

The Gospel of John Seven Signs, Seven Statements

Lesson #7

Sign # 6 – THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS

John 5:28...*for the hour is coming when the dead will leave their graves at the sound of his voice...*

As we begin this final session we come to the last of the public signs we will examine. Like the final sign, this sign also concerns a resurrection. This is without a doubt the most personal of all the signs for us that John writes about. If you think about it, death is the one thing that all humans have in common. In the school of life every person makes an “A” in death, no one fails that course!

The hope of life after death has been an important concept in man’s development. Without this there is no meaning to life. It is only a series of random events and then oblivion. There are no consequences to any action. The hope of re-incarnation or a reward after a good life provides the only incentive to civilizing behavior.

The “Good News” that Jesus brings affects all of us in the most fundamental way. There is life after death. We have a spiritual father who loves us and wants us to be with Him for eternity.

Just like the wedding in Cana and the feeding of the multitudes, the resurrection of Lazarus happens around Passover. Indeed this sign happens the week before Jesus arrives triumphantly in Jerusalem for Holy Week.

Lazarus is an interesting character. He seems to come out of nowhere to be identified as a good friend of Jesus (we are told that Jesus loved him), along with his sisters Martha and Mary. We don’t know what Lazarus died of, but know that it was a natural death from some sickness. I wonder what Lazarus thought in his final hours before death. Did he think that Jesus would heal him like the public official’s son?

The detail that Lazarus had been dead for four days is significant. It makes it clear that Lazarus was truly deceased. According to the cultural traditions of the Jews it was believed that the soul hovered near the body for three days but after that time there was no hope of resuscitation and decay would begin.

It was then, and still is now, the custom of the Jews to bury the dead as soon as possible after death. Those who die a natural death, like Lazarus from illness, would have their bodies washed in preparation for burial and would be anointed with oils and herbs and wrapped in burial cloths. Those who die violent deaths, however, are not washed because their blood must accompany them to the grave (Jesus will not be washed after His death). The ritual of mourning would begin immediately following burial. According to the customs of 1st century Judea, men and women walked separately in the funeral

procession and after burial the women returned alone to begin the mourning, which customarily lasted for 30 days. This mourning ritual included loud wailing and dramatic expressions of grief.

When Jesus arrived at Bethany, Martha offered a mild reproach, but she quickly followed this with a statement of faith in Jesus. But she doesn't ask Him to resurrect her brother. She believes if Jesus had been by her brother's side before his death that Jesus could have healed him. She also expresses the belief that whatever He asks God the Father will be granted. **But why doesn't she ask for Lazarus' resurrection at this time if she believes in the power of Jesus as the Son of God?** Some scholars suggest that her faith was imperfect but according to St. Augustine Martha illustrates the perfect example of Christian faith. She places herself and her brother entirely in God's hands—in submission to His will. St. Augustine writes:

...she will not say, 'But now I ask you to raise my brother to life again. [...] all she said was, I know that you can do it; if you will do it; it is for you to judge whether to do it, not for me to presume. In Ioannis Evangelium (The Gospel of John), 49.13

Notice the similarity between Martha's statement in verse 22 and the Virgin Mary's instructions to the waiters in John 2:5. In each there is the same indirect expressed hope that Jesus will act despite what appears to be an impossible situation. There is a desire and a delicate suggestion but no direct request.

Martha misunderstood Jesus when He said your brother will rise again. She apparently thinks He is offering only words of comfort affirming the doctrine of the resurrection of the body in the final judgment that He has taught and that is advocated by the Pharisees but not the Sadducees [Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18; Acts 23:8].

In Mark 12:18-27 Jesus upheld the doctrine of the final resurrection:

Then some Sadducees—who deny that there is a resurrection—came to him and they put this question to him.[..].

They proceed to tell Jesus a story supporting their claim of no resurrection. Jesus responds rather severely by saying:

Surely the reason why you are wrong is that you understand neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For when they rise from the dead, men and women do not marry; no, they are like the angels in heaven. Now about the dead rising again, have you never read in the Book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him and said, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. He is God, not of the dead, but of the living. You are very much mistaken.

The Old Testament Scriptures to which Jesus refers which promise a bodily resurrection are found in **Job 19:25-26**; in David's Toda [thanksgiving] psalms of **Psalms 16**; **Isaiah 26:19**; **Daniel 12:2-3**; and **2 Maccabees chapters 7 and 12 and 14**.

