

3. The mourners present with Mary were moved by Jesus' open anguish and weeping. It was clear to them how deeply Jesus had loved Lazarus and this caused some among them to wonder how this outcome came about in the first place. Having come to Bethany from Jerusalem (vv. 18-19), they were aware of Jesus' recent healing of the blind man; perhaps some of them had even witnessed the healing. They knew that Jesus was able to heal afflictions and there was no doubt how much He loved Lazarus; why, then, having learned of His beloved friend's serious sickness, didn't He come at once in order to heal him before he died (11:36-37)? These mourners shared Martha and Mary's perplexity, but very soon they, too, would understand why this situation played out as it did.

Still moved within Himself, Jesus asked the group to lead Him to Lazarus' tomb. When they arrived, Jesus directed the men to remove the stone from the opening (the tomb was a cave with a large stone covering the entrance), to which Martha objected that Lazarus' body had already begun to decompose. Opening the tomb would allow the horrible smell of decomposition to emerge, and worse than the smell itself was having to tie that stench to her beloved brother. It was agonizing enough to know that Lazarus was dead; having his death thrust upon their senses with such horrific intensity was unbearable.

Jesus' responded to Martha's objection by calling her mind away from the horror of the situation to the glory to be revealed through it (11:40). This statement is interesting because John gave no account of Jesus previously speaking to Martha about the glory of God in connection with Lazarus' death; he only mentioned it in Jesus' conversation with the messengers while they were still in Perea (ref. v. 4). Perhaps the messengers had conveyed this idea to the sisters when they returned; perhaps Jesus had spoken this way to Martha and John didn't record it. Whatever the case, John believed that Jesus had set His Father's glory at the center of His explanation to Martha. Merging His statements to Martha and to the messengers reveals the logic of this conclusion: *The glory of God was to be manifest in this woeful situation by the Son being glorified, and Jesus would be glorified – and so glorify the Father – by powerfully demonstrating that He is resurrection and life, and so the source and substance of life out of death for all men.*

This observation sets the stage for what happened next. Having reminded Martha of what this circumstance was really about, Jesus raised His eyes and prayed out loud in the hearing of the witnesses (11:41-42). His prayer was not for Himself, but for the sake of those present with Him; He wanted them to recognize that the work He was about to perform was His Father's work – a work expressing not merely the Father's power, but the Father's purpose. These witnesses needed to understand that He wasn't a miracle-worker displaying His power, but the Son sent by His Father – Israel's God – to fulfill the Father's long-revealed will and accomplish His work in the world. When Lazarus came forth from the tomb, a living man surrounded by death's stench, they were to see in that mighty sign, not just an astonishing miracle, but the glory of Yahweh: the glory of His faithfulness, love and renewing power manifest in His Son. He'd sent His Son, the promised Messiah, to bring life out of death, not to a certain man, but to Adam's race and ultimately the whole creation. And not the life of reanimation, but the life bound up in the Godhead. Lazarus would live to die again, so that his raising was only a pointer. The life which Jesus had come to impart was His own life – the life of His own resurrection.

When Jesus had finished praying He called into the darkened tomb, summoning Lazarus to come forth. Within a matter of moments Lazarus appeared at the opening, still wrapped in the burial linens, and Jesus instructed the dumbfounded witnesses to go to him and unbind him (11:43-44). He'd manifested His Father's glory – the power of the divine love and restorative purpose – by liberating Lazarus from the bonds of death; soon He would bring that glory to its climax in His own triumph over the grave – a triumph, not just for His own sake, but the sake of the world. The Father's glory in the Son had its goal in life out of death for the whole creation (ref. 3:16, 6:33, 51, 8:12, 12:23-32; cf. also Isaiah 65; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Ephesians 1:9-10; Revelation 21:1-5).

