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## LUKE 12–17; JOHN 11

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### JESUS TRAVELED SOUTH AND VISITED BETHANY TO RAISE LAZARUS

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#### Setting

After Jesus' time teaching, preaching, and healing in Galilee, Luke's Gospel follows Jesus and his traveling companions (including several women, Luke 8:1–2) on their journey from Galilee to Jerusalem for the Passover. This is the only passover pilgrimage found in the Synoptic Gospels during in Jesus' ministry. The nine chapters are filled with conversations, parables, healings, and teaching.<sup>1</sup> In ancient Palestine, the preparations for Passover began weeks in advance.

The accounts in this week's chapters may overlap with some of these Second Temple traditions that preceded Passover:

- **Six weeks before:** Rabbinical agents went out to the countryside to inspect roads and bridges to determine what repairs were needed after the winter rains for pilgrims to safely travel to Jerusalem. They surveyed public squares (for pilgrims to sleep as they traveled), and determined if there were adequate wells to provide water for the travelers.<sup>2</sup> Once in Jerusalem they made sure there were enough *mikvaot* for travelers to be purified in Jerusalem, and ovens to roast the lambs properly.<sup>3</sup> Ritual purity took time, so many came early “to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves” (John 11:55).
- **One month before:** Bridges and roads were repaired in preparation for the hordes of pilgrims. The red heifer was burned and its ashes prepared as the “testing draught” for women suspected of committing adultery (Numbers 19:1). Those who chose to remain as indentured servants for life, had their ears pierced and wore a hoop as a mark of identification. All the sepulchers were painted white (so that travelers knew where they were, and could stay away in order to maintain ritual purity).<sup>4</sup>
- **Two weeks before passover:** Flocks and herds were tithed, temple treasury chests opened and emptied.
- **One week before passover:** Thoroughly cleaning to remove all traces of leaven from the house (Exodus 12:15,19; 13:7; etc.).
- **Four days before passover:** Select the pascal lambs, and display them in a public place (Exodus 12:3).
- **One day before passover:** Cook all the food and finish removing the last of the leaven.

## Jesus Warns of Being Puffed Up

*Luke 12:1-12*

**Luke 12:1-3 “an innumerable multitude . . .”** The words actually describe two things, either an indefinite very large number, or literally 10,000. To emphasize the enormous size of the crowd, Luke includes that they “trampled on one another.” As the crowd gathers, Jesus talks to his close disciples nearest Him, as “friends” (Luke 12:4).

“**leaven of the Pharisees**” Jesus’ conversation pointed to the upcoming Passover and Feast of the Unleavened Bread, by using the analogy of leaven. Before the feast, Israelites carefully remove all the leaven or fermenting yeast agents from their homes, and do not eat it for the entire week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:15,19; 13:7; etc.). It represents their ancestors in Egypt whose bread did not have the time to rise because they left in haste after the destroying angel passed over them. In addition, leaven also grew to symbolize corruption. Jesus spoke against those who had internal leaven, or those who were puffed up with pride. He specifically denounced the Pharisees’ pride which led to hypocrisy. Jesus warns that all the wicked thoughts and behaviors will at some time be revealed loud and clear.

**Luke 12:4** “I say unto you,” is repeated nine times in this chapter (and more in the rest of Luke’s Gospel). It introduces Jesus’ authoritative teachings.

**Luke 12:5** “Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell” Jesus taught that we should be more aware of our spiritual safety than our physical safety. Mortality will end, we do not need to fear death. But if we have lost our spiritual bearings, there are eternal consequences.

## God’s Awareness of our Witness

*Luke 12:6-12*

**Luke 12:6-7** “are not five sparrows sold . . . the very hairs of your head are all numbered . . . ye are of more value than many sparrows.” God’s awareness of every bird and hair demonstrates that He oversees the details of our lives, “not one of them is forgotten before God.” Jesus recognized the value of the fact that even the little things that seem insignificant are known and valued by God.



**Luke 12:8-9** “. . . he that confess me” we can witness of Jesus or deny Him with our words, thoughts, and deeds. Those who testify of the Son of God will find the Lord defending them in heavenly courts. The opposite is also taught by Jesus. This message was very real for the early Christians who were being killed for confessing their belief in Jesus. The JST adds that the apostles felt condemned: “*Now the disciples knew that he said this, because they had spoken evil against him before the people; for they were afraid to confess him before men . . . saying, he knoweth our hearts, and he speaketh to our condemnation, and we shall not be forgiven.*” This explains why the Lord then went on to teach about the sin against the Holy Ghost.

**Luke 12:10** “. . . blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven” The sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, “is a sin which is unpardonable,” if one has had a sure witness, or if the Holy Ghost “once has had place in

you” (Alma 39:5–6; also see Hebrews 6:4–6; 10:26). Joseph Smith clarified what one has to do to deny the Holy Ghost: “He must receive the Holy Ghost, have the heavens opened unto him, and know God, and then sin against him.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Pres. Kimball further explained, “The sin against the Holy Ghost requires such knowledge that it is manifestly impossible for the rank and file to commit such a sin.”<sup>6</sup>

**Luke 12:11–12 “For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the very same hour”** Jesus promises divine inspiration as we defend Him. Pray that it happens to you. However, this only comes when we have learned the language of the Lord. As President Russel M. Nelson warned in his first General Conference as prophet, “in coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>7</sup> Like the early Christians, this may become a matter of our spiritual life or death.

## Stewardships: Earthly Treasures

*Luke 12:13–21*

**Luke 12:13–15 “Guard against every form of greed”** (NASB) A new scene opens, with someone approaching Jesus for help to divide his inheritance. It begins a long discussion on possessions, including a few parables. Luke includes Jesus’ warning against valuing wealth and position more than any other Gospel. The narration invites us to ask ourselves, “How do we view this world’s goods?”



God gave Moses and the children of Israel laws for inheritance (see Numbers 27:1–11; 36:6–10; Deuteronomy 21:15–17). They were often a topic of dispute. Contention over financial issues has plagued most generations. Satan has tempted humanity with greed or a love of materialism since Adam’s children. Hugh Nibley helped define the problem: “We have been warned against things of this world . . . but exactly what are the things of the *world*? An easy and infallible test has been given us in the well-known maxim ‘*You can have anything in this world for money.*’ If a thing is of *this world*, you can have it for money; if you cannot have it for money, it *does not* belong to *this world*”<sup>8</sup> (emphases added).

## Stewardships: Parable of Rich Fool

*Luke 12:16–21*

**Luke 12:16–18 “a certain rich man brought forth plentifully”** A lack of understanding of the principle of stewardship is seen here. The rich man claims that he owns “my fruits, my barns, my goods.” Personal pronouns (I, me, himself) are mentioned ten times in two verses (ten of the 45 words) to emphasize the foolish man’s

problem is self-centeredness that leads to self-indulgence. This is the antithesis of God's laws to love God and our neighbors. The man has forgotten that the earth is the Lord's. Humans are only stewards of God's property. All we have is His.

**Luke 12:19–21 “take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry”** Jesus attacks the dream of getting rich enough to retire with a life a leisure. The parable reminds his audiences that not only is the future not in our control, but also that storing up riches is self-centered foolishness. The Lord reveals the Law of Consecration to teach a better way. God's creation has plenty for all, if we all do our part to work hard and share. The answer is found in the Law of Consecration, which was restored in 1831 in Kirtland, Ohio (with more details taught over time in D&C 42, 58, 105, etc.). Consecration works on three major principles: 1. Agency, 2. Stewardship, and 3. Accountability.<sup>9</sup> The parable poked fun at the foolish man's shortsightedness to teach that all is God's and we have the responsibility to bless others with our gifts.

## Stewardships: God's Solution as our Provider

*Luke 12:22–34; Matthew 6:19–21, 25–34*

**Luke 12:22–23 “take no thought . . . life is more than meat”** Jesus taught this same message as part of his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:25–34). There he instructed his apostles about their focus as missionaries and full-time servants for the kingdom. God promises to provide for those sent out to serve and work with Him. He also teaches them not to worry, or “be anxious about your life” (ESV). With faith and trust in God's care, our anxiousness about the future diminishes. Parts of this advice apply to all, and parts are specifically for his special audience (the apostles). God also directed us to plan ahead and to balance our need for daily bread and dependence on God with hard work and the sweat of our brow (Genesis 3:19).

**Luke 12:24–25 “Consider the ravens . . . God feedeth them.”** God takes care of even the unclean birds like ravens (Leviticus 11:15), and reminds us, “how much more are ye better than the fowls?”