1. **Job 19:25-26:** *I know that I have a living Defender [Redeemer] and that he will rise up last, on the dust of the earth. After my awakening, he will set me close to him, and from my flesh I shall look on God.*

2. **Psalms 16:9-11:** *So my heart rejoices, my soul delights, my body too will rest secure, for you will not abandon me to Sheol [the grave], you cannot allow your faithful servant to see the abyss. You will teach me the path of life, unbounded joy in your presence, at your right hand delight for ever.*
3. **Isaiah 26:19:** *Your dead will come back to life, your corpses will rise again. Wake up and sing, you dwellers in the dust, for your dew will be a radiant dew, but the earth will give birth to the shades.*
4. **Daniel 12:2-3:** *Of those who are sleeping in the Land of Dust, many will awaken, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting disgrace. Those who are wise will shine as brightly as the expanse of the heavens, and those who have instructed many in uprightness, as bright as stars for all eternity.*
5. **2 Maccabees chapters 7, 12 and 14:** The Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead in the Last Days was also affirmed in 2 Maccabees chapter 7 in the story of the martyrdom of seven brothers during the persecution of the 2nd century BC Syrian-Greek king Antiochus IV. 2 Maccabees 7:9: the second brother cries out during his torture: *With his last breath he exclaimed, ‘Cruel brute, you may discharge us from this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up, since we die for his laws, to live again for ever.’* This belief is affirmed by the other brothers in verses 11, 14, 23, 29, and 36. In 2 Maccabees 12:38-45 Judas Maccabeus and his soldiers pray for their dead comrades that their sins may be forgiven in verse 44: *For had he not expected the fallen to rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead.* And in the death of the Jewish elder Razia in 14:46: *...he tore out his entrails and taking them in both hands flung them down on the crowd, calling on the Master of his life and spirit to give them back to him one day. Thus he died.*

Note: **Wisdom 3:7-9** may also be a reference to the final resurrection. This passage implies a later or altered condition of the just sometime after death and could refer to the final glorification of the righteous.

Martha also held the belief of a bodily resurrection, but Jesus will put her faith in a bodily resurrection in a radical new context when He tells her:

John 11:25-27: *Jesus said: ‘I AM the resurrection [and the Life]. Anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ she said, ‘I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.’*

The additional phrase “*and the Life*” is omitted in some ancient handwritten manuscripts and included in others. The addition of the phrase *and the Life* does fit well, however, with the flow of ideas and statements that proceed and follow the phrase. This is Jesus’ 5th “I AM” statement

Think of the significance of this statement of Jesus. The life that Jesus gives is a **present reality** and not just a future promise! There are two principal ideas here:

1. **“I AM the resurrection”** is a direct answer to Martha’s profession of faith in verse 24 and also tells her of the present realization of what she had only expected on “the last day”. Jesus is the

resurrection in the sense that not only will whoever believes in Him, even though he may suffer a physical death, shall come to eternal life but there is the gift of spiritual rebirth that is offered **now**, in this life. The believer who is resurrected spiritually in Christ, even though remaining “in the flesh” for a time, already lives by the Spirit and when he dies physically, will live spiritually. That is why we speak of 2 resurrections: one through baptism when we die to sin and are raised to eternal life and the other at the end of time [see **Revelation 20:5-6**; CCC# **686; 990; 999-1004; 1015-17; 1214-15**].

2. “**and the Life**” is a statement related to **verse 26**. The believer who is alive spiritually will never die spiritually. Whoever receives the gift of life through belief in Christ Jesus will never die a spiritual death because this life is **eternal**. The “life” that Jesus speaks of is life that comes from “above” and is begotten through God the Holy Spirit. His life conquers physical death as well as gives spiritual life. But this gift of supernatural life is not just the life that will begin beyond the grave but is the supernatural life which sanctifying grace will bring to the Christian soul through the gift of Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist. It is the promise Jesus made to all believers in **John 6:54**:

Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person.

The believer in Christ has triumphed over death forever and this victory will be the sign of Lazarus’ resurrection.

Martha is a wonderful example of the model Christian. She responds in faith, love, and in obedience to the teachings of Christ in her profession of faith in Him. Her statement is the clearest recognition of Jesus as the Messiah that we have heard in John’s Gospel! It has the force of Peter’s confession of faith in **Matthew 16:16**.

