

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## The Resurrection of Lazarus

“Then Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.’<sup>22</sup> Yet even now I know that whatever You ask from God, God will give You.’<sup>23</sup> ‘Your brother will rise again,’ Jesus told her.<sup>24</sup> Martha said, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live.’<sup>26</sup> Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die-- *ever*. Do you believe this?’<sup>27</sup> ‘Yes, Lord,’ she told Him, ‘I believe You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.’”

“Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany...” Lazarus was a Greek form of the Hebrew name Eleazar. Bethany was a village about two miles east of Jerusalem (cf. vs. 18), on the far side of the Mount of Olives. This name, and the proximity of their house to Jerusalem, probably indicates a priestly lineage. **Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were siblings.** Vs. 2 is in reference to the well-known incident recorded in some of the other gospels, and in the next chapter (12:1-3; Matt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:1-9), providing further clarification concerning who these people were. These sisters are probably the same ones mentioned in Lk. 10:38-42 also. **“The sisters therefore sent to Him”** (vs. 3). **They had a clear hope of Lazarus’ healing, if Jesus would come** (vss. 21,32). “...he whom You love is sick.” **Jesus was evidently very close to this family, and cared deeply for them** (cf. vs. 5). “When Jesus heard it, He said...” (vs. 4). He knew immediately that He was to do a miracle. “This sickness is not unto death...” Though Lazarus *did* die, **the ultimate end of this sickness was the opportunity for the miraculous healing power of God to be displayed.** “He stayed two days longer...” (vs. 6). **By the time Jesus received this message, Lazarus had already died** (cf. vs. 39). Nothing would have been gained by rushing off immediately. Jesus never would have been able to get to Bethany in time to prevent Lazarus’ death. No one could accuse him of playing with this man’s life.

**Jesus informs the disciples of His intent to return to Judea** (vss. 7-10). **They are incredulous that He would return when the Jews had so recently intended to stone Him.** He uses a figurative lesson to assure them. “Are there not twelve hours in the day?” This statement harks back to His teaching in 9:4. We must do the works of God while we have the opportunity. It is not yet night time. “If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world”. The implication is that **if one walks in the will of God, he will be safe from stumbling.** “But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” This latter phrase, “the light is not in him”, is a twist to the figure of speech that *stands out as contrary to nature*, and hence, the point of the teaching. **The light we see by is outside, ...in the world around us.** Jesus’ comment indicates that this spiritual light that guides us is *inside us, ...an interior illumination from God.* This is what can enable us to walk without stumbling.

**The Lord tells them that Lazarus has died, and that He goes to raise him from death** (vss. 11-16). “Lazarus has fallen asleep...” **Sleep was a common descriptive way to refer to death. It is based upon the observation that the dead person looks like they are asleep.** Bible scholars refer to this as the phenomenological use of language. We describe an event *as it appears to us*, even if we know that there is more to it than that. A common example from our culture is the use of the term “sunrise”. We know that this is not a scientifically accurate description of this event. It appears to our eyes as if the sun actually is rising from the horizon, when really the earth is simply turning on its axis. The description of death as “sleep” here is *not meant* to instruct us as to the state of the dead person’s spiritual essence. **Scripture tells us in numerous places that the dead are conscious, not in a state of soul-sleep** (cf. Lk. 16:19-31; II Cor. 5:1-9; Phil. 1:21-23; Rev. 6:9-11). “Lazarus is dead...” Jesus spoke in plain terms because they had misunderstood. “I am glad for your sakes that I was *not* there, so that you may believe...” Again, Jesus already knew what He was going to do. **A resurrection was a much more powerful sign than a “simple” healing.** “Thomas ...said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him.’” (vs. 16). **The climate was dangerous enough in Judea that the disciples fully expected that not only would He be killed, ...but that they, too, would die with Him.** They were *justified* in their concern. This was, in fact, Jesus’ *last trip* to Judea. It is good that we have this glimpse into Thomas’ character. We learn that there was more to him than the skepticism which he has become known for. He was ready to walk into the face of danger with Jesus.

**When Jesus arrives near Bethany (vs. 30), He has a private meeting with each of the surviving sisters** (vss. 17-32). In both cases, the first words they uttered to Him was concerning their faith that, had He been there, Lazarus would not have died (vss. 21, 32). **They confidently knew Jesus was able to heal. Martha even goes so far as to express that her hope is not totally exhausted,** “...even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You”. **“Your brother shall rise again”** (vs. 23). **Jesus begins to tell her His intent.** She says, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day”. **What Jesus alludes to is too unbelievable to seriously entertain, so she interprets**