**Luke 12:27–28 “Consider the lilies”** We, like the beautiful lilies, are God's handiwork. We are most beautiful when shining His light. How do you move from anxiousness to trusting God? The answer is, “ye of little faith...seek the kingdom of God”



**“will he clothe you”** In the discussion on Matthew 6:28, this appears to also address temple promises, as the word for “clothe” is a form of “endow or indue.” The word “endow” came from the idea, “to provide with a dowry” and is occasionally used for one who “is endowed by his Maker with reason; to endow with privileges or benefits.”<sup>10</sup>

**Luke 12:29–33 “Seek ye first the kingdom of God”** The Lord’s counsel to not worry about meals and clothing appears to be mainly for those serving Him full-time as apostles, but there is also application for all disciples. As we put our priorities in seeking God’s will and His kingdom above earthly wants, including “fear not” and giving our excess to the poor, God promises: “all these things shall be added unto you.” This is an extraordinary return. By giving our time and money to God’s Kingdom, He will supply us with everything else we need and more. God offers an amazing investment.

**Luke 12:34 “your treasure is . . . your heart”** Our heart’s desires become our treasures. Heavenly treasure is inexhaustible. When we exercise faith, we connect our thoughts to trust in God. It helps to look at how Jesus’ directives grow in this section: verse 22, “Do not be anxious;” verses 24 & 27 “Consider;” verse 29, “Do not seek [or] worry;” verse 30 “Seek his kingdom;” verse 32 “Do not fear;” verse 33 “Sell [and] give alms....”

## Stewardships: Parable of the Prepared Servants

*Luke 12:35–40, JST; Matthew 24:42–44; Mark 13:33–37*

**Luke 12:35–40 “wait for their lord . . . when he cometh . . . open unto him immediately”** Good servants wait on the Lord, like a waiter at a fine restaurant graciously waits on the guests’ every need. The Lord needs disciples who will anxiously wait on Him. While we wait on the Lord, we actively serve and are to “watch. . . for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not” (Luke 12:40). Jesus asked disciples to wait with ears listening for promptings of the Spirit and active efforts to stop the adversary. As Elder Larry Y. Wilson expressed:

As we wait on the Lord’s timing it is not enough to just follow the people in front of you. . . [This] approach takes little thought or effort. You can just do and think what others are doing and thinking. This works fine in sunny weather. But the storms of deception and the mists of falsehood arise without warning. In these situations, being familiar with the voice of the Holy Ghost is a matter of spiritual life and death.<sup>11</sup>

When we wait on the Lord in this way, we are prepared and listening for Him to knock and be ready to open.

## Stewardships: Parable of the Unfaithful Servant

*Luke 12:41–48, +JST; Matthew 24:45–51*

**Luke 12:41–47 “Blessed is that slave . . . at work”** (NET). Jesus did not directly answer Peter’s question as to who is included as his servants. Instead, the Lord gives a short parable to describe the qualifications of servants

of God. His kingdom needs active servants. His audience understood what servitude entailed. It helps to remember that the word for slave and servant were interchangeable at the time of Christ, and, additionally, one of those words also meant child. One third of the population of the Roman Empire, and one half of cities (including Jerusalem) were either servants or slaves.<sup>12</sup> Jesus lived his life as a servant and even more so in his death (Matthew 26:39; Mark 10:45; etc.). He asked his disciples to do the same—*until he comes again*, “at an hour when [we are] not aware” (Luke 12:46).

**Luke 12:48 “much is given . . . much required”** Returning to Peter’s question (who is supposed to give up their cares of the world to work for the kingdom, and who is God going to bless for waiting/serving Him), the Lord now answers that he expects more of his servants who have received more light and truth. The punishment for slothfulness and inattentiveness will be greater for those to whom he has given more.

## Coming Judgments

*Luke 12:49–59, JST; Matthew 5:25–26; 10:34–36; 16:2–3*

**Luke 12:49–59 “I have come to bring . . . division”** (BSB) Jesus realized that Satan is at war with God’s teachings. His message will not fall easily on those who serve the devil. Discipleship requires standing up for Christ’s message, even in times of social conflict and family strife. (These verses have been discussed previously in Matthew as well.) The prophet also brought up this same point in his Conference Report this past April (April 6, 2019 Priesthood Session).

## Tragedy and Repentance

*Luke 13:1–5, teachings unique to Luke*

**Luke 13:1 “Blood Pilate had mingled”** News traveled to the pilgrims about heinous murders among their people. The story was that the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate killed Jews from Galilee and supposedly added their blood to the temple sacrifices. In this account we learn more about what the Jews thought of Pilate and his atrocities.

**Luke 13:2–3 “Suppose ye that the Galileans were sinners? . . . Nay”** Whether or not the murders happened as described, Jesus seized the opportunity to confront a misconception. A major part of the restoration Jesus brought included cutting away at cultural baggage. He used this opportunity to teach that bad things happen to good people too (i.e. Job!). Life includes suffering and losses as part of our developing faith, hope, and charity and are not necessarily consequences of sin.

**Luke 13:5 “But except ye repent . . .”** Jesus’ main point is that we all need repentance as we will all come before our maker at some time.

## Parable of the Fig Tree

*Luke 13:6-9*

**Luke 13:6** “A certain man had a fig tree” Jesus began with calling all to repentance and then gave an illustration. The parable speaks of the need for good fruit. Jesus knew that repentance brings good works and righteous influence. Sincere repentance brings the change of heart which then can bring good fruit. Jesus asks us to live in a way so that we are ready to meet our Maker. As this was early spring, the figs should have formed and will not ripen until late summer.

President Russel M. Nelson spoke on repentance in his April 6, 2019 Priesthood Session encouraging the Saints to develop daily habits of repentance or fine tuning our spirits to be in tune with God. He said, “we can do better and be better.”

**Luke 13:7-8** “Three years” may refer to Jesus’ ministry, but the Gospel of Luke never refers to Jesus’ ministry lasting three years (only John’s Gospel). Looking beyond the time, his message deals with fruit. A tree without fruit, is to be removed—especially because fig trees deplete the soil. The man asked, “Why should it use up the soil?” The parable also teaches that God warns His people before their destruction.



Allegorically, God moves the trees around His vineyard to see if they will produce fruit elsewhere. By cutting down this tree, God can provide the fertile soil for others of His spirit children to come to earth. But the servant does not want to destroy the tree yet, and encourages the man to work towards repentance one more time—with dung and digging. Not that this sounds like Zenos’ allegory of the olive tree in Jacob 5. As we discussed in Matthew, we can find several accounts with a similar theme scattered across the Bible.

**Luke 13:9** The “dresser of his vineyard” God will authorize the cutting. The cutting symbolizes God’s judgment to determine the sincerity of the fruits of repentance.



## The Infirm Woman

*Luke 13:10-17*

**Luke 13:10 “He was teaching in one of the synagogues”** We are back in another synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke included 17 references to synagogues), though, this is the last time Luke takes us to a synagogue. As was his practice, Jesus chose to perform healings on the Sabbath to not only restore those suffering, but also to teach the higher laws of Sabbath worship and human suffering. The woman does not approach the Lord, nor does anyone exert faith—the message is that Jesus wanted to teach a principle about the Sabbath. The Old Testament (OT) teaches that Sabbath observance is a sign of the covenant (Exodus 31:16–17).

**Luke 13:11 “a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years”** (ESV) Her years of scoliosis or osteoporosis left this woman bowed over. Physical deformities had social side effects in the society of the Bible. They saw illness as God’s curse, or an evil spirit, which had demeaned her. Yet, in conjunction with Jesus’ earlier messages on repentance (Luke 13:5; 8–9), by placing this healing here, Jesus used this opportunity to teach that the woman’s infirmity did not make her a sinner. Luke may have chosen to include this story of Jesus here to further illustrate another aspect of repentance.

**Luke 13:12–13 “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity”** (NIV) Jesus’ message is deliverance, and he demonstrated it immediately and permanently. The woman saw God in this great work and is remembered as “glorifying God.” Luke did not mention the Lord laying his hands in conjunction with healing very often, but he did here.

**Luke 13:14–15 “the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation . . . not on the sabbath”** Regardless of the miracle and power of God just manifested, the rabbi could not see beyond the oral laws that have defined his Sabbath worship (see discussion on Matthew 14). The crux is that Jesus chose to act mercifully and heal as part of his Sabbath worship. He pointed out the hypocrisy in the law by giving the example of watering an animal on the Sabbath. He asked them to compare and contrast the greater value of humans to animals. His actions paralleled his teachings of the sparrows and lilies from Luke 12:27.