Did you notice that Jesus remained outside the town and did not enter into town? Martha went into town to get Mary, Martha’s cautious whispering to Mary may indicate the element of danger mentioned earlier in verse 8.

What is Mary’s first response when she sees Jesus? It is similar to Martha’s greeting. As soon as Mary sees Jesus she falls prostrate at His feet. Mary of Bethany is always pictured at Jesus’ feet. Both sisters are examples of model Christians.

Weeping, Mary also mildly reproaches Jesus with the words: *Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.* It is Jesus’ response that has caused so much debate among Biblical scholars. In both verses 33 and 38 Jesus exhibits a strong display of emotion. Scholars have found the Greek in these passages very difficult to translate. The difficulty is that what is being rendered in Greek seems to be two Semitic idioms that express deep internal emotion. The debate is whether the emotion is sorrow, as expressed in this translation, or anger? The same verbs in question, *tarassein* [verse 33 = “shutter” or “sigh”] and *embrimassthai* [= “moved with deepest emotions” or “deeply distressed,” which appears in both verses 33 and 38] can have the basic meaning implying an articulate expression of anger or indignation as well as sorrow. The Greek verb *embrimassthai* is used in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament in **Daniel 11:30** as well as the Gospel of **Mark 14:5**. The Greek word

tarassein, used in this passage, is also found in **John 14:1 & 27** describing the reaction of the disciples to the imminent death of Jesus. It is also found in **John 13:21** describing how Jesus was emotionally moved at the thought of being betrayed by His Apostle Judas Iscariot when Satan entered his heart. The verb *embrimassthai* is also used to describe Jesus' reaction to the suffering of the afflicted in **Mark 1:43** and **Matthew 9:30** but as in this passage scholars cannot agree if the emotion is anger or sorrow. It is interesting that in the commentaries of many of the early Church Fathers, who were articulate in both speaking and writing in Greek and perhaps more familiar with the Semitic idioms, they understood this passage in John in the sense of Jesus expressing extreme anger rather than sorrow.

We can understand Jesus' sorrowful response to the pain and suffering of His friends but what are some reasons for which He might be responding in anger?

It is unlikely that the anger is directed at Mary's mild reproach. She does not understand that the reason for her brother's death is for God to be glorified through the miracle of his resurrection. Nor is her weeping an indication of a lack of faith since Jesus Himself cried. A better explanation may be that that He was angry because once again He is face to face with the realm of Satan and the sin that brings suffering and death, manifestations of Satan's evil influence over creation and mankind.

Saint John Chrysostom suggests that in this passage Jesus has the same mixture of emotion that He felt in the Garden of Gethsemane (as recounted in the Synoptic Gospels) which is an emotional distress caused by the imminence of His suffering and death and the climax of His struggle with Satan. *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 63.2

Whether His emotion was anger or grief or a combination of both, this passage allows us to reflect on the depth of Jesus' human feelings reminding us that He was both fully divine and fully man and therefore experienced of all the depths of emotion that we feel. The Navarre Commentary suggests if Jesus can be moved to tears over the temporary physical death of a friend and believer what must He feel over the spiritual death of the sinner who has brought about his own eternal condemnation? St. Augustine writes about this passage: *Christ wept; let man also weep for himself. For why did Christ weep, but to teach men to weep.* St Augustine, *The Gospel of John*, 49, 19.

The crowd of mourners surrounding Mary and Jesus show no doubts about the reality of Jesus' miracle of healing the man born blind. Theirs is a natural question: Since Jesus has performed such wonderful miracles why didn't He heal His friend?

When Jesus reached the tomb we find that it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Lazarus is not buried in the public cemetery but in a cave—the tomb of a wealthy man—the poor were buried in common graves. These rock-hewn sepulchres consisted of an antechamber and an inner or lower part of the chamber in which bodies were deposited in niches in a recumbent position. Approximately a year after the burial the bones would be collected and placed in a stone ossuary or bone-box. According to the Talmud the burial niches were usually six feet long, nine feet wide, and ten feet high. The entrance to the burial cave was sealed by a large round stone that rolled in front of the opening in a channel specially cut for the stone or was sealed by a plug-like stone. The fact that this family could afford a cave burial site is another indication that Lazarus' family was neither poor nor destitute. Jesus' body will also be laid in a similar cave burial cave, which was the tomb of a wealthy man who was a disciple as well as a member of the Sanhedrin: Joseph of Arimathea.

