

Session Fourteen: The Seventh Sign: The Raising of Lazarus

Opening Prayer

Where is the raising of Lazarus at in the Scriptures? John 11:1-44.

Background and Context

- We have been walking our way through the extended Pentecost and 3rd Day Event of the revelation of Jesus.
- He has been shown to be the bringer of abundance, the new Moses, the Word that is powerful, the same God who has command of the wind and waters.

He is the one who will die....

- In various ways the signs have also pointed to his “hour,” though it has been subtle.
- The hostilities of the Temple leadership towards Jesus have been building and building.
- After the major argument at the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus attends one more major festival during the winter before his death.
- Feast of the Dedication of the Temple, late in Chapter Ten.
- His presence at this feast is a statement that he has come as the new temple.
- He states to the crowds that: the Father and I are one in the same. They threaten to kill him.

The Hour is approaching....

- “The Hour” draws near now in chapter 11 which is where we find the story of the raising of Lazarus.
- All of this is permitted by God so that ultimately the only Son can perform his greatest “eighth sign,” the sign of ultimate revelation of God’s own nature and glory: he will freely die so that the world can have life.
- Raising one dead man to life will lead to the killing of the Son of Man.
- And: the sign that leads to his death will be one in which he displays God’s radical power over life and death. This is at the center of the raising of Lazarus.
- It is a precursor to what the Father will do for his dead Son, Jesus.
- It is yet another attempt to raise up a response of faith in Jesus’ followers.

Who are Martha, Mary, Lazarus, and where is this story taking place?

- John tells us that Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were friends of Jesus. Possibly he stayed at their home during his many visits to Jerusalem.
- They live in the Town of Bethany which is only a short walk from Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives.
- One can go to Bethany today to visit the Church built over the place of the Home of Lazarus and his raising.
- It is very likely that these are the same Martha and Mary that appear in Luke’s Gospel in the conversation about the house chores.
- It is also possible that this Lazarus is connected with the Lazarus mention in Luke’s Gospel of the poor man Lazarus who dies and is carried away to the bosom of Abraham while the rich man suffers torment. The rich man asks Lazarus to return in order to convince others to change and believe, but he does not return. In John’s story, the person named Lazarus does return; some believe others do not.

- After Lazarus is raised, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus will host a dinner for Jesus on the Saturday before Palm Sunday, and there his body will be anointed by Mary as a preparation for his burial. After that he will enter Jerusalem to die.
- The death and the raising of Lazarus therefore takes place shortly before Passover, likely in the early spring of the year that Jesus dies.

The Story and the Characters

The Story of this last sign is long so it is best relayed and explained by briefly highlighting the main characters.

The Disciples/ Apostles' faith

- The situation for a sign is set up by Mary and Martha requesting Jesus to come because their brother is near death.
- Jesus waits before going, because he loves them- he has a greater plan in mind than the merely immediate.
- He then explains to his Disciples that they are going to back to Judea to attend to this situation.
- The Disciples question this decision because they know it puts them all into danger. They call him "Rabbi" showing their continue misunderstanding of who he is.
- They continue to view Jesus and this situation from a merely earthly perspective, not understanding the power of Jesus or that he must go to die.
- Instead they still view him as a political leader who is going to do battle in the city in the manner of David or a warrior king.
- Jesus explains that he is glad they were not present so that this situation of human want or lack, in this case a dramatic one, can allow for belief.
- The apostles decide to go with him "to die with him"- they are speaking of a political campaign.
- Their faith and understanding is insufficient.

Martha's Faith

- Martha appears on the surface to have more understanding than the Disciples/Apostles, but she will falter.
- She runs out to meet Jesus while Mary stays stationary at home; like in the Luke story, Mary is the more contemplative of the two. Martha is action oriented and takes the initiative.
- She explains that she knows Jesus is a wonder worker because if he had been there earlier, Lazarus would not be dead because Jesus could have cured him. She does not allow for the possibility that there was a greater plan at work and that Jesus is more than a mere wonder worker. He is master over death.
- Jesus attempts to correct her by explaining Lazarus will rise; as in: I have power even over this.
- She interrupts him and explains what SHE KNOWS, (as she teaches the teacher) namely that he will rise on the last day. This is in reference to the Pharisee tradition of a final resurrection.
- He corrects her again: I am the resurrection. Do you believe this he asks her?
- Yes, I have come to believe- as in- I knew this a long time ago. You are the messiah. This is the response of someone who thinks she knows everything, and she only succeeds in using the same labels that others before her have used who do not grasp who Jesus truly is.

Up to now, Jesus still has not encountered real faith.

End of Session Fourteen