

A Historically Grounded Narrative Series

When Love Waited

How the death of Lazarus became the setting for a declaration that redefined life, death, and hope

A biblically faithful retelling rooted in Scripture, historical context, and careful theological clarity.

About this Account

This narrative is drawn directly from the biblical record and presented using widely recognized translations such as the ESV, NIV, NASB, and KJV. Cultural, geographical, and historical insights are included to deepen understanding while remaining faithful to the text.



Setup — A Friendship Interrupted by Death (John 11:1–6)

The story begins not with a miracle, but with a relationship.

In the village of Bethany lives Lazarus, along with his sisters Mary of Bethany and Martha of Bethany. The Gospel of John makes this clear from the outset: this is not a distant encounter. These are people known personally to Jesus.

When Lazarus becomes seriously ill, the sisters send word, not with a detailed request, but with a simple statement: *“Lord, he whom you love is ill”* (John 11:3).

The message carries weight.

It assumes relationship.

It expects response.

The text reinforces this expectation: *“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus”* (John 11:5).

What follows, however, introduces the tension that defines the entire scene.

Instead of going immediately, Jesus remains where he is for two more days (John 11:6).

The delay is intentional.

He states that the illness will not end in death, but will serve the glory of God (John 11:4). Yet from the perspective of those waiting in Bethany, that purpose is not visible. What they experience is absence.

(Theological insight: Many interpreters note that this delay is not neglect, but preparation, setting the stage for a revelation that would extend beyond healing to something greater.)

By the time Jesus begins the journey toward Bethany, the situation has already changed.

Lazarus has died.

The setting is now fixed:

A household marked by grief.

A friendship tested by delay.

A promise spoken, but not yet understood.

Nothing outward suggests hope.

The illness has run its course.

The burial has taken place.

The waiting has ended in loss.

And yet, the story is only beginning to unfold.

Conflict — Grief Meets Delay, Faith Meets Finality (John 11:11–32, 37)

By the time Jesus arrives, the moment that seemed urgent has already passed.

He tells his disciples plainly: “*Lazarus has died*” (John 11:14). What was once hope for healing is now a confrontation with death itself. When he reaches Bethany, Lazarus has been in the tomb four days (John 11:17), a detail

that emphasizes permanence in the cultural context of Jewish burial. There is no expectation of reversal.

Martha comes out first.

Her words carry both faith and disappointment: *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”* (John 11:21).

She believes in Jesus’ power,
but she measures it by timing.

She continues: *“Even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you”* (John 11:22). There is trust, but it is undefined, hope without clarity.

Jesus responds with a promise: *“Your brother will rise again.”* (John 11:23)

Martha answers within her understanding: *“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day”* (John 11:24).

Her faith is real, but distant.

It is anchored in the future, not the present moment.

Then Mary comes.

She falls at Jesus’ feet, repeating the same words: *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”* (John 11:32). Her grief is more visible, expressed through weeping, joined by others who mourn with her.

The atmosphere is heavy:

house filled with sorrow.

A community gathered in mourning.

A shared question, spoken twice: *Why not sooner?*

Even the onlookers voice it: “*Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?*” (John 11:37).

The conflict deepens beyond circumstance into emotion.

Jesus is described as deeply moved and troubled (John 11:33). He does not stand apart from the grief, he enters into it. The shortest verse in Scripture captures the moment with clarity: “*Jesus wept.*” (John 11:35)

(Theological insight: Many scholars emphasize that this moment reveals both divine authority and human compassion, Jesus does not dismiss grief even when he knows what he will do next.)

Nothing has changed outwardly.

The tomb is sealed.

The body has been laid to rest.

The mourners remain.

Faith exists, but it is limited by what has already happened.

This is the tension:

They believe in who Jesus is, but they struggle to see what that means now.

The next moment will not simply address their grief.

It will redefine what they believe is still possible.

Climax — A Voice at the Tomb, A Life Called Back (John 11:23–27, 38–44)

The moment does not begin with action, but with a declaration.

Standing before the reality of death, Jesus speaks to Martha of Bethany: *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live”* (John 11:25).

The statement is not theoretical.

It is immediate.

It is personal.

He then asks, *“Do you believe this?”* (John 11:26)

Martha responds with a confession: she believes that he is the Christ, the Son of God (John 11:27). Her faith is real, but it has not yet been tested at this level.

Then the scene shifts to the tomb.

It is described as a cave, with a stone laid against it (John 11:38). The setting is final, closed, and still. Jesus commands that the stone be taken away.

Martha hesitates.

“Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” (John 11:39)

Her words reflect reality as she understands it.

Death has progressed.

Time has passed.

There is no expectation of reversal.

Jesus answers by pointing back to belief: *“Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”* (John 11:40)

The stone is removed.

Jesus lifts his eyes and speaks aloud, not for information, but for those listening: *“Father, I thank you that you have heard me... that they may believe that you sent me.”* (John 11:41–42)

Then comes the defining moment.

He cries out with a loud voice:

“Lazarus, come out.” (John 11:43)

There is no ritual.

No delay.

No visible process.

Only a command.

And the result follows:

Lazarus comes out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, his face wrapped with a cloth (John 11:44). The one who had been declared dead now stands at the entrance of the tomb.

Jesus gives a final instruction: *“Unbind him, and let him go.”*

(Theological insight: Many interpreters understand this moment not only as a restoration of life, but as a sign revealing Jesus' authority over death itself, anticipating the greater reality of resurrection still to come.)

Everything that defined the conflict is overturned:

The tomb is no longer final.

Time is no longer limiting.

Death is no longer absolute.

The climax is not just the raising of Lazarus.

It is the revelation of who Jesus is, spoken before the act, and confirmed by it.

Resolution — From Private Grief to Public Consequence (John 11:45–53)

What happens at the tomb does not remain there.

Many who witness the raising of Lazarus believe in Jesus (John 11:45). The moment that began as a personal loss becomes a public revelation. Faith spreads, not through teaching alone, but through what has been seen.

But belief is not the only response.

Some go to the Pharisees and report what has happened (John 11:46). The news reaches the religious leaders, and they gather to consider the implications. Their concern is not whether the event occurred, but what it will lead to.

“If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him...”
(John 11:48)

Their fear is layered:

Loss of influence.

Loss of control.

Potential intervention from Roman authority.

The miracle that reveals life also intensifies opposition.

At the center of the council, Caiaphas speaks with blunt clarity: *“It is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.”* (John 11:50)

His words are political, but the Gospel frames them as more.

(Theological insight: John notes that Caiaphas speaks prophetically, though not by his own intention, his statement points toward the coming death of Jesus, not only for Israel, but for a broader gathering of God’s people (John 11:51–52).)

From that moment forward, the decision is made:

Plans are set in motion to put Jesus to death (John 11:53).

The resolution carries a double outcome:

- A man is raised to life.
- A path is set toward another death.

The raising of Lazarus becomes more than a miracle, it becomes a turning point.

It confirms Jesus’ authority over death.

It draws people to believe.

It provokes leaders to act decisively against him.

The personal has become historical.

The grief of one family becomes the setting for a revelation that reshapes everything, and accelerates what is to come.

Reflection — When Life Reveals What Lies Ahead

Lazarus lived again.

But the moment did not end in celebration alone.

It revealed something greater, and set something irreversible in motion.

What restored one life also led toward the sacrifice of another.

Question for Reflection:

When we see moments of restoration and hope, do we recognize that they may be pointing beyond themselves, to a larger purpose we do not yet fully understand?

By: Marc Seffelaar