Upon Jesus' order to remove the stone Martha makes a very practical statement, It is now the fourth day and corruption has begun; the decaying flesh has a very strong and repulsive odor—practical Martha tells Jesus her brother's corpse will stink!

Jesus prays with His eyes opened and raised to heaven, as is the Jewish custom. Jesus begins His prayer by addressing God the Father as "Abba," which was Jesus' characteristic but unusual way of addressing God in prayer. No Jew of His generation or previous generations would have addressed Yahweh this way. **Abba** is literally rendered as the affectionate address of a little child to a father = 'daddy'.

In **Romans 8:15** St. Paul writes:

For what you received was not the spirit of slavery to bring you back into fear; you received the spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out, Abba, Father!

And in **Galatians 4:6-7** St. Paul also writes:

As you are sons, God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son crying, 'Abba, Father'; and so you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir, by God's own act.

Jesus' loving and intimate address to God the Father has now, through our baptism and resurrection in Christ enabled us to go to our "Abba" in the same intimate union as a little child goes to the embrace of a loving "daddy".

Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' What is significant about the fact that Jesus calls Lazarus by name? Although dead, Lazarus has not lost his personal identity. Death does not end existence but transforms existence to another plane which is why Jesus stated in **Matthew 22:32** and **Luke 20:28** that God 'is not God of the dead but of the living, for to him all are alive.'

What happens next is beyond belief. "***The dead man came out...***" of the cave! While Lazarus is still wrapped in the burial cloths, there is no doubt that he is alive. In this the last sign John will record before Jesus' own resurrection, **Jesus has given back physical life as a sign of His power to give eternal life and as a promise that on "The Last Day" He will bodily raise the dead!**

This sign prefigures what Jesus spoke of in **John 5 vs 28-30** concerning the Final Judgment. Jesus said ... *for the hour is coming when the dead will leave their graves at the sound of his voice: Those who did good will come forth to life; and those who did evil will come forth to judgment.*

The raising of Lazarus is the 3rd resurrection miracle in the Gospels.

The two other resurrection miracles occur in **Mark 5:35-43** when Jesus raised Jarius' daughter, and the widow of Nain's son in **Luke 7:11-17**. The raising of Lazarus is only recounted in John's Gospel. It does not appear in the Synoptic Gospels.

What similarities do you see between these 3 resurrection events? Compare the raising of Lazarus to the raising of Jarius' daughter in **Mark 5:21-43**. There are 5 points that parallel the account of the raising

of Jarius' daughter in Mark 5:21-24, 35, 43 and the raising of Lazarus the brother of Mary and Martha. They are:

1. Death of a sick person before Jesus arrives
2. the use of the metaphor of "sleep" for death
3. Jesus' emotion or displeasure at the loud wailing of the mourners
4. Jesus' command with which He calls the dead back to life
5. Jesus' instructions in the care of the person who has been raised

Two Old Testament prophets also raised the dead? In **1 Kings 17:17-24** and **2 Kings 4:8-37** we read where Elijah and Elisha raise the dead. The chief difference between these Old Testament resurrections, and the Gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jarius daughter and the widow of Nain's son when compared to Jesus' miracle with Lazarus, is the length of time that Lazarus was dead. The other resurrections occurred immediately after death. It had been at least 4 days since Lazarus had died. His body had begun to actually decay.

Jesus' resurrection though similar differs from Lazarus' resurrection. Lazarus lived out the normal span of his life after his resurrection and then physically died again, but Jesus being raised from the dead will never die again! He has conquered sin and death! In **Romans 6:9-10** St. Paul writes:

We know that Christ has been raised from the dead and will never die again. Death has no power over him any more. For by dying, he is dead to sin once and for all, and now the life that he lives is life with God.

The great 4th century Biblical scholar St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, saw the resurrection of Lazarus as a sign of the Sacrament of Reconciliation [Penance], and in Christian art found in the catacombs in Rome dating from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd centuries there are over 150 representations of the raising of Lazarus symbolizing the gift of the life of grace which comes through the priest in this Sacrament.