**Luke 13:16 “daughter of Abraham”** To further emphasize the previously-infirm woman’s worth, Jesus gave her an honorary title. This may also have helped her social healing and raised her from the false judgement she had endured. Luke also included that Jesus equated her illness with Satan’s binding. By doing so, it shows how Jesus’ healing pushes “back the power and influence of Satan’s kingdom.”<sup>13</sup>



*The Woman with an Infirmity of Eighteen Years* by James Tissot

## Parables of Growth and Equality: Mustard Seed + Leaven

*Luke 13:18–21; Matthew 13:31–32; Mark 4:30–32*

**Luke 13:18 “What is the kingdom of God like?”** Repeatedly, Luke used “Kingdom of God” to draw attention to *He* whose Kingdom it is. (Luke was a Gentile convert to Christianity, and did not have a problem referring to God, whereas Matthew, as a Jewish Christian avoided using the name of God, so he changed the phrase to, “kingdom of heaven.”) Also, Luke’s parables were often placed in pairs or triplets using different genders, ages, and professions. The message is that *all* are needed to build the Kingdom of God. Here, a man plants and a woman bakes.

**Luke 13:19–21 “like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden . . .”** (NIV).



Image of mustard seeds by Ajale via Pixabay

John W. and Jeannie Welch described:

The endearing parable of the tiny mustard seed teaches the principles of growth and progression that are essential to the operation of the plan of salvation. All people who come to this earth are here to grow, to learn, and to progress. . . . In this context, Jesus then used the unsuspecting mustard seed that grew to fill God’s purposes and kindly welcomed all the needy birds of the sky to enter in and make their homes in its branches.”<sup>14</sup>

All three Synoptic Gospels include this parable. For more on these two parables, including what Joseph Smith taught on it, see my discussion from *Come Follow Me*, Matthew 13 and Luke 13 (March 18–24, 2019).

## Citizens of the Kingdom

*Luke 13:22–30*

**Luke 13:22 “He went through the cities and villages”** Luke continued to describe Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem for Passover, by stopping off in many local towns to preach, teach, and heal. A city was usually defined as a community with a wall, even if it had a small population of only a dozen homes.

**Luke 13:23 “are there few that be saved?”** The idea of a “chosen people” brings questions of exclusiveness. Many Jews at the time mistakenly believed that only those Israelites born through Abraham’s son Isaac could get to heaven. They saw heaven as a place only for Abraham’s righteous seed. It is a question from the perspective of scarcity; as if Heaven were not big enough, so only has room for a few. It also assumes a limit. This is wrong. All

who qualify will be warmly welcomed. We can choose to be chosen by following Jesus.

This is why Jesus restored the message that *he* is the way, baptism is the gate, and the condition of our hearts and minds matter. Both John the Baptist and Jesus denounced the idea that your lineage will save you by teaching the need to “do the works of Abraham” and “raise seed to Abraham from these stones” (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8).

**Luke 13:24 “Strive to enter in at the strait gate”** Those who “strive” to enter, is a phrase used for “athletic contests and thus has to do with focused, intense effort.”<sup>15</sup> It also sounds like the Celestial Kingdom requirement, “valiant in their testimony of Jesus” (D&C 76:78–79; also Matthew 7:13; Revelation 22:14; etc.).



*Abraham's Journey from Ur to Canaan* by József Molnár, 1850. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

**“I say unto you”** Jesus spoke from a position of authority and had no need to quote scripture here. The JST adds an important conditional, “for the Lord shall not always strive with man,” highlighting the need for repentance before judgement day.

**Luke 13:25–26 “Ye . . . knock at the door”** The great banquet of the Lord is repeated throughout scripture. All are invited, but only some qualify.

**Luke 13:27–28 “ye know not from whence ye are” (JST)** This addition clarifies that it is not God who keeps us from heaven, but our level of understanding stemming from our choices. Our Savior will work everything out, but not all understand or want his gift enough to become like him. At the end they will regret it with weeping.

**Luke 13:29 “they shall come . . . and shall sit down in the kingdom”** In answer to the question, people from around the world will be able to enjoy the banquet in the kingdom of heaven. Often the cardinal directions (north, south, east, west) link to the temple in biblical texts. Here too it refers to those who will return into the presence of God.

**Luke 13:30 “first which shall be last”** Before Jesus’ Second Coming, those who did not receive the promises will receive them. The Gentiles are allowed to be God’s servants by laboring to bring forth the kingdom of God on earth. They will bring God’s news to the children of Abraham, who will be the last (as a people) to receive the message of Jesus’ Gathering of Israel.

## Jerusalem’s Future

*Luke 13:31-35; Matthew 23:37-39*

**Luke 13:31-32 “Depart hence, for Herod will kill thee”** Luke alone included this conversation where Jesus is warned that Herod wants to kill him too. Jesus responded by calling him a “fox.” Luke’s inclusion is not merely to note a change of locale, but also to stress the inevitability of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection. He will not die in Galilee from Herod, but like the prophets of old, Jesus will die in Jerusalem (and Herod will add his voice there).

**Luke 13:33-35 “I have gathered thee . . . as a hen”** Jesus choose to describe Himself as a mother-bird trying to protect her young. The image of his wings describes his work on both sides of the veil, going and coming in behalf of his young.

**“your house is left unto you desolate”** The house of God is the temple. The Jewish house can also be the temple, the people, or their future kingdom. The problem is, it is empty. It gives a message of judgment.<sup>16</sup> Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem stretches to back to its history of killing prophets. It echoes other lamentations found in the OT (2 Chronicles 35:25). Yet it is written in present tense, with the ever-present attitude toward heaven-sent messengers.

## Jesus Healed a man with Dropsy on the Sabbath

*Luke 14:1-6*

**Luke 14:1 “he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees”** The setting changes on their journey south to a home. A Pharisee invited Jesus to join him for a Sabbath supper. According to Josephus, the festive meal on the Sabbath was at the end of the synagogue service at the 6th hour (noon). To keep the Sabbath according to the Pharisaic oral laws, all the food was prepared on Friday.

**Luke 14:2 “a man before him had the dropsy”** The text leaves the possibility open that the man was “planted” there to trap Jesus in breaking the Sabbath. Dropsy was the name for swelling or the condition we call edema. Fluid accumulated in the tissues that caused swelling as only the symptom, although the person usually has a more serious problem with circulation, the heart, or kidneys.

**Luke 14:3 “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”** Jesus asked the first question. As Lord of the Sabbath, he knew the answer, but wanted to teach the importance of helping our fellow human beings, and keeping the higher law of Sabbath observance. Healing on the Sabbath also points as a sign to the greatest Sabbath healing Jesus will offer, the Resurrection.

**Luke 14:4–5 “And he took him and healed him”** Jesus acted and taught with authority. Deuteronomy 22:4 records the Mosaic injunction to help an ox that falls, so why not a human. However, the Palestinian Jewish community rule book states: “Let no one assist a beast in giving birth on the Sabbath day. Even if it drops (its newborn) into a cistern or into a pit, one is not to raise it up to the Sabbath. Later rabbinic literature states: “they may not deliver the young of cattle on a feast-day, but they may give help.”<sup>17</sup>

## Jesus’ Teachings on Humility

*Luke 14:7–11*

**Luke 14:7–11 “he put forth a parable”** At the same dinner party, the Gospel of Luke adds that Jesus told them a parable (this story is also similar to wisdom literature). Luke divided this section of dinner conversations into two parts—the first a parable about someone of lesser social status usurping a position and the second about God’s feast.

**“He marked how they chose out the chief rooms”** Jesus’ attention now turned to the way guests chose where to sit. Why do you try to get the best seats, when you may not be the most important guest invited? He repeated a similar account found in Proverbs 25:6–7 (“do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king . . .”), which here has a double meaning as he first taught humility and secondly, he subtly taught that *he* is The King. He asked for more humility in all settings. Jesus’ parable warns of self-righteousness before God and man. This advice for dinner parties can be applied by disciples to other public gatherings and prideful thoughts. The message can relate back to Jesus’ earlier comments on where we think we fit in God’s heavenly home or kingdom. This latter view offers further eschatological overtones.

**Luke 14:8–10 “when thou art bidden”** Both the first and second dinner parables begin with this phrase, tying the two together. At the time, dinner guests “reclined” rather than the KJV choice, “sit”; starting from a reclining position would make it even harder to get up (and possibly more humiliating) to move to “economy class,” as it were.

**Luke 14:11 “whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased . . .”** with the exception of “and/*kai*” for *de*, this verse is word for word the same as Luke 18:4, and similar to Matthew 23:12.<sup>18</sup> Repeated messages are there for emphasis. Luke introduced this topic earlier in 13:28–29. The message becomes clearer as Jesus repeatedly taught the need for his disciples to seek humility, not status or notoriety. His example spoke even louder than his words.



*Parable of the Wedding Feaster* by Andrey Miranov, 2014. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

## The Parable of the Great Supper

*Luke 14:12–24; Matthew 22:1–14 about The Wedding Feast*

**Luke 14:12 “to him that bade him . . . call not thy friends”** Jesus’ second parable turns from the guests to the host. Jesus encourages this prominent Pharisee (and all of us) to not socialize with your friends and family who will return the favor, but reach beyond your circle to those in need. (Matthew 22 records a similar message at a wedding feast, which gives the story an eternal sphere of the Second Coming or the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.)

