

## John 10:40-11:16

### Introduction

After the opening prologue (“In the beginning was the Word...”; 1:1-18), the main body of John’s gospel *begins* with John the Baptist baptizing “*in Bethany beyond the Jordan*” (*peran tou Iordanou*; 1:28). This geographical note will be very important. The prologue says of John:

- John 1:7-8 — He came as a **witness** [*martyria*], to **testify** [*martyreo*] about the Light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but he came to **testify** [*martyreo*] about the Light.

The whole identity of John the Baptist was that of a man sent to point to someone else through his witness and testimony (cf. 1:19, 23, 26-27, 29, 32-34; 3:27-30; 5:33-35). So at the end of chapter one we were “handed off” from John the Baptist to Jesus (1:29-42). John said to two of his disciples when he saw Jesus walking by: “Behold, the Lamb of God!” In other words, “The time has come for you to leave me, and follow Him!”

The next day Jesus decided to leave the area of Bethany **beyond the Jordan** and “go to **Galilee**” (1:43). It was in **Galilee** that Nathanael, and probably also Phillip, had their decisive encounters with Jesus (1:43-51). It was in Cana of **Galilee** that Jesus changed the water into wine and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him (2:1-11). After staying a few days longer in Capernaum (still in **Galilee**), we read in chapter two:

- John 2:13 — The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus **went up** [*anabaino*] to **Jerusalem** [in Judea].

Jesus is said to go “up” (*anabaino*) from Galilee to Jerusalem not just because it’s higher in elevation but because it’s the center of Jewish “national” and religious life. It was on this visit to **Jerusalem** that Jesus “cleansed” the temple (2:13-25) and had a night conversation with Nicodemus (3:1-15), after which He went out into the Judean countryside and was baptizing (3:22). To this point things have been fairly calm. Our first real hint of trouble comes at the beginning of chapter four:

- John 4:1-3 — Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John... he left **Judea** and **went away** [*aperchomai*] again into **Galilee**.

If John says that Jesus “went up” to Jerusalem because it was the center of the Jews’ “national” and religious life then it’s perhaps for this same reason that John always says Jesus “**went away**” (*aperchomai*) from **Judea** into **Galilee**. And maybe, too, because compared to the growing danger in **Judea**, **Galilee** is beginning to feel like a safe haven. It was on His way back to **Galilee** that Jesus passed through Samaria and had His conversation with the woman at the well (4:4-42). And then it was in Cana of **Galilee** that Jesus healed the royal official’s son (4:43-54). John says:

- John 4:54 — This is again a **second sign** that Jesus performed when He had come **out of Judea into Galilee**.

We don't know how long this stay in Galilee lasted, but we read in chapter five:

- John 5:1 — After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus **went up** [*anabaino*] to **Jerusalem**.

It was on this second visit to Jerusalem that Jesus healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda and told him to pick up his mat and walk on the Sabbath (5:2-9).

- John 5:15-18 — For this reason the Jews were **persecuting Jesus**, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” For this reason therefore the Jews were **seeking all the more to kill Him**, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

Chapters 5-10 are marked by growing conflict between Jesus and “the Jews” – by Jesus’ increasing self-revelation and—in direct correspondence to this—“the Jews” increasing hostility. Jesus spoke in His first public discourse (5:19-47) of His relationship with the Father and of the Father’s witness to Him as the one whom He had sent. This only confirmed “the Jews” in their hatred of Jesus, so it’s perhaps with a feeling of relief that we read at the beginning of chapter six:

- John 6:1 — After this Jesus **went away** [*aperchomai*] to the other side of the Sea of **Galilee**.

It’s in Galilee that Jesus feeds the five thousand (6:1-14) and then comes to the disciples walking on the sea (6:15-21), and then delivers His second discourse at the synagogue in Capernaum (“I am the bread of life”; 6:22-58). Even here in Galilee, we find opposition from “the Jews,” but there’s no one seeking to arrest Jesus or kill Him. Still, many of those who had attached themselves to Jesus as His disciples were abandoning Him (6:59-65).

- John 1:11 (cf. 3:19, 32) — He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

And so we come to chapter seven.

- John 7:1, 10 — After this Jesus went about in **Galilee**. He would not go about in **Judea**, because *the Jews were seeking to kill him...* But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also **went up** [*anabaino*]...

