitely departed from the tomb and his situation was indeed hopeless in Sheol. In their minds, hopeless even for Jesus, who, many believed, could have healed him if He had only arrived sooner.

(John 11:18) Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,

To distinguish this Bethany from the Bethany where John the Baptist had preached and baptized Jesus and others, John identified this Bethany as being about 2 miles from Jerusalem. A Sabbath day's journey was about 1 mile; therefore, according to Jewish law someone could not travel to and from Bethany and Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Jesus ascended into heaven from Bethany (Luke 24:48-53).

(John 11:19) and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

Jesus was a dear friend of Lazarus and his family. Jesus sometimes taught and dined in the home of Mary and Martha. Their home was large enough for many to gather to hear Jesus teach. Their family was influential, and many Jews came to console Lazarus' sisters, some coming even from Jerusalem, and some of them returned to report Jesus' good deed and Lazarus' resuscitation to the Pharisees and chief priests (John 11:45-47). Remember how close Bethany was to Jerusalem. The Jews considered it a good work to console the family members of one who had died; in some cases staying with them as long as seven days; therefore, most of those who had been consoling Martha and Mary from the beginning would have still been there offering consolation when Jesus arrived. No one would have been able to doubt that Lazarus was dead and had been in the tomb four days and his situation was hopeless unless Jesus performed a miracle.

(John 11:20) When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

When Martha and Mary learned that Jesus was just outside the town, Martha left their guests and went to see Jesus. Martha was the sister who provided food and hospitality when Jesus taught in her home. Martha was the one who asked Jesus to tell her sister, Mary, to help her serve their guests (Luke 10:38-42). Martha went to see Jesus first because she was a constantly active person, who learned (after Jesus spoke to her in Luke 10:38-42) to put Jesus first above everything else. After Jesus raised

Lazarus from the dead, and before Jesus' last Passover celebration, Jesus may have stayed in Lazarus' home where Martha expressed her devotion to Jesus by serving Him and His followers (including Lazarus) dinner and where Mary expressed her devotion to Jesus by washing His feet (John 12:1-3). Until He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, it seems likely that Jesus stayed for a short time in the home of Lazarus. Many people in Jerusalem would have heard that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead and many would have come to see both Lazarus and Jesus at Lazarus' home in nearby Bethany. In the few "daylight" hours Jesus had left before He was glorified by dying on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins, Jesus probably stayed where He could easily be found to heal, help, and teach people.

(John 11:21) "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

We can imagine Martha and Mary and their family and friends saying, "If only Jesus had been here," over and over again to each other as they mourned Lazarus' death four days, because Mary used the same words when she met Jesus (John 11:32). Perhaps they had also encouraged Lazarus and one another that Jesus would come and heal him before Lazarus died. No one doubted Jesus' ability to heal the sick, and many also knew that Jesus had raised from the dead those who had not yet been buried.

(John 11:22) But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

Martha went directly to see Jesus before He arrived at her home, probably because she knew that even though Jesus had come after Lazarus had died that He could still do something though she knew not what. She may have had enough faith in Jesus to hope that even now Jesus could bring her brother back to life. She knew that Jesus was a man of prayer and He could ask His Father for anything and God always answered the prayers of His Son. She expressed her complete trust in Jesus with her few words. Once again, Martha did not tell Jesus what to do. Earlier, when they sent messengers to Jesus, she only told Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill" (John 11:3). She did not tell Jesus what she wanted Him to do, but of course

she strongly implied that she wanted Jesus to heal her brother. In speaking to Jesus, Martha only told Jesus the situation and spoke of the love He had for Lazarus. After Lazarus' died, she really did not know what Jesus could do or what she should ask Him to do, but she trusted Jesus to do the loving, right, and wise thing, and she knew God heard His prayers. We can pray to Jesus trusting that His Father will give Him whatever He asks Him, and Jesus will always pray and do what is best for us and all concerned. It is always best for us to pray to God as Jesus prayed to His Father, "Not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39).