**Luke 14:13 “the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind”** Luke often included messages to the outcasts and here emphasized Jesus’ theme of befriending the socially unclean or misfits. Interestingly, three of the four handicaps that Jesus listed as the unclean that should be invited were specifically excluded from the list of “sons of light against the sons of darkness” in the Qumran *War Scroll*, and from the priests serving in the tabernacle in Leviticus 21:17–23. His message directly hit and tore down the false thinking of his day.

**Luke 14:14–15 “. . . be recompensed at the resurrection”** The message Jesus taught goes beyond serving the needy, he also taught about charity. “Real love never reckons with recompense.”<sup>19</sup> He pointed to the resurrection to give this counsel eternal implications. When a guest chimes in about the rewards in heaven for the upright, Jesus turns his teachings to another parable.

**Luke 14:17 “Come for now things are all ready”** Luke gives a general statement about the preparations, while Matthew 22:4 includes a few details about the preparation of the feast—the calf has been slaughtered, and foods prepared—which adds eschatological implications to this “marriage feast.”

**Luke 14:18–20 “began to make excuse”** The invited guests gave legitimate excuses, but that made it more

tragic—they do not see the value of the feast. These were good things they were doing, but the feast is the best thing they should do. (Note how three examples or witnesses are often used in Jesus’ parables, as we saw in the Good Samaritan.) The story begs us to ask, “What are we doing that gets in the way of coming to Christ’s feast?”

1. **“I have bought a piece of ground . . .”** The Greek is in the present tense, “I am in the act of buying . . .” but in the ancient world that was a very long drawn out process over time.
2. **“I have bought five yoke of oxen . . .”**
3. **“I have married a wife”**

**Luke 14:21–23 “Go out quickly, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed and the halt and the blind”**

The three affluent groups are contrasted with the same four unfortunate groups that Jesus mentioned earlier (as those unable to return a favor in Luke 14:13). Twice the servant went out and there was plenty of room.

The word “compel/urge” was the license that Augustine claimed to use physical force against heretics, and then again in the middle ages during the Inquisition. Latter-day revelation contradicts this, “No power or influence can or ought to be maintained . . . only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41). We believe in the gospel of peace (D&C 27:16) and leave judgment to God (D&C 82:23; 98:16).

**Luke 14:24 “not one . . . will get a taste of my banquet”** Those who miss the Lord’s Feast, have mixed up their priorities. Those who want to come enough will rearrange their lives to join the Lord. This message bridges Luke’s next section that asks disciples to prioritize the things of God above all else—family included.

## The Conditions of Discipleship

*Luke 14:25–33; Matthew 10:37–38*

**Luke 25–27 “went great multitudes with him . . . if any man come unto me . . .”** As crowds followed, Jesus taught them that following him comes at a great sacrifice. Discipleship requires a list of very hard conditions:

1. In order to follow God, disciples “hate,” or are willing to give up, even the favor and protection of parents, wife, children, and siblings.
2. Disciples must be willing to give their “own life”—meaning both giving their life to serve Him and in death if required (as it did in Luke’s community).
3. Disciples “bear his cross,” literally meaning a cross of crucifixion, but figuratively meaning they are willing to suffer even unto death.

Nothing that life has to offer should deter a person from following Jesus. The JST changes in Luke 14:27 emphasize this point: “Settle this in your hearts, that ye will do the things which I shall teach, and command you.” To further illustrate his message, Jesus uses three examples: building a tower, making war, and the parable of salt.

### ANALOGY OF BUILDING A TOWER

**Luke 14:28–30 “first sit down and count the cost to see if he has the resources to complete it”** (BSB) Just as we financially and emotionally need to count the cost of our house projects—we likewise, spiritually must count the cost of discipleship before making covenants. Not finishing a project is a blunder, but it does not have eternal ramifications. In that sphere, Jesus’ message is more than just being prepared, it extends to the importance of making and keeping our covenants. If we choose to follow Christ, we must follow him with all our heart, mind, might and strength.

### ANALOGY OF MAKING WAR

**Luke 14:31–33 “sit down first and deliberate whether he is able . . .”** A benevolent king would never risk the lives of his soldiers without making sure they had a plan to win. Jesus used these examples hoping that all his followers would ask: “am I willing to pay a similar cost?” We do not know what our specific or individual cost will be to enter the Kingdom of God, we must always walk humbly and trust that God’s will is better than our blurred perspective. We must be willing to consecrate our all to build His kingdom.

### PARABLE OF SALT

**Luke 14: 34–35 “if salt has lost its taste”** (ESV) In the ancient world salt was very valuable and at times, people were even paid wages in salt. (Salt became the root of our word, salary.) Jesus saw his disciples as very valuable, but only if they are going to continue to add flavor and value. If their commitment stopped, thus becoming figuratively tasteless, their once great value is gone and they are worthless. This parable of losing flavor bridges to the next three on losing disciples.

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## INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER 15

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Jesus came to earth to save lost souls (that means all humanity). In Luke 15, he shared three similar parables—each about lost souls. All three answer the pharisaic murmuring. All three stories include a little hyperbole shock value to keep the Pharisees listening. The first pair included opposite genders, one relatively rich and the other relatively poor.

**Luke 15:1–2 “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them”** The Pharisees condemned Jesus for eating with sinners earlier as well (Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30). I couldn’t find anything in the Torah that forbade eating



with sinners or unclean (unless you were a priest), but often eating was looked at as a covenant or a sacred rite—so you would not want to make a covenant or contaminate yourself through eating with a sinner. The idea that publicans were all sinners developed with Jewish hatred of the Roman tax collectors.

## Parable of The Lost Sheep OR “The Gospel of the Outcast”

*Luke 15:1-7*

**Luke 15:4 “What man of You”** Jesus addressed the Pharisees as if they were shepherds. This may have been a social slam, as shepherds were socially unclean, not trusted, and not allowed to stand as a legal witnesses because of their traditional dishonesty. On the other hand, 80–90% of the people in Palestine lived an agrarian lifestyle, so many Pharisees had close contact with livestock and could relate to the parable.

**Luke 15:5–6 “when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders . . .”** Sheep who fall onto their backs cannot aright themselves. Depending on how long the sheep is in that position, their legs may be weak from a lack of circulation.<sup>20</sup> This sounds like the situation as the shepherd carries the sheep back to the flock.

**“he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me”** Such extravagance is an unusual practice for shepherds. The climactic center of all three parables is a communal celebration over finding something that was lost. This was unheard of, in fact, extraordinary. Yet, in God’s flock, it coincides with His work and glory.

**Luke 15:7 “joy in heaven over one sinner who repents”** Jesus’ interpretation explains that the sheep



represent humans. The lost one is the repentant sinner who returns to the fold of believers, much to the joy of the angels. (For more see Come Follow Me, Matthew 18:1–5).

## Parable of The Lost Coin

*Luke 15:8–10*

**Luke 15:8–9 “a woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one . . .”** The word “silver” is translated from the ancient Greek coin *drachma*, which was a half day’s labor in Athens. Women usually did not “own” anything. The money they earned or found was the property of their husbands or fathers. So perhaps this is why it is so important that she find it. Even her “bride price” was given to her father.<sup>21</sup> Or perhaps the coins had sentimental value as part of the woman’s dowry (yet her father/guardian was given the dowry and rarely in Judaism was it given to the bride. However, in other cultures the bride sewed her bridal coins into a bedecked head-dress).

**Luke 15:10 “joy in the presence of angels of God over one sinner than repenteth”** The message of the parable is clear. If humans will exert such effort to recover their property (*light a lamp, sweep, search*), how much more effort will God Himself expend to regain one of His children? The message is that God will initiate even greater efforts with his grace and love to find a lost soul. Jesus repeated this three times as all three of these neighboring “finding the lost” parables end with an exuberant eruption of joy when the lost is found.