In John’s Gospel this is the last time John tells us Jesus “**went up**” from **Galilee** to **Judea**. He won’t return to Galilee until after His resurrection (cf. 21:1). In chapter nine, Jesus heals the man born blind, and then in chapter ten is Jesus’ discourse on the good shepherd in which this whole section (beginning with chapter five), and even all of John’s Gospel to this point reaches its climax. On the one hand, we have the culminating self-revelation of Jesus:

- John 10:27–30 — “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of **My hand**. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of **the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.**”

On the one hand, we have the culminating self-revelation of Jesus. On the other hand, the confirmed opposition of the Jews (cf. 7:32; 8:59). In verse thirty-one:

- John 10:31 — The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.

And in verse thirty-nine:

- John 10:39 — Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him...

So we come to the end of chapter ten:

**I. John 10:40** — And He **went away** [*aperchomai*] *again* [*not*, as at all the other times, to **Galilee**, but] **beyond the Jordan** [*peran tou Iordanou*; 1:28; 3:26] to the place where John was first baptizing, and he remained there.

And so, this morning, we’ve come full circle back to the beginning – where everything started. John began his baptizing ministry *not* in Judea and *not* in Galilee, but “**beyond the Jordan**” in the more uninhabited “wilderness” regions of Decapolis (or possibly Perea).<sup>\*</sup> The ministry of John was a ministry of calling people “out” – of “making ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Lk. 1:17; cf. Jn. 1:23). The ministry of Jesus was also one of “calling out” and so in this sense it was a continuation of John’s ministry, but as the one who also fulfilled John’s ministry, Jesus didn’t stay out in the wilderness regions of Decapolis or Perea. After being baptized “**beyond the Jordan**,” Jesus went back and forth between **Galilee** and **Judea** (“going up” [*anabaino*] and “going away” [*aperchomai*]), proclaiming the Good News to all the people.

It’s against this backdrop that these words at the end of chapter ten can now almost jump off the page at us: “And He **went away again beyond the Jordan** to the place where John was first baptizing, and he remained there.” “[Jesus] came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him” (1:11). Jesus withdraws “beyond the Jordan” because in some sense the window of opportunity for Judea and for Galilee as a whole has closed (cf. Mat. 23:37-39; but see 11:41-42; 12:30-36, 44-50). So was the ministry of Jesus a failure? Is this a retreat of one who’s been defeated? We go on to read in verses 41-42:

**II. John 10:41–42** — *Many* came to him and were saying, “While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man was true.” *Many believed in Him there.*

The people who had come out **to John the Baptist** and believed his **testimony** (*martyria*) **beyond the Jordan** are now coming out **to Jesus** (the one to whom John **testified** [*martyreo*]) **in that same place** and “*many*,” John tells us, “believed in Him **there.**” Can you see, now, the

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<sup>\*</sup> When we find John later, baptizing on the west side of the Jordan, he’s probably still baptizing *not* in Judea or Galilee, but in Decapolis (3:23-26).

beauty of that word, “there” (*ekei*)? If, on the one hand, Jesus’ withdrawal “beyond the Jordan” was a response to the people’s rejection of Him, it also proves, on the other hand, the success of John the Baptist’s ministry and therefore the glorious truth that Jesus’ own mission has not at all been derailed. Even in Jesus’ withdrawal “beyond the Jordan,” we see that all things are still moving to their appointed goal and “end.” And what is that goal and end? And where will that goal and end be reached? We go on now, to read in chapter eleven:

**III. John 11:1–2** — Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.

Bethany was a village **in Judea**, just two miles to the east of **Jerusalem**. That’s going to be very important, but here at the beginning John doesn’t make anything of this. Instead, he identifies Bethany as the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

Apparently, these two sisters were well-known in the Christian “tradition” (the body of teaching *passed down* by word of mouth or in writing from the Apostles). Luke tells the well-known story of Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening to His word while her sister Martha was distracted with serving (Lk. 10:38-42), and it seems John is depending to some extent on his readers’ knowledge of this “tradition” (and perhaps others). John identifies Lazarus by saying he was the brother of “the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair” (an account that John relates in the next chapter). His main point isn’t just IDing Lazarus with the facts of geography and family connections; his main point is emphasizing the relationship between Jesus and these two sisters of Lazarus. The sisters loved Jesus and trusted Him while Jesus’ was especially close to these sisters because of the time He had spent receiving hospitality in their home.