4. As noted, Bethany was very near Jerusalem, suggesting that the other mourners with Mary and Martha had come from there. John referred to these individuals as “Jews” (ref. vv. 18-19, 31-36), a term he characteristically employed for Jewish authorities. If that was his meaning here, it indicates that Lazarus was a man of some significance; men from the ruling elite would hardly travel to Bethany to be part of a mourning party for someone of no distinction. At the same time, John's statement that many of these Jews came to believe in Jesus as a result of the sign (11:45) hints that these mourners weren't all members of the ruling class. For such individuals took a huge risk by embracing Jesus as the Messiah; they knew the official position regarding Jesus and the design the authorities had for Him. In the end, John didn't specify whether any of these new believers were part of the ruling elite, but he implied that others among the mourners were, for they returned to the Pharisees to report what Jesus had done (11:46).

a. When the Pharisees learned that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead and the word of this astounding miracle was spreading among the people, they realized that the situation with Him was getting out of hand. Throughout His ministry, Jesus' words and works had divided the people, with some embracing Him as Israel's Messiah and others decrying and opposing Him. And this division – and particularly the opposition – only intensified as time went on. Very soon the enmity would reach a fever pitch, engulfing even many of those who'd joyfully celebrated Jesus as the Messiah (cf. 12:12-15 with Mark 15:1-15; Luke 23:13-24).

The authorities were increasingly concerned with the effect Jesus was having on the people, and the spectacular nature of this latest sign and the attention it was getting only heightened their anxiousness. Thus they convened a council to discuss what to do about the situation (11:47). John recorded only a snippet of that discussion (how he knew what was said is a matter of speculation), but he captured in summary fashion the assembly's concern as well as their resolution.

The marrow of their concern was how the Romans would likely respond to all this commotion and adulation surrounding Jesus (11:48). They were worried that Rome might march against the nation and Jerusalem in particular, and this fear spotlights the issue of Jesus' messiahship. Rome wouldn't tolerate an uprising, but Jesus wasn't inciting one. No, Israel's rulers were concerned that the Roman authorities would hear talk of Jesus being the Messiah, the *King of Israel*.

Rome was willing to tolerate the Jews and their quirky customs and zeal for their God. What they could not and would not abide was a Jewish king setting himself alongside Caesar. The Herodian rulers carried the title, “king of the Jews,” but as Rome’s nod to their allegiance; they exercised their rule as vassals under Caesar’s authority and direction. This council was all-too familiar with Rome’s view of would-be Jewish messiahs; the horror of Rome’s brutal response to Judas the Galilean and those who followed him as the Messiah two decades prior was still fresh in their minds. If Jesus was allowed to continue building His own messianic movement, the slaughter and destruction would surely return. And this time Caesar might feel the need to go further than he had with Judas, perhaps doing to Jerusalem and her temple what the Babylonians had done five centuries earlier.

- b. And so, while these Pharisees and priests were doubtless genuinely concerned for their nation, city and temple, their concern ultimately reflected back on themselves; if this scenario played out, *they* would lose their entire way of life – not only their station and prestige, but their power and wealth. This was an unthinkable outcome that couldn’t be entertained for even an instant. It was Caiaphas, the high priest, who articulated what the whole assembly must have been thinking: It was far better that Jesus should lose His life than Roman swords and firebrands be raised against the entire nation and Yahweh’s holy city and temple (11:49-50). One’s man life instead of the lives of countless multitudes certainly made sense, especially when Jerusalem and the temple were added to the balance. And this exchange was all the more sensible given that this Jesus clearly wasn’t the Messiah, but only a pathetic, deluded man whose delusion put the nation and Himself in danger; surely it was an act of mercy to end His tragic life.

This was doubtless the course of thinking these men engaged to justify their resolution that Jesus must die. John, however, perceived a different dynamic at work: Looking back on Caiaphas’ statements and superimposing them on Jesus’ crucifixion, he discerned in them prophetic insight (11:51-52). Jesus indeed was going to die in the nation’s place and for its deliverance; He would endure Rome’s wrath as a supposed insurgent, though Israel was the true rebel and would soon incur the same wrath. What Rome did when the tree was green it would later do when the tree was dry and fully suited for burning (ref. Luke 23:26-31; cf. Luke 19:41-44, 21:1-22). Jesus would give His life for the life of the nation, not because its rulers took it, but because He chose to give it (10:17-18). He was going to take the place of the rebellious house that they might be delivered, but sadly, most would miss His deliverance and see their worst fears realized. Only a remnant would be saved, and Jesus would add these to His other sheep gathered from another fold (10:16). Through His death and by virtue of sharing in His life, the Good Shepherd was going to gather together in Himself all of His Father’s children, both those who are near and those who are far (Ephesians 2:1-22).

- 5. Israel’s rulers had desired Jesus’ death for some time; now they were plotting it. So it had to be, for Passover was approaching. With His gaze set on the same goal, Jesus withdrew His public presence, retreating to Ephraim to await His appointed day (11:53-54).