

Tense Times in Jerusalem: Jesus Raises Lazarus (John 11:1-57)

Gospel of John, Session 13

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Keywords

Lazarus, Resurrection, Bethany, Caiaphas, Sanhedrin, Inclusio, Eschatology, Miracles, Sign

Abstract

This session, taught by Dr. David Turner, covers John 11:1-57, focusing on the raising of Lazarus as the climactic seventh sign in the Gospel of John. The narrative traces the rising tension in Judea, leading to Jesus' brief retreat across the Jordan, his return to Bethany to perform the miracle, and the resulting hostile plot by the Sanhedrin under Caiaphas' counsel. Dr. Turner explores the literary structure of the narrative, including its chiasmic elements and inclusio, while also addressing geographical contexts, ancient Jewish burial customs, and key theological themes like inaugurated eschatology. Finally, the session highlights how this final public miracle serves as the pivotal turning point that directly precipitates Jesus' own passion and death.

Outline

I. Introduction to Session 13

- A. Title: Tense Times in Jerusalem: Jesus Raises Lazarus (John 11:1-57)**
- B. Speaker: Dr. David Turner**
- C. Background context of rising tension and disputes in Jerusalem (John 7–10)**

II. The Flow of the Narrative (John 11:1-54)

A. Jesus' retreat across the Jordan

1. Departure from Jerusalem to Bethany beyond the Jordan (John 10:40-42)
2. Reflection on John the Baptist's testimony and local belief

B. Learning of Lazarus' illness and the delay

1. Message from Martha and Mary regarding Lazarus' sickness in Bethany near Jerusalem
2. Jesus' cryptic response: sickness for the glory of God
3. Two-day delay out of love for the family
4. Decision to return to Judea despite disciples' fear of stoning
5. Discourse on walking in the daylight vs. stumbling in the night

6. Announcement of Lazarus' "sleep" (death) and Thomas' courageous/fatalistic response ("let us go that we may die with him")

C. Arrival in Bethany near Jerusalem

1. Conversation with Martha
 - a. Martha's mixed faith: "if you had been here, my brother would not have died"
 - b. Affirmation of the resurrection on the last day
 - c. Jesus' declaration: "I am the resurrection and the life"
 - d. Martha's confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God
2. Conversation with Mary
 - a. Mary's arrival and parallel grief-stricken statement
 - b. Emotional public mourning of the sisters and bystanders
 - c. Jesus' deep emotional response: troubled in spirit, weeping (John 11:35)
 - d. Mixed reactions of the crowd: highlighting Jesus' love vs. questioning why He didn't prevent the death

D. The Raising of Lazarus (John 11:38-44)

1. Description of the tomb: cave with a stone covering
2. Martha's concern over the four-day odor of decomposition
3. Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving for the benefit of bystanders
4. The command: "Lazarus, come out"
5. Unbinding the resuscitated Lazarus from his grave clothes

E. The Denouement and Rising Opposition (John 11:45-54)

1. Divided response: many believe, others report to the Pharisees
2. Emergency Sanhedrin meeting regarding Jesus' signs and fear of Roman intervention
3. Caiaphas' Machiavellian advice: "better for one man to die for the people than the whole nation perish"
4. John's theological interpretation of Caiaphas' words as high priestly prophecy
5. Formalized plot to execute Jesus
6. Jesus' withdrawal to the obscure village of Ephraim near the wilderness

III. Literary and Geographical Contexts

A. Literary Structure of the Narrative

1. Chiastic structure centering around the raising of Lazarus
 - a. Avoidance of arrest east of Jordan (beginning) / Ephraim (end)
 - b. Martha's grief and belief / Pharisees' unbelief
 - c. Mary's grief and belief / bystanders' belief
2. Literary inclusion (inclusio) starting and ending with Jesus avoiding arrest

B. Topographical and Geographical Analysis

1. The two Bethanys
 - a. Bethany near Jerusalem (east of the Mount of Olives, modern Al-Azharia)
 - b. Bethany beyond the Jordan (location of John's baptizing ministry, southern or northern theories)
2. Topographical descent/ascent: traveling from the Jordan River Rift Valley (~1,000 ft below sea level) up to Jerusalem (~2,600 ft above sea level)
3. Al-Azharia: traditional tomb site and the impact of the modern separation wall

C. Ancient Jewish Burial Customs

1. Chiseled rock-cut tombs with rolling stone channels and locking depressions
2. Primary burial in vertical niches within the tomb chambers
3. Secondary burial: collecting disarticulated bones into ossuaries (bone boxes) for space preservation

IV. Major Exegetical and Theological Themes

A. The Raising of Lazarus as the Climactic Seventh Sign

1. Dramatic suspense built through a three-fold delay and dialogue structure
2. Ultimate demonstration of Jesus' identity and mission

B. Inaugurated Eschatology

1. Realized eschatology: resurrection power experienced in the present through faith
2. Future eschatology: final resurrection and judgment on the last day

C. Raising vs. Resurrection

1. Lazarus was resuscitated/raised back to a mortal body destined to die again
2. Jesus' resurrection represents a glorified, transformed heavenly body

D. Opposition and Realpolitik

1. Caiaphas' advice as a classic political self-preservation strategy (realpolitik)
2. Divine providence overriding unbelief to offer a substitutionary theological prophecy
3. Miracle as the direct catalyst for the final plot leading to Jesus' death