**IV. John 11:3** — So the sisters sent word to Him, saying, “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.”

We should never think of Jesus having “favorites” in the sense of “preferring” some people over others.” There’s a very important sense in which Jesus loves all of His sheep equally because He calls each one *by name* and because He lays down His life for *all* the sheep – and there is *no greater* love than this. But in his true humanity, and especially in the limited days of His fleshly weakness, Jesus could not be equally “close” to everyone (cf. Mk. 5:37; 9:2; 13:3; 14:33). Without ever showing preferential treatment or a favoritism that could make anyone “jealous,” there was a special human bond of affection between Jesus and Lazarus (cf. 11:36) just as there was between Jesus and Lazarus’ two sisters. In their fear and desperation, Mary and Martha appeal to this *human* bond of affection in the hope that on this basis—if on no other—Jesus will do something. In their distress they seem to be grounding their unspoken request in the hope of some kind of “preferential” treatment. They don’t actually ask Jesus to come to them in Bethany, likely because they know He’s a wanted man in Jerusalem. But won’t Jesus please do something for Lazarus, the one He loves? We read in verse 4:

**V. John 11:4** — *But* when Jesus heard this, He said, “This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.”

Can you hear the note of rebuke and correction in Jesus’ words (cf. “but”; Gr. *de*)? Jesus never does anything “from Himself” (according to His own will; cf. 5:30; 6:38), so how can the sisters appeal primarily to Jesus’ “human” love for Lazarus as grounds for Him to heal Lazarus? Whatever Jesus does, He does because it’s what He sees the Father doing (cf. 5:19) – *so that the Father may be glorified*.

And yet, as it happens, “*This sickness*,” Jesus says, “is not to *end* in death, but [*it is*] for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.” That’s the message, apparently, that Jesus sent back to Mary and Martha (cf. 11:40). He doesn’t say that He will come. He doesn’t even say that He will heal Lazarus or that Lazarus won’t die. What He does say is that the final, end result of this sickness will not be Lazarus’ death, but the revelation of the glory of God in and through the revelation of the glory of Jesus, the Son of God.

Is this rebuke compatible with Jesus’ love for Lazarus, and for Mary and Martha? Should we think of this single, overriding motive of the revelation of God’s glory as in some way minimizing or even “overruling” Jesus’ love for Lazarus? We read in verses 5-6:

**VI. John 11:5–6** — Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when He heard that he was sick, He then remained two days longer in the place where He was.

All of a sudden we’re brought back to the reality of where Jesus is geographically. When John says that Jesus “**remained** [*meno*] two days longer in the **place** [*topos*] where He was, he’s echoing verses 40-41 of chapter ten.

➤ **John 10:40-41** — And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the **place** [*topos*] where John was first baptizing, and he **remained** [*meno*] *there*.

On the one hand, we remember that Jesus’ withdrawal “beyond the Jordan” was a response to the people’s rejection of Him. On the other hand, this same withdrawal proved the success of John the Baptist’s ministry and therefore the reality that Jesus’ own mission has not been derailed. Even in Jesus’ withdrawal “beyond the Jordan,” all things are moving to their appointed goal and end. So the point *here*, then, isn’t that Jesus remained two days longer in the place where He was just to give time for Lazarus to die or just to make sure that Lazarus had been dead for a sufficiently long period of time. That might be true in some secondary sense, but the deeper reason Jesus “remains” is because it’s not yet the will of His Father for Him to go and because He knows that the greatest good of Lazarus and Mary and Martha—*whom He loves*—is to be found in the revelation of the Father’s glory and in the doing of His Father’s will.

We should be careful about saying these things tritely. Because we know how the story turns out, we can tend to “smile” knowingly. But even if Mary and Martha had comprehended the meaning of Jesus’ message, that still wouldn’t take away any of the pain of watching the suffering of their brother and seeing him die. And in any case, they didn’t understand. In fact, they won’t understand fully until Jesus Himself has been raised from the dead. The grief of Mary and

Martha was just as bitter and just as painful as such grief always is. So when we ask this question, we need to make sure we ask it with full sympathy and that we're really prepared to embrace the answer: **Why** didn't Jesus go immediately? **Why** are we told that He "remained two days longer in the place where He was"? Because Jesus knows that the greatest good of Lazarus and Mary and Martha—whom He loves—is to be found in the revelation of the Father's glory and therefore in His own faithfulness to do His Father's will – so that even He Himself might be "*glorified*" in and through the sickness of Lazarus.

But this only raises another pressing question. What exactly does Jesus' being "glorified" look like? When Jesus says that Lazarus' sickness is "for the glory [*doxa*] of God," He's not talking about giving thanks and praise to God (subjective); He's talking about the objective *revelation* of God's glory. So when Jesus also says that the *Son of God* is to be "glorified" (*daxazo*) by Lazarus' sickness, is He talking about honor and praise from men, or is He again speaking objectively of the revelation of His own glory – the glory that He had with the Father even before the world began (cf. 17:5)? Back in chapter seven, we read these words:

- John 7:39 — This [Jesus] spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was **not yet glorified**.