**His statement in light of accepted theology.** The Jews believed in a general resurrection of the dead, both of the righteous and the unrighteous, that would take place at the end of the age (Dan. 12:2,13; Jn. 5:28,29). **“I am the resurrection and the life...”** (vs. 25). **What an incredible statement!** In the Greek, the use of the pronoun *egō* in this construction *adds emphasis*. It would be like He had said, “I *Myself* am the Resurrection and the Life”. **Jesus is claiming to be responsible for the resurrection of all.** More than that, He is claiming to be the embodiment of resurrection hope and power. **This is the fifth “I am” claim of this type** (6:35; 8:12; 10:9,11), **and the third such statement directly tied to a miraculous sign that dramatically illustrated the claim** (6:1-35; 9:1-40). “...he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies.” The promise of resurrection is for those who are “believing into/unto/ towards Me”. The Greek word order, “...even if he might die (at a point in time), he will live...”, clearly states that **though physical death may occur, there is a guarantee of life.** “...everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die...” (vs. 26). The Greek is, “everyone living and believing into/unto/towards Me not *never* might he die (at a point in time) unto the age”. **The former statement had addressed the guarantee of resurrection for those who had physically died. This statement goes farther. It says that those who are living and are believing in Jesus will never really experience death, at all.** “Do you believe this?” Jesus prompts Martha in this way probably to *clarify*, and thus to *strengthen*, her faith. **“I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.” This is the strongest, most direct confession of Jesus’ identity in the entire book to this point!** Notice how John has led the reader carefully up to this point by dangling this possibility before our minds in many ways (4:25-29; 7:26,27,31,40-43; 9:22; 10:24). (While women generally were minimized in Jewish culture, God made the point to exalt them as equals. He used Mary to initiate Jesus’ miraculous ministry at the beginning of the book. Here, at the center, we have this powerful confession coming from Martha’s lips. Then, in chapter 20, women are the first eyewitnesses of His resurrection. God was not going to allow the prejudice of the culture silence their testimony.) **This powerful, direct confession, coupled with the stupendous miraculous sign which He is about to perform, serve as a one-two combination in accomplishing John’s purpose** (20:30,31). Both “Christ” (Heb. = “Messiah”, meaning “Anointed One”), and “Son of God” were kingly titles (Lk. 23:2; Ps. 2). “He who comes into the world” is a phrase referring to the fact that **this Messianic King was prophetically promised to Israel.**

Martha returns to tell Mary that Jesus had come, and was calling for her. Her sudden exit appeared to the visiting Jews as though she had been overcome by grief and had gone to the tomb to weep. They followed her to console her. As a result, they became witnesses of the miracle soon to take place.

Vss. 33-38a - In these verses, **the entire group makes its way to the tomb at Jesus’ request. We also have the opportunity to glimpse some of Jesus’ inner emotions.** “When Jesus... saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled.” The Greek says, “As He *saw*... He *was strongly moved within in/with/by the Spirit*, and *He troubled/agitated/disquieted Himself*”. **He entered into their pain and felt their grief** (Isa. 53:3,4). **The Spirit prompted Him to identify with their hurt.** We see Him doing a similar thing in Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:29-34; Lk. 19:41-44. In most of these contexts, this *identification* with people’s pain or need was *followed by action* to address the need. Often these responses were miraculous in nature. Note, too, that **He voluntarily responded to this inner prompting by opening up His emotions.** He did not remain detached or distant emotionally, even though He knew what He was going to do. “Where Have you laid him?” (vs. 34). Jesus *did not know* where the tomb was, ...a sign of His human limitations. “Jesus wept” (vs. 35). The word for the weeping of Mary and her friends is different than that used to describe Jesus’ response. They were loudly wailing and sobbing in expression of their grief and loss. By contrast, **the word used for Jesus’ weeping occurs only here in the NT and means “to shed tears”, but not necessarily accompanied by the loud wailing. Jesus’ display of emotion was sufficient, however, for His enemies to observe, “Behold how much He loved him!”** Some of them commented on His apparent inability to save Lazarus from death, even though He had opened the eyes of the blind man. “Jesus therefore again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb.”

**“Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it”** (vs. 38b). This was a common form of burial in Palestine. Upon asking that the stone be removed, Martha objected that by this time, there would be a stench, “...or he has been dead four days” (vs. 39). (There was a rabbinic tradition that the spirit would hover around the deceased for up to three days, hoping to re-enter the body. This may account for Jesus’ delay for two days (vs. 6), so that there could be no question that Lazarus was truly dead.) “Did I not say to you, if you believe you will see the glory of God?” (vs. 40) This statement from Jesus was enough for Martha to ask that the stone be removed. “Jesus raised His eyes and said, Father...” **Jesus’ prayer was obviously for the benefit of those standing nearby, that they might know that it was God who was doing the work** (vss. 41,42). “Lazarus, come forth” (vs. 43). **Responding to Jesus’ call, the resurrected Lazarus hopped out, still bound in his grave clothes, and with the napkin still wrapped around his face.** Note that “the burial custom of the Jews” involved the wrappings of strips of cloth, not the use of a burial shroud (Jn. 19:38-40; 20:4-8).

**Once again, there was a division among those who were there, some believing, some not** (vss. 45,46).