(John 11:23) Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Jesus' words have at least two meanings. Jesus knew that Lazarus would rise again within that very hour. He knew He would bring life to Lazarus' dead body and return Lazarus' soul to his renewed human body that very day. But Jesus also wanted to raise Lazarus from the dead and make Lazarus' resuscitation a teaching moment for His disciples and for Lazarus, Martha, Mary, their family, friends, and all who would believe in Him (John 11:11-16). Jesus knew that Lazarus would eventually die again, that is why we call Lazarus' rising from the dead a "resuscitation." Raising Lazarus from the dead was a resuscitation or physical restoration, not a resurrection from the dead of his body never to die again. Jesus is the first person raised from the dead as a person resurrected from the dead to never die again. So, after Lazarus eventually died again, his risen Lord and Savior would raise him again on the future day of resurrection and Lazarus would never die again. By raising Lazarus from the dead after four days in the tomb, and after His own resurrection from the dead, the followers of Jesus knew that by believing in Him they too would live after they died. They knew that Jesus had the power to raise them from the dead whenever He chose.

(John 11:24) Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus led Martha to express her faith in the resurrection of the dead as revealed in the Bible up to that point in time. On the last day (on the last typical day on Earth), the dead will rise again. The truth of the resurrection is an essential teaching of the Bible. However, Martha wanted more than

the assurance of this truth from Jesus. She most probably wanted Jesus to ask God to raise Lazarus now, but she did not say that directly. Perhaps her faith in Jesus had not yet grown to the point where she could ask Jesus to do that specifically, but Jesus would do that without being asked. She did not yet know all Jesus could or would do.

(John 11:25) Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;

Jesus told Martha that He did not need to pray to have the power to raise Lazarus from the dead, because He himself was “the resurrection and the life.” He could do what she wanted in the situation. “I am” is the divine name or title for God: the name God gave Moses, and the name Jesus used of himself (especially in the Gospel of John). In this “I am” saying of Jesus, He used the title for God and will soon reveal His power as God the Son to create life, sustain life, and raise people from the dead. Jesus did not need to pray at the tomb, but we will soon discover that He did pray publicly for a reason. Because Jesus is the resurrection, He could and did raise himself from the dead after three days in the tomb. After His resurrection, Jesus showed His disciples that He had the divine power of an unending life.

(John 11:26) and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Jesus told Martha and all who learn the truth about Him that He is the Person to believe in for salvation, because He is God, the Word made flesh, the Son of God with resurrection power, and the Giver of life. Before Jesus Christ comes again, everyone will die physically and their souls will go to one of two places, either to Sheol or to Paradise. When Jesus said, “*everyone who lives and believes in me will never die,*” He meant that when the physical body of a believer in Him dies their soul will go to be with Him in Paradise (even as He promised the repentant thief who died on the cross believing in Jesus: see Luke 23:43). If the believer dies before Jesus returns, those who believe in Jesus will live in Heaven or Paradise with Jesus, the holy angels, and all who love God; therefore, the believer will never die. When Jesus returns as He promised, all believers in Him who have died physically will rise again with resurrected glorified human

bodies, and they will live on the new Earth never to die again. If we live “in Jesus” and if we believe “in Jesus,” then we will never die spiritually but have eternal life. Believers in Jesus will leave their body behind when they die, but they will go to heaven, from where they will await the last day.

(John 11:27) “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

Martha affirmed her faith in Jesus. She believed everything Jesus said about himself. She believed in and completely trusted Jesus. She called Jesus “Lord” in the divine and kingly meaning of the title “Lord.” She declared that Jesus was the “Messiah” the Jews expected to come someday. She declared Him to be the “Son of God,” as Jesus had told Nicodemus (John 3:16-18). She believed that Jesus had come from His kingdom in heaven into the world that He created. Soon, she would see Jesus visibly demonstrate that He is the resurrection and the life when He raised her brother from the dead and gave him life. Then, after His resurrection, she would see Jesus again and grow even more in her understanding of Him.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why might God sometimes choose to delay in giving us what we want?
2. Why do you think people of all economic conditions and stations in life followed Jesus?
3. What truths about Jesus did Martha confess to Jesus? Do you believe these?
4. Why is it important to believe that those who die “will rise again in the resurrection on the last day”?
5. What does it mean for a believer in Jesus to “never die.”

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