In chapter twelve, Jesus will say:

- John 12:23, 27–28 (cf. 12:16) — "**The hour has come** for the Son of Man to be **glorified**... Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, **glorify** Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both **glorified** it, and will **glorify** it again."

In chapter thirteen:

- John 13:30–32 — After receiving the morsel [Jesus] went out immediately; and it was night. Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus said, "**Now** is the Son of Man **glorified**, and God is **glorified** in Him; if God is **glorified** in Him, God will also **glorify** Him in Himself, and will **glorify** Him immediately."

And finally, in chapter seventeen:

- John 17:1, 5 — "Father, **the hour has come**; **glorify** Your Son, that the Son may **glorify** You... Now, Father, **glorify** Me together with Yourself, with the **glory** which I had with You before the world was."

It's in the light of these other passages that we have to read here: "But when Jesus heard this, He said, 'This sickness is not to end in death, but **for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.**'"

How is it that Jesus will be glorified? What is the path, for Jesus, to being exalted by the Father so that the glory He had with the Father before the world began is finally and fully revealed? The Son's being "glorified" doesn't consist simply in a triumphal raising of Lazarus from the dead.

We see this even now in these words: “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when He heard that he was sick, He then remained two days longer **in the place where He was.**”

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**VII. John 11:7** — Then after this He said to the disciples, “Let us go to **Judea** again.”

Jesus doesn’t say, “Let us go to Mary and Martha and Lazarus.” Jesus doesn’t say, “Let us go to Bethany.” He says instead—very purposefully: “Let us go **to Judea again**. *Why? In order that the Son may be glorified*. If Jesus is to be glorified by the sickness of Lazarus, then this “being glorified” must in some way be connected with Jesus’ death in Judea. It will be the raising of Lazarus that sets in motion the events leading to Jesus’ death (cf. 11:45-53, 57; 12:12-19). Even more importantly, it won’t be until after Jesus’ own resurrection from the dead that the raising of Lazarus can be fully understood (cf. 1:14; 2:11). It won’t be until after Jesus’ glorification via death on the cross that the raising of Lazarus will then “come into its own” as a saving revelation of the glory that Jesus had with the Father before the world began (cf. 11:25, 40).

The disciples see the connection between going to *Judea* and Jesus *dying*. They can’t see any connection at all between going to *Judea* and Jesus being *glorified*.

**VIII. John 11:8–10** — The disciples said to Him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?” 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 anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him” [cf. Mat. 6:22-23].

The disciples are afraid. The only thing they see in Judea is death – which, to them, can only be a final defeat. But Jesus sees things very differently. As long as He is walking in the daytime—in obedience to, and in the full light of, His Father’s will—there is no possibility of stumbling and therefore there can be no final defeat. As long as Jesus is walking in the daytime, going to Judea, for Jesus, can only mean being glorified – even if through death.

**IX. John 11:11–15** — 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.” The disciples then said to Him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. So Jesus then said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and **I am glad** [I rejoice] for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him.”

When Jesus arrives in Bethany, at the home of Mary and Martha, John will tell us simply: “Jesus wept” (11:35). These are real and genuine tears. Jesus weeps, being touched by our griefs and sharing fully with us in our sorrows (cf. Isa. 53:3-4). But even as Jesus weeps, and even as He sees Mary and Martha and the Jews who were with them weeping, He will still be glad and rejoice that He was not there. He knows that the greatest good of Lazarus and Mary and Martha *whom He loves*, and the greatest good of His disciples—and the greatest good of all of us—is to be found in the revelation of the Father’s glory and therefore in His faithfulness to do His Father’s will. Jesus goes to raise Lazarus so that in the face of this revelation of the glory of God, His disciples might believe *now* as they have *not yet* believed, and so that one day, when they

can see the raising of Lazarus in the light of His own glorification via death, they might then believe fully, being confirmed in faith forever. That the disciples still need to believe as they have not yet believed can be seen in verse sixteen:

**X. John 11:16** — Therefore Thomas [twin], who is called Didymus [twin], said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, so that we may die with Him.”

### **Conclusion**

Jesus walked always in the light of day—in the full light of His Father’s will—so it was impossible that He should ever stumble – whether He was in Galilee or “beyond the Jordan” *or in Judea*. Even death, in Judea—a death that will be precipitated by the raising of Lazarus from the dead—can only be for Jesus the pathway to the saving revelation of His *glory*.

Are we also walking in the light of day? Are we walking in the full light of the Father’s will for us as that will has been fully revealed in the Gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ? This is what it means to believe. And this is why the Jesus who wept also rejoiced that He was not there – so that we might believe. If we walk in the day, then the light is in us, and we can know that we will never stumble. Even death itself can only be, for us, a pathway to life.