

## **Signs: The Gospel of John, John 11:1-16**

The raising of Lazarus from the dead wasn't the last of Jesus' miracles before the cross, but it's the last of the "signs" that John records for his readers—it is the climatic sign in John's gospel.

Each of the seven signs John recorded pointed to a particular aspect of Jesus' divine authority. This final miracle exemplifying his power over the last and most irresistible enemy—death!

**v.v.1-3:** the first few verses introduce us to Lazarus of Bethany, the brother of Martha and Mary. Although Martha and Mary are mentioned in the other Gospels, Lazarus is not. Mary is referred to by an event that John has yet to describe to his readers (12:1-8), pointing to the prominence of her story to his readers.

While Jesus and the disciple's exact location isn't noted by John, most commentators note that it was probably Bethhabara, about twenty miles to the NE of Bethany, near the Jordan River. Some place them as much as 50 miles away, a full two and half day walk. The sister's plea through the messenger points to an apparent relationship and familiarity that Jesus had with this family. They lean into Jesus' love and compassion for them and their brother and seem confident that Jesus would come.

**v.v.4-6:** Jesus' reaction was purposeful and optimistic. He sends the messenger back to the sisters with the hope that the "illness does not lead to death." John points out that Jesus loves this family—only to say that after hearing of Lazarus' illness he, "stayed two days longer." This would, on the surface, seem either uncaring or even selfish to the disciples and the sisters, but Jesus (and the Father) had a bigger plan at work. It should be noted that according to the timeline in the story, Lazarus' time of death most likely happened while the messenger was enroute to Jesus.

**v.v.7-10:** Jesus' plan to return to Judea, the very place they had left because the Jews were seeking to kill him, wasn't welcomed by the disciples. Jesus reminds them that he has a work and a purpose—that "walking in the light," is walking in God's purpose.

**v.v.11-15:** Jesus statement that “Lazarus has fallen asleep,” was interpreted by his disciples to mean that he must be recovering and is simply resting. Jesus, however, meant “sleep” as a metaphor for death and the coming healing. He then makes a strange declaration, “Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there...” Jesus knew that this was part of the plan, that it was positioning him for a supreme display of his power, further certifying the Father’s confirmation of him as His Son—increasing the disciples faith. He was certain of the outcome and knew that strengthened belief and joy would be the result.

**v.16:** This is Thomas’ first appearance in John’s Gospel, and he will appear three more times before the Gospel is finished. His statement here seems paradoxical to the perceived pessimistic attitude we see later. He, as well as the other disciples, what awaited them in Judea.

### **The Wait**

There is a lesson for us in this story as well—a lesson in waiting.

**“We are taught by this delay on his (*Jesus*) part, that we ought not to judge the love of God from the condition we see with our eyes. When we have prayed to him, he often delays his assistance, either that he may increase still more our ardor (*passion*) in prayer, or that he may exercise our patience and at the same time, accustom us to obedience.” John Calvin**

**Why delay? Increases our devotion to prayer, strengthens and develops our patience, and helps us to practice obedience.**

At times it may seem like God is delaying or late in responding to our needs and prayers, however, we must remember, when God acts it’s not after a delay, **His actions are always perfect and on time. God’s timing isn’t our timing, but His timing is always perfect. What we perceive as a delay is actually His working out His perfectly timed plan for us and His creation.**

**We have hope while we wait—waiting isn't something we have to endure to get what we want, it's part of the process of becoming what God wants us to be.**

**Our faith is forged in waiting. Our hope is strengthened in waiting. Our trust is revealed in waiting. Psalm 119:81-88**