

## John 11:17-44 - “I am the Resurrection and the Life”; Seventh Sign<sup>1</sup>

**Before the class:** Prepare copies of the “Seven Signs” handout for the Information session.

**Fellowship Question:** (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin discussion, and to lead into the study)

1. What was the earliest brush with death that you had?
2. What event in your life has caused you to reflect on the frailty and shortness of life?

### Information

The story of the resurrection of Lazarus is well-known to many of us. We can recount the facts of the story. Today, we will practice a discipline called “holy reading” or “lectio divina.” It helps us to move beyond the facts to the “heart” of the story.

This story has five parts: the notification to Jesus of Lazarus’ illness; Jesus’ conversation with Martha; Jesus’ conversation with Mary; the resurrection of Lazarus; and the reaction of the onlookers. We will focus on the middle three parts of this story.

I will read each of the sections. I invite you to take a character in the story and live it through them. The point of this story, as in all of John’s Gospel, is to reveal the answer to the question, “Who is Jesus and why should I follow him?” So, look at Jesus through your character’s perspective for all three readings.

Here are the main characters (besides Jesus): Jesus’ disciples; Lazarus; the sisters of Lazarus; mourners; community members; religious leaders.

Take a deep breath, relax, and ask God’s Spirit to speak to you through these readings.

- Read John 11:17-27; 11:28-33; 11:34-44

After each reading, ask, “Whose perspective did you take? What can you share from that perspective?”

After the three readings, ask, “Who is Jesus?”; Then, “Why should I follow him?”

This is the seventh of the seven “signs” in John’s Gospel. These signs demonstrate how God’s love is revealed through Jesus’ power. They point to why we should follow Jesus.

- Distribute the “Seven Signs” handout.

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<sup>1</sup> This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2023. More lessons may be found at [greatbibleteachers.com](http://greatbibleteachers.com).

“John narrates fewer miracles than do the Synoptics...almost one-half of the Marcan narrative of the public ministry concerns the miraculous. John describes only seven miracles each carefully selected to encourage the faith of the reader...In the Synoptic tradition, there is much more attention to the marvelous act of the miracles and the enthusiasm they produce...This vivid coloring has faded in John; here the miracles are narrated with discretion, and detailed descriptions of the marvelous are avoided.”<sup>2</sup>

[The following two paragraphs are also on the handout. Summarize them, or invite class members to read and then respond to the quotes.]

“This primary emphasis on the symbolic possibilities of the miracles differentiates John from the Synoptics. This does not mean that the material action, like healing, can be dispensed with, but simply that there is little emphasis on the material results of the miracle and great emphasis on the spiritual symbolism. If Jesus heals the official’s son and grants him life, the explanation that follows this miracle and that of Bethesda makes it clear that the life which Jesus communicates is *spiritual* life.”<sup>3</sup>

“The raising of Lazarus discloses how God resolutely counters the pervasive threat of death; God’s Word-made-flesh enters fully into and assumes the conditions of humanity, including suffering and mortality; yet in his resurrection Jesus reveals that death’s pernicious grip on human life is not ultimate. Death is powerful but not all-powerful. The raising of Lazarus redounds to God’s glory because it reveals God’s love and life-giving purposes for the world. The account puts the assertions of John 3:16 into narrative form: God’s love for the world is expressed through the giving of life. Although the death and resurrection of Jesus will further reveal God’s life-giving power, its full disclosure awaits ‘the last day,’ with the resurrection to life and the judgment when Jesus’ identity as the life-giving Son of God will be vindicated.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Transformational Exercise**

Go back to the prayerful attitude of the “holy reading.”

The resurrection of Lazarus has happened. Now, you are no longer the Biblical character. You are yourself.

What do you do or say to Jesus as he walks toward you?

[Invite class members to share their experience with this exercise.]

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<sup>2</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel of John*. The Anchor Bible, Volume 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 525.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, 529.

<sup>4</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 251

Close in a prayer something like this: *God of life, be with us, save us, and resurrect us. We make our plans for this new week. But we really have no idea what is ahead of us. Whatever happens help us to trust that you will be present in your time and in your way, which is always the way of love. Amen.*

## Seven Signs in the Gospel of John<sup>5</sup>

“Each of these seven signs revealed some specific characteristic of Jesus’ power and person.”

<b>Text</b>	<b>Jesus...</b>	<b>Jesus has power over...</b>
John 2:1-11	Changes water to wine	Quality
John 4:46-54	Heals the nobleman’s son	Distance/Space
John 5:1-9	Heals the long-sick man	Time
John 6:1-14	Feeds the five thousand	Quantity
John 6:16-21	Walks on water	Natural law
John 9:1-12	Heals man born blind	Misfortune
John 11:1-46	Raises Lazarus	Death

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“The raising of Lazarus discloses how God resolutely counters the pervasive threat of death; God’s Word-made-flesh enters fully into and assumes the conditions of humanity, including suffering and mortality; yet in his resurrection Jesus reveals that death’s pernicious grip on human life is not ultimate. Death is powerful but not all-powerful. The raising of Lazarus redounds to God’s glory because it reveals God’s love and life-giving purposes for the world. The account puts the assertions of John 3:16 into narrative form: God’s love for the world is expressed through the giving of life. Although the death and resurrection of Jesus will further reveal God’s life-giving power, its full disclosure awaits ‘the last day,’ with the resurrection to life and the judgment when Jesus’ identity as the life-giving Son of God will be vindicated.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief: An Analytic Study of the Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1948), 30-31, 312.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel of John*. The Anchor Bible, Volume 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 529.

<sup>7</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 251.