St. Augustine gave a beautiful analogy comparing Lazarus coming alive out of the dark tomb to the repentant believer through confession who "comes forth" from the darkness of sin and into the light of grace: ***For what does come forth mean if not emerging from what is hidden, to be made manifest. But for you to confess is God's doing; he calls you with an urgent voice by an extraordinary grace. And just as the dead man came out still bound, so you go to confession still guilty. In order that his sins be loosed, the Lord said this to his ministers: 'Unbind him and let him go'. What you will loose on earth will be loosed also in heaven.*** St. Augustine: *The Gospel of John [In Ioannes Evangelium] 49.24*

Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees to tell them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting [gathered together*]. 'Here is this man working all these signs,' they said, 'and what action are we taking? If we let him go on in this way everybody will believe in him, and the Romans will come and suppress the Holy Place and our nation.'

The council which was convened was probably the Sanhedrin, the Jewish law court which had jurisdiction over civil and religious matters with Roman approval. The three estates of the Sanhedrin were the priests, the elders, and the scribes (most of the scribes being Pharisees).

Question: From the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry what has been the ultimate fear of the Jewish authorities? The fear was that the messianic fervor among the people would spark a revolt against Rome, which would destroy the relatively good relationship the civil and religious authorities had developed with the Roman authority. Such a revolt threatened the nation and the most holy site of the people, the Temple in Jerusalem, the center of worship of Yahweh and the only site where sacrifices can be offered to God.

One of them, Caiaphas, the high priest **that year**, said, ‘You do not seem to have grasped the situation at all; you fail to see that it is to your advantage that one man should die for the people, rather than that the whole nation should perish.’ He did not speak in his own person, but as high priest of **that year** he was prophesying that Jesus was to die for the nation—and not for the nation only, but also to gather together into one the scattered children of God.

Some Biblical scholars have accused John of not understanding Jewish traditions. According to Mosaic Law the High Priests of Yahweh held their position for life [see **Numbers 35:25**], but the Romans controlled the appointment of the high priests and apparently saw a life time appointment as a position of too much power and influence. It is obvious that John not only understood Jewish traditions but Jewish traditions in the historical context. The 1st century AD Jewish historian Josephus has confirmed that this was the practice under Roman rule at the time Jesus lived. This was also a practice that was more familiar to the Roman culture; for example pagan high priests in Roman dominated Asia Minor changed each year.

Other Biblical scholars have also cited John’s use of the phrase *high priest being of that year* as evidence that John is guilty of making an historical error by suggesting that Caiaphas was High Priest for only that year—repeating the phrase 3 times. If John was suggesting a one-year term that would certainly be an error—Caiaphas was the High Priest for 18 years. But what is interesting is the connection between the triple phrase “**high priest being of that year**” that fateful year of Jesus’ sacrificial death:

- 11:49** *One of them, Caiaphas, the high priest that year, said, [...] one man should die for the people ...*
- 11:51** *He did not speak in his own person, but as high priest of that year he was prophesying that Jesus was to die for the nation...*
- 18:13** *...Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had counseled the Jews, ‘It is better for one man to die for the people.’*

The number 3 always indicates importance, fullness or completion, and in the New Covenant—the Most Holy Trinity. The mention of 3 of anything in Scripture, like 3 days or 3 men, usually means that the event that follows is of great significance. But a series of a repeated phrase links those phrases together with the number of times repeated adding significance.

Remember it is the High Priest who yearly offers the sin sacrifice for the people of the Covenant in the Feast of Atonement, and this is the significance of the link between these repeated phrases. As the High Priest, Caiaphas is linked to Jesus’ sacrificial death. In the Old Covenant system it is the High Priest who makes the most important yearly sacrifice for the sins of the people at during the Feast of Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement. In the early fall of that year, 30AD Caiaphas chose the lamb and

sacrificed it on the Feast of Yom Kippur for the sins of the people. In that same year in March he will chose the True Lamb and will be instrumental in offering His sacrifice for the sins of the world! This is why John uses the phrase 3 times. Jesus sacrificial death will be the full and complete sacrifice which all other animal sacrifices prefigured. There is also the ironic connection between this last High Priest of the Old Covenant being instrumental in the “investiture” through the baptism of blood of the High Priest of the New Covenant, Jesus the Messiah.

It is ironic that what Caiaphas was trying to prevent did occur. In 66AD the Jews revolted against Rome. The nation was destroyed, a million people died, and the rest were sold into the slavery. The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD [just as Jesus prophesized in **Matthew 24:1-2**] and it was never rebuilt.

Joseph Caiaphas intended that Jesus be executed to save the nation of Judea from political annihilation by the Romans, but the higher prophetic purpose, which he does not recognize, is that the death of Jesus is necessary for the salvation of the world [see **John 1:29**].