## Parable of The Prodigal Son—or Two Sons or Father’s Love

*Luke 15:11–32*

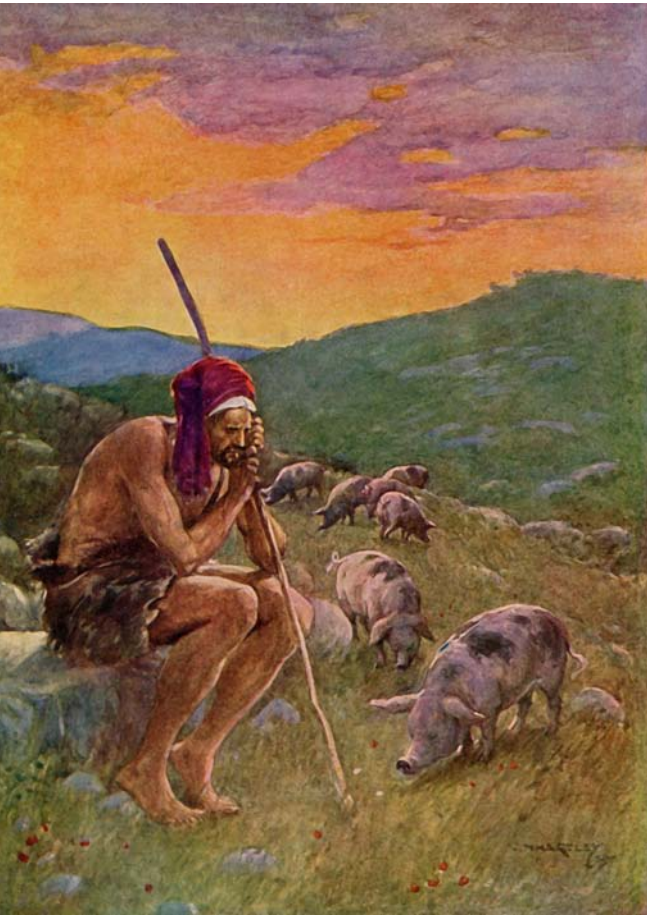
This parable is seen by many as the greatest of all parables. It beautifully teaches God’s plan of salvation. It also ties in the message that repentance is a free gift, God honors agency, estrangement, responsibility, and grace. In Keith Meservy’s analysis of this parable he sees that we are initially spiritual, and if our spiritual needs are not met, then regardless of how many other physical and material satisfactions we may have, we long for more.<sup>22</sup>

**Luke 15:11 “a certain man had two sons”** The central figure in this parable is the father. Elder Gordon B. Hinckley taught that “every parent ought to read it again and again. It is large enough to encompass every household, and enough larger than that to encompass all mankind . . . who need to repent and partake of the forgiving mercy of our Heavenly Father and then follow his example.”<sup>23</sup> Jesus’ parables teach us about whom we worship as well as how to better worship Him. The two sons set up the two-part parable.

**Luke 15:12 “give me the share of property that falls to me”** (RSV) Jesus began with an outrageous request. A Jewish son from that time would never ask his father for his share of the inheritance while his father was yet alive. Scholars have not one case of any son, older or younger asking for inheritance from a father who was in good health in Middle Eastern ancient literature; it “was equivalent to wishing his father’s death.”<sup>24</sup> The inheritance required dividing his land and property. Asking while the father was still alive would have required the father to



*The Return of the Prodigal Son* by James Tissot, 1899.



The Prodigal by J. H. Hartley, 1929.

sell his land, his source of income. Jesus used this to show the extreme rudeness and indignance of this son.

The Law of Moses divided inheritance by giving the first born a double portion, and everyone else equal portions (Deuteronomy 21:16–17). With two sons that means the oldest received 2/3 of the estate and the younger 1/3. The text describes the man as if he were not married, so the use of “younger” may possibly mean that he was in his teens.<sup>25</sup>

**Luke 15:13 “wasted . . . with riotous living”** This is the only time in the Bible we find the word, “riotous” or “loose living” (RSV). It means “dissolutely, extravagantly, wasteful, reckless, decadently, or licentiously.”

**“a far country”** The young man has left his covenant people and gone to live among heathens. Later the older brother denounces him spending the father’s estate on “prostitutes” (Luke 15:30). In each parable we see pictures of Jesus too—in this case Jesus was perceived as associating with heathens like Samaritans, and was chastised for “eat[ing] with publicans and sinners.” Perhaps his audience thought of Jesus as a prodigal too.

**Luke 15:14 “famine”** The weather often describes God’s judgments in the Bible. In the ancient Israelite world, prophets sealed the heavens, and promised good weather for good behavior.

**Luke 15:15 “fed swine”** For a Jew, the most degrading of all occupations was serving gentiles. This is one step worse: this young man serves an unclean gentile’s unclean animals (Deuteronomy 14:8 and Lev 11:7).

**Luke 15:16 “he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat.”** This has got to be the best description in the Bible of utter dire need. The husks the pigs ate, as we find in the footnote, were carob pods. The tree is found all over the Mediterranean. It grows long pods filled with a sweet pulp and an indigestible seed. It is often used as food for animals. He could have eaten the pulp, but was too disgusted with himself to partake. In addition to his physical needs, Jesus describes his social isolation too, “No man gave unto him” any food that was more suitable for humans.

**Luke 15:17 “when he came to himself”** In this foreign state—living recklessly, with gentiles—the young man was not fully himself. However, his conditions had completely humbled him. His broken state allowed him to become contrite (or crushed) so that he had a new perspective. In his soliloquy he is inspired by the idea of returning home. This is how the Spirit of the Lord works in all of us. When we are humble enough to listen, we can again hear the Spirit’s voice.

The first message of the Spirit in such a situation is to “return”—this is the meaning of repentance. John W. Welch sees the steps of repentance and restoration included in this parable.<sup>26</sup>

1. Realizing one’s life is out of harmony with God’s will
2. Remorsefully and genuinely recognizing one’s situation
3. Resolving to make a permanent change
4. Requesting forgiveness
5. Relying on mercy, putting oneself in God’s hands
6. Receiving gestures of forgiveness
7. Rejoicing
8. Restitution and repairing
9. Reforming habits
10. Resisting the temptation to fall back
11. Reinforcing repentance by renewal
12. Retaining the remission of sin by returning God’s grace.

**Luke 15:18–19 “I will arise . . . make me as one of thy hired servants”** In his soliloquy, the starving young man chooses to return to his father, not the estate. Psychologically and legally, though, he realizes that he can no longer be called a son—he will have to take a place as a hired servant. But he is motivated to move on and “arise/*anastas*,” to resurrect or come back from his spiritual death.

“**sinned against heaven**,” is the phrase used to mean “sinned against God” without using God’s name. It was too sacred to be spoken. He also realizes that he has sinned against his father—his father’s name, covenants, teachings, and inheritance.

**Luke 15:20 “a great way off . . . his father, ran”** The father was either looking off in the distance, or as he was out in the fields, he recognized the emaciated silhouette of his son on the horizon. The father’s love broke through social propriety, where ancient robed men *never* ran anywhere, but this father allowed his love to dictate his behavior and like a child, he ran to the one he loved. Jesus’ story telling techniques make it even more captivating for those with the cultural background.



**“fell on his neck, and kissed him”** The father’s spontaneous hugging and kissing, again demonstrates rejoicing over the lost. Jesus set a dramatic illustration of love. In a Divine context, it manifests God’s forgiveness.

**Luke 15:21 “no more worthy”** The son’s repeated confession emphasizes his repentance. When sufficiently humble, with a broken heart and contrite spirit, this becomes the message we all cry to heaven.

**Luke 15:22–24 “the best robe . . . ring . . . shoes . . . calf”** The “best” also means the “first in rank” so the robe is an honorary (in Greek it can also mean: influence, honor; chief; principal). In an allegorical light, a robe is symbolic of premortal heavenly dress. The ring possibly represents authority as rings were used to seal documents. Rings were also worn by the rich and may be symbol of returning to luxury. Shoes were a sign of wealth in a land where most wore sandals. The celebration brings the whole community together to rejoice with a feast with meat and merriment. The ring of authority and robe of honor could allegorically refer to a covenant meal as well.

If Jesus' story reflected his culture, the neighbors may have gathered to see the returning prodigal, but rather than welcoming him, they would have taunted, mocked and possibly even physically abused him by spitting or hitting him. Among their accusation for sexual immorality, they may have suggested a trial to have him stoned. Instead, in Jesus' shocking rendition, the younger son not only is not treated as a servant, but rather as an honored guest. This speaks of Divine forgiveness. In a timeless world where God lives in the present, the sins of those who repent of their by-gones, are gone (D&C 58:42). God's compassion acts to "cheer on every runner" as they return home.<sup>27</sup>

**Luke 15:24 "my son was dead and is alive again"** The prodigal was spiritually dead, and by returning *to his father's house*, is alive spiritually again. This verse parallels Luke 15:32, emphasizing Jesus' message of forgiveness and God's mercy.

**Luke 15:25–27 "his elder son in the field"** The elder son is not told about the situation. This may suggest that he was either absorbed in his work, or not looking (expecting?) his lost little brother to return. He was not as quick to forgive and see the situation as his father does. I presume, over the years, the big brother has experienced humiliation or at least embarrassment from the actions of his reckless brother. He many have enjoyed not having the complainer around. Whatever the motivation, he is upset by the feasting and rejoicing over the returning trouble maker.

