



John 11

BACKGROUND:

The raising of Lazarus from death to life is another of Jesus' signs that show his glory and many come to believe in him. It is Jesus' biggest sign so far in John.

The sign and the prophesy of the high priest together point to what Jesus will do for his people. It points to his substitutionary death for his people and his power to defeat death (It begins to fill out what it means to have authority to lay down his life and take it up again for his sheep 10:14-18). The giving of life is intrinsically linked to Jesus' death – his substitutionary death (Lev 16... 'the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' John 1:29) and his resurrection shows that death has been defeated even when we see the signs of death around us and in us.

Jesus is again ambiguous in his interactions with his disciples and others so it is okay to point that out at some points in the discussion. There are also some plain speaking moments. Martha's response to him is also ambiguous. She thinks that God will do whatever Jesus asks (11:22). Does she think that that includes bringing Lazarus back from the dead that very day? And while Jesus speaks clearly – 'I am the resurrection and the life' - there is a blurring of timeframes as to when the resurrection will take place. Certainly the resurrection of his people forever is still in the future. However, through the interaction and subsequent miracle, Martha has a much more personalised understanding about the source of life and the power of resurrection – It is through trust in Jesus that those promises are guaranteed. This is because her life must now be tied up in Jesus' life to understand the resurrection and how it is possible. His death and resurrection will become her death and resurrection giving her new life now that will bubble up into eternal life. Jesus' authority and demonstration of his power over death means that those in him are guaranteed of resurrected life to the point where Paul says that they live in Jesus now because they died to sin in him and have new life now and the promise of resurrected life (Gal 2:20 Romans 6:5-11).

There are strong links to Ezekiel 34 and 37 in John 10. John 11 has some links to Ezekiel 37- Jesus raises Lazarus simply by his word (Just as Ezekiel prophesies to the bones). The state of Israel is similar. It is now languishing under a foreign power fighting for survival (Under the Babylonians in Ezekiel's time. Under the Romans in Jesus' time). Jesus gives a sign to show that God brings life through him and he defeats our greatest enemy – our sinful nature that wars against God and brings the condemnation of death.

In Jesus we now know where the heart of the resurrection can be found. However, we live knowing the power to come in a world where death still has its say. Navigating that in the light of the gospel is the call of each Christian. Death still has a sting until Jesus returns. In the meantime we have the comfort that Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Think about which questions will help bring out discussion in your group about death and Jesus' power by looking at different perspectives and responses of those in John 11. There may be people in your group where the death of someone they know has had more of a profound impact. Is it worth talking to them beforehand to let them know what you will be looking at in growth group?

STUDY IDEAS

Possible opening:

We have quite a different interaction with death in Canberra in the 21st Century than would have been the case in Jesus' day. Each of us has been touched by death in different ways. How do you think people in Canberra would react to the statement that 'Death is a natural part of life'? How does their view of death interact with how they live?

Read John 11 with the following in mind so you can quickly survey different people's view of death.

At a glance - take some quick notes about each person's view of death as you go through the passage. What are the different attitudes to death and its prevention in John 11?

Jesus

Disciples

Thomas

Mary

Martha

Jews

Pharisees

Chief priest

What is the purpose of Jesus delay to come to Lazarus (especially v.15)?
Let's explore if that purpose is realised as we look at the responses of different people.

Thomas seems quite bold in this passage. What do you think his view of death is?

What is his understanding of death and resurrection before and after he sees Jesus resurrected? (20:24-29) Does it surprise you after he has witnessed the raising Lazarus from the dead?

What is **Martha's** understanding of Jesus' power (how is her take perhaps different from others v.22)?

What is her understanding of the resurrection?

How does Jesus fill out her understanding when he says 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.'?

How is Martha's understanding and her faith tested at the tomb (v.39)?

How have you seen your faith in and understanding of Jesus grow over time? Do you expect that to continue?

What are the responses of those who saw the miracle (45-46)? How do you explain the responses?

What tensions strike you from chapter 11 and life now?

Eg. Seeing and believing

Truth and political/religious/community pressure

belief and doubt in the Christian life

the way things are now and the way they will be (present realism but also with a sure future hope (eg. how can we be open to surprise by God and hope in the face of curse and death at the same time?))

In chapter 37 of Ezekiel the people of Israel are being overwhelmed by a foreign power and they call to God to say that they are as good as dead. The rest of the chapter looks at two major achievements that God will carry out for his people - resurrection and good caring governance. It is a resurrection of sorts looking to a future restoration. Israel is on its deathbed due to turning their backs on God and under under foreign occupation (sound familiar?). **Read Ezekiel 37:1-14.** Looking at John 11 through this lens:

What would the original hearers think of 'I am the resurrection and the life' coming from the lips of a man?

How does this resurrection, like in Ezekiel, show a resurrection before its time?

The Pharisees were believers in the resurrection. How do they, the spiritual leaders of Israel in Jesus' time, respond to what Jesus has done?

What is their feeling about the present and future (John 11:47-48)?

What is their solution (49-53)?

How does that differ from God's plans?

Ironically, how are they playing their part in bringing about God's plan for salvation?

How does the prophesy of the high priest explain the gospel?

How does that make a greater resurrection possible?

How does Jesus respond to despair and death (vv.28-38 Deeply moved can be translated 'enraged' or 'indignant')? How can Jesus be both enraged and compassionate (v.35)?

How are we to approach the death of a loved one? (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

How can we bring hope to a world that wants to sweep death under the carpet?

How can we be both real with what is happening now and look forward to a glorious future?

How does Jesus help us trust him that he has brought life to the full?