**Luke 15:28–29 "he was angry, and would not go in"** The responsible, hardworking older son was asked to join in the meal, but his anger kept him out. The Greek word for "anger" is the same one used when Jesus was cleansing the temple. Here, the older brother's anger did not include a forgiving heart. Even when his father asked him to come, he refused. We can see how mad the older brother is by not even claiming a relationship to his brother later in vs. 30, but calls him, "thy son."

**"went out and pleaded with him"** (AB). The father hears of his first-born son's anger, and comes outside to talk to him. Again, we see the father as the driving force in this parable. Family relations are the hardest relationships at times. The son complains, "you never even killed a goat for me," which is a far less valued animal than a fatted calf. The older son does not feel justified. Frustrating as it may be, justice is not part of this life—at least from a mortal's perspective. Even when we obey the commandments, work hard, honor our parents, it does not always bring the happiness and rewards we think we deserve. The balance doesn't seem right from our limited view of life. However, the parable goes on to teach that life is longer than we think. Mercifully, justice will be dealt with.

The father represents God's willingness to come to us, wherever we are, and listen to our complaints. Yet, when He does, we need to hear, learn and follow His advice, as the older son in the parable does.

**Luke 15:30 “thou hast killed for him the fatted calf”** This is a powerful statement. It is the third time that killing the fatted calf is mentioned (Luke 15:23, 27). This time though, it is the most clear reference to the symbol of the sacrificial “fatted calf” that the Father killed for the sinner (Leviticus 4:4; 16:6). God killed the best He had, when he allowed His only begotten Son to be slain for the sins of the world.

**Luke 15:31 “all I have is thine”** The father begins with a loving title in Greek, “my child.” He explains that rejoicing for his lost brother does not diminish his love and rewards that are in store for him. For we know that “he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father’s kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him” (D&C 84:38). The older son’s jealousy has not taken him out of his father’s inheritance.

**Luke 15:32 “it was meet . . . thy brother . . . is alive again”** From Jesus’ perspective, finding and nurturing the lost soul is “meet” or *necessary*. It is the second time Luke used the word “lost,” which in Greek can also be translated as “destroyed.” Luke’s writing skill has the father turning the message from him crying out, “your son” (vs. 30) to now being told, “YOUR brother who has returned!”

From the times of the early Christians, this parable represented a loving Heavenly Father, “filled with mercy toward one son and justice toward the other.”<sup>28</sup> The story also exemplifies each of us who return from our self-centered behaviors through repentance to seek forgiveness and then enter into the loving and compassionate arms of our Heavenly Parents.

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## RAISING OF LAZARUS

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John 11—7th miracle

### Why did Jesus perform miracles?

Approximately 14% of the four Gospels are devoted to recording Jesus’ miracles (Matthew 12%, Mark 25%, Luke 13%, and John 9%). Of the 47 recorded miracles, Jesus never refused to help (though, he often required a second request).

### THEY SHOW . . .

- Power over nature (John 6:19)
- The Father’s witness (John 10: 25)
- The glory of God (John 11:5)
- Open hearts how to believe (John 18:10)



- To testify of the Messiah (John 20:30–3)
- Power over sins (Luke 8:35–42)
- Power shared with others (Matthew 10:1)
- Power over defects (John 9:1–7)
- Power over death (John 11:17–46)

## Setting of John 11

John’s Gospel explains that Jesus had been across the Jordan River in Perea for most of the winter (ever since the Feast of Dedication in November/December in John 10:22–39). Then, in the early spring, a few weeks before the Passover, Jesus’ friends in Bethany urgently call Him back. As Jesus and his group of apostles and ministering women cross the Jordan River back into Judea, they follow the path of Joshua and the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. Figuratively, the path crosses from “the world” into to “the Promised Land.” Though for Jesus, his promised land will be when he unites with his Father in a few days.

Only John’s Gospel records this story of the raising of Lazarus. (Although, Luke 10:38–42 mentions Jesus in Bethany with Mary and Martha). John placed this as Jesus’ seventh miraculous sign. This miracle was the last straw that provoked the wicked leaders to set in motion their plan to kill Jesus. It triggered the Jerusalem leaders to act. This miracle becomes a sign of what Christ will do—except, rather than raising humanity back to mortality, he will raise us to immortality to never die again.<sup>29</sup> It concludes the first half of the Gospel of John (sometimes described as the Book of Signs) and introduces the second half—Jesus’ passion and resurrection.<sup>30</sup>

## Jesus Received News that Lazarus was Ill

*John 11:1–6*

**John 11:1 “Lazarus was sick”** (NIV) The name Lazarus means, “whom God Helps.” I find no connection between the two men named Lazarus in the NT (the other is a beggar in a parable recorded in Luke 16:20). This Lazarus is the brother of Mary and Martha mentioned throughout the Gospels.

“**Bethany,**” was a suburb to the east of Jerusalem, 1 ¾ miles from the old city (3,000 cubits or 15 furlongs/stadium, John 11:18). The distance was just far enough outside the city to separate the “clean and unclean.” The name Bethany meant, “House of Affliction,” and may have been one of the three places designated for the care of the sick (including one for lepers). The Qumran Temple Scroll mentions they were located to the east of Jerusalem.

Bethany is approximately 25 miles from the Jordan River, which forms the border with Perea (modern Jordan). A town built on the ruins of Bethany is called El Azariyeh (named after Eleazar or in Greek, Lazarus). Bethany’s distance was ideal for pilgrims to stay there during the three major pilgrimage feasts to Jerusalem. Jesus stayed there with his friends. During pilgrimage feasts, the boundaries of Jerusalem expanded in order to house every-

one within the city. Bethany was 1.5 miles from Jerusalem and close enough to be included in the extended holiday city boarder to eat the Passover.

**John 11:3 “Lord, the one you love is sick.”** As dear friends of Jesus, Mary and Martha sent messengers to Perea seeking Jesus’ help when Lazarus became seriously ill. (Indirectly this informs us that Jesus communicated with his friends while outside of Judea). This Greek word for “love” is *phileo* and it is used 25 times in the New Testament for love/friendship (other words for love include *agape* used for charity and *eros* used for physical attraction). *Phileo* has a broad meaning of brotherly love (i.e. Philadelphia means the city of brotherly love). John used the verb *phileo* to describe God’s love for his Son (John 5:20) and the disciples (John 16:27). The relationship with Lazarus’ family was close enough that Jesus often stayed with them in their home. The Gospels give evidence that this family enjoyed plenty of means (sending messengers, their large house, parties, spikenard, etc.)

**John 11:4 “for the glory of God”** Jesus’ purpose in performing this miracle is broader than compassion alone, it is specifically to show the “glory of God.” He will glorify God by setting the stage for his own death and resurrection. The previous miracle John includes, the healing of the blind man, was done “that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9:3). Jesus knew Lazarus’ outcome while still in Perea. If Jesus were only performing the miracle to heal a dear friend he would have come immediately, but his timing testified of his broader message to teach in addition to heal. We can always be assured that the Lord knows the end from the beginning and trust his plan and his timing, even when it appears impossible.

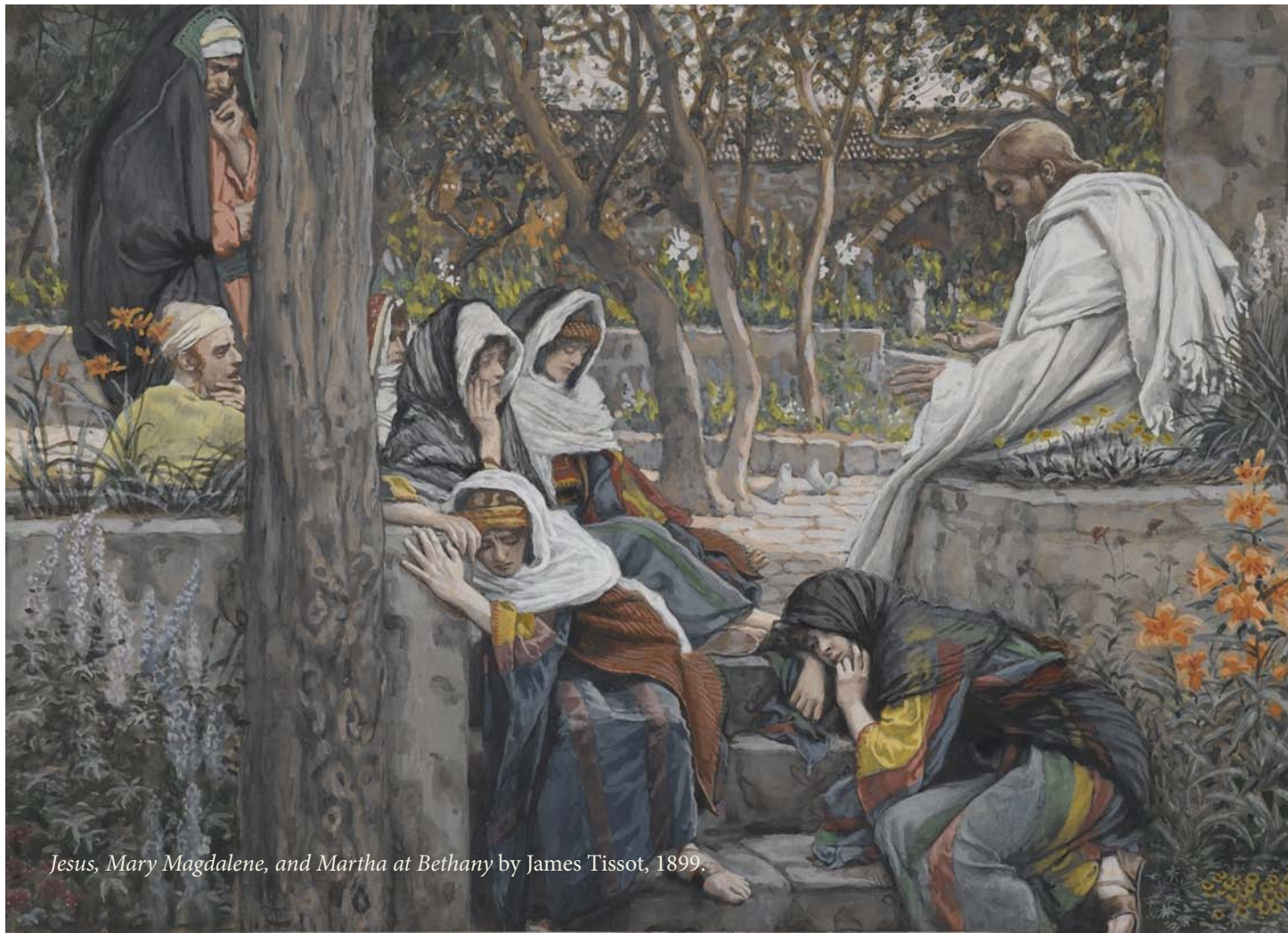
**John 11:6 “He abode two days still”** As with all miracles, Jesus’ timing of this miracle is especially important. On the surface the delayed arrival tested the faith of Mary and Martha and the other disciples. Jesus wanted to teach something more. By delaying his arrival, Jesus was able to address a doctrinal issue.

Prophets in the OT, like Elijah, also raised the dead. But they always performed the miracle shortly after the death. Some see the “two days” in John 11:6 as a parallel to Jesus’ own resurrection, as he rose on the morning of the third day, after two days in the tomb. Yet Lazarus was not resurrected, only returned to his second estate. He had to die again. Jesus was the first resurrected being on earth.

## Jesus and Disciples walked from Perea to Bethany

*John 11:7-16*

**John 11:7-8 “. . . the Jews were but now seeking to stone you”** The disciples expressed their concern about Jesus’ safety. This is *real* because the last time they were in Judea some Jews tried to stone Jesus (John 10:31). The 25-mile hike from the Jordan River to Bethany was through some very dangerous areas where robbers were known to wait. Jesus knew that he could not be harmed until God deemed his mission complete and it was the right time.



*Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Martha at Bethany by James Tissot, 1899.*

**John 11:9–10 “walk in . . . the light of this world”** Jesus countered the disciples worries with his plan to walk in the daylight, as the “light of the world” can refer to both the sun and the Son (D&C 88:7). John returned to one of his favorite themes: light and darkness. Symbolically, we will not stumble spiritually if we have the Light of Christ and the fire of the Spirit burning brightly within our hearts to guide our thoughts and actions.

**John 11:11–14 “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth”** The Greek word for “sleepeth” is *koimao* and is used eighteen times in the NT. Usually it means to fall asleep, and once it is translated “death,” so it is understandable why the disciples became confused. We use the same euphemism now in English.

**John 11:15–16 “To the intent that ye / you may believe.”** Jesus emphasized the relation of the miracle to the disciples. Interestingly, it is Thomas/Didymus (meaning twin) who spoke out this way. He must have also been very close to Lazarus, but his comments also show us a little more of his nature. He jumped to conclusions without exercising his faith. The JST adds an extra sentence, “for they feared lest the Jews should take Jesus and put him to death, for as yet they did not understand the power of God.” This may mean that Thomas refers to dying with Jesus, not Lazarus.

## Jesus Arrives in Bethany

*John 11:17-40*

**John 11:17-18 “He had lain in the grave four days already”** Without embalming or refrigeration, dead bodies begin decomposing immediately. Within the day that one breathed their last, the body was laid in the tomb, and then after three days the tomb was usually closed with a stone to keep wild animals away. Later, it was opened, the bones removed and put in a sarcophagus so that another body could use the grave site.

Many Jews believed that a spirit stayed near its dead body for three days. By Jesus delaying his arrival until the fourth day, no one could doubt that Lazarus was completely dead (Note the JST adds that He came to “Martha’s house”)

**John 11:19 “Many of the Jews came . . . to comfort”** This also means that many witnessed the miracle of raising Lazarus. According to funeral customs in Jesus’ time, after one died and the body was buried, for the next day or two loved ones or their servants rubbed oils and spices into the body and wrapped it. Funerals included elaborate traditions. The more money one had, the more extensive the burial procedures.<sup>31</sup> “At the moment of a man’s death, his wives, daughters, and female relations united in cries of lamentation” (Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 101).

Women could be hired as professional mourners to wail, shriek, and cry for days. The Mishnah calls for even the poorest man to hire at least one mourner at the death of his wife. As usual, the men and women were separated in public, including walking separately to the burial spot in a funeral procession. After the burial the women returned alone from the grave to mourn for 30 days. This mourning included loud wailing and dramatic expressions of grief.<sup>32</sup> The Jewish men also played a prominent part in mourning rites.

Jesus has already shown his distaste for this tradition when he asked all the mourners to leave before He raised Jairus’ daughter. It appears this tradition was motivated by the adversary as it distracts the mourner from feeling the Spirit of God that can be close during that sacred time when the veil is thinner.

**John 11:20-22 “Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him”** I love Martha’s interaction with Jesus—this time she is not in the house preparing for the company (Luke 10:38-42), but is the first to go outside, down the street, and outside of her village, to greet Jesus (John 11:30). She actively seeks Him out, even in her overwhelming grief. We can only imagine how disappointed the family must have felt with the Lord’s timing. They knew Jesus had been asked, and they also knew that Jesus had not hurried to their side.

**John 11:23-24 “Thy brother shall rise again”** As mentioned earlier, the word “rise/*anistemi*” is used multiple times in the NT and can refer to the resurrection (i.e. John 20:9, but usually that is *anastasis*). Martha’s clear faith opens the door for Jesus to testify of his divinity.

**John 11:25 “I am the resurrection”** This verse augments the prologue theme in John 1:4 “I am Life” to include Eternal life through the resurrection too. As Jesus had earlier taught, the first, or mortal, death is not to be feared; only the second or spiritual death. All sons and daughters of God who have not committed the unpardonable sin will live again in glory.

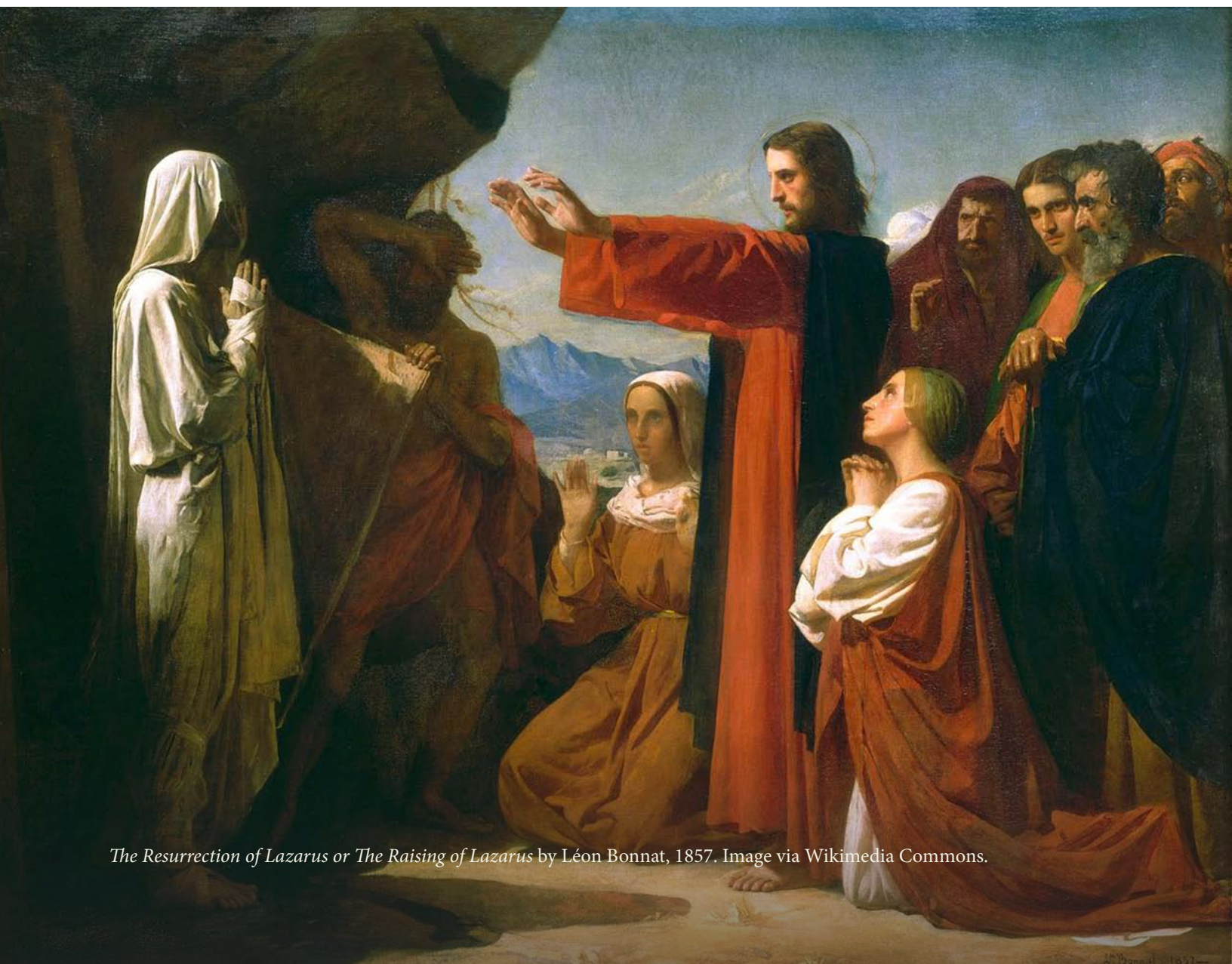


**John 11:27, “Yea, Lord: I believe”** Martha’s testimony is the clearest witness of Jesus’ divinity in John’s Gospel. She testified that he is the one they have long awaited, “the Christ,” which is the Greek equivalent to the *Messiah* in Hebrew, and the Son of the God. Her vibrant testimony shines as a second witness beside Peter’s in Caesarea Philippi, voicing almost the same words.

Martha's two additional witnesses, "Yea Lord I believe," and that Jesus is the one "which should come into the world," makes her testimony the most comprehensive as well. She may not quite understand everything that will happen to her brother, but one thing for sure she knows—Jesus is the Promised Messiah—and that is all that we *really* need to know.

**John 11:28–30** "She . . . called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come and calleth for thee" Why does Martha cautiously whisper to her sister? Will so many people rush to Jesus that Mary cannot have a private conversation with Him? Or perhaps, Mary and Martha sought privacy out of concern for the Lord's safety? We do not know. In John's Gospel, Jesus is referred to as: "Teacher/Rabbi/Lord/Master."

**John 11:31** "To weep" really means, "to wail!" Supposedly, the noise from mourners was heard from quite a distance.



*The Resurrection of Lazarus or The Raising of Lazarus* by Léon Bonnat, 1857. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

**John 11:32–33 “Mary . . . fell down at his feet”** John described Mary of Bethany in this same position for most of her interactions with Jesus. She used the exact same words that her sister, Martha, spoke when she first met the Lord: “if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” Her sobbing moved Jesus to compassion and he was “troubled / deeply moved in the Spirit” (RSV).

**John 11:34 “Where have ye laid him? . . . come and see”** First, Jesus’ disciples asked, and he told them to come and see” (John 1:39). Now the disciples said it to Jesus. All who follow him now will see God’s power to bring life from death.

**John 11:35–36 “Jesus wept . . . behold how he loved him”** Jesus’ compassion for Mary was so great that he wept even though he knew that he will shortly raise Lazarus from the tomb (John 11:4, 43). It teaches much about his nature too. Jesus taught his disciples what real compassion is and how to mourn with those that mourn. In Jesus’ sermon on the mount he blessed those that mourn. Jesus’ actions validate the need to mourn. We also have record of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem in Luke 19:41 and a reference to the tears shed in Gethsemane in Hebrews 5:7.

We find other examples of our Lord crying in empathy in scripture. Twice among the Nephites Jesus expressed his love through tears of gratitude, and twice with “compassion” (3 Nephi 17:5–10). Jesus wept after exclaiming, “And now behold, my joy is full” (3 Nephi 17:20–22).

**John 11:37 “Could not this man . . .”** The local Jews knew that Jesus had healed a blind man in Jerusalem three months earlier and added their belief that Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying (John 9:1–7). They appear to be a group filled with faith. However, to bring Lazarus “back from the dead required not only that his spirit be brought back from the spirit world to be united again with his body, but also that the physical elements of the body be changed from a decomposed or unorganized state to their former or more organized state, thus seemingly defying laws of nature.”<sup>33</sup>

**John 11:38 “It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it”** This foreshadows Jesus’ garden tomb. Carved vertical shafts were more common for private burial than horizontal caves. Larger burial areas also had a mourning room adjacent to the burial room. The stone kept animals away. Jewish townspeople kept their burial places outside of the town in order to avoid ritual impurity from contact with the corpses.

**John 11:39–40 “. . . he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days”** Again John included the fact that Lazarus had been dead four days—emphasizing he was completely dead, and his spirit was gone. The “stench” refers to the decomposition that occurs without complete embalming. Martha’s response shows that her faith isn’t perfect yet—we can all increase in faith. In one of the Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of John, there is an extra phrase,

*Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead* by William Hole, 1905.





“Lord, why are they taking away the stone?”<sup>34</sup> Jesus reminded Martha (and all his disciples) that the purpose of performing this miracle is for the “glory of God” (John 11:4).

## Jesus’ Raised Lazarus from the Tomb

*John 11:41-53*

**John 11:41–42 “Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee”** Jesus’ gesture of looking upward as a prelude to prayer is also mentioned in Luke 28:13; John 17:1; Matthew 14:19. Gratitude fills his prayers. I love the fact that Jesus thanks the Father for hearing him, even before he performs the miracle.

**John 11:43 “He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus come forth”** Lazarus is the third recorded instance of Jesus restoring life, and is the most dramatic (the 12 year old daughter of Jairus, within the hour of her death, Matthew 9:18–25; Mark 5:38–42; Luke 8:35–42; and the widow’s son, on the way to his grave in Nain, Luke 7:11–17). Peter and Paul also raise the dead (Acts 9:40; 20:9–10), and in the OT there were others (Elijah, etc.).

**John 11:44–45 “came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes”** Lazarus’ grave clothes are described just like Jesus’ are, with a separate head cloth left in the tomb. Their practice was to wrap the bodies with spices and oils. Lazarus would use his death clothes again, for he was not resurrected, but only restored to life. The burial clothing was often thin strips of cloth wrapped around the limbs.

**John 11:46–53 “Many . . . believed on him. . . some of them went their ways to the Pharisees”** Ironically this miracle to restore a life leads to Jesus’ death. Some who were eye witnesses shared this great miracle with antagonistic Pharisees, who used it to spur the Sanhedrin to plot Jesus’ death. It became so well known, that it became the “last straw” in the minds of those who wanted to kill Jesus. They also added Lazarus to their list of those they hoped to kill (John 12:10). And they sought to do it as soon as possible (John 11:57).

Fortunately, Lazarus is not killed by the Sanhedrin. In an apocryphal source we read: “Lazarus came back to life just twelve seconds after Jesus spoke.” Early sources also sketched, “Lazarus’ later career as ‘treasurer of the church at Philadelphia’ and dying ‘when 67 years old, of the same sickness that carried him off when he was a younger man at Bethany.’<sup>35</sup>

When Jesus’ raised Lazarus from the dead is not clear. It appears to have happened either a few days or a few weeks before his Sunday morning triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He may have stayed in Bethany during those days or weeks. John does not tell us, but Jesus is back in Bethany six days before Passover (John 12:1).

*Header Image: The Resurrection of Lazarus or The Raising of Lazarus by Léon Bonnat, 1857. Image via Wikimedia Commons.*

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## ENDNOTES

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1. In John's gospel Jesus spends the last three months of his life in Perea. Luke has Jesus' traveling. The two may not be contradictory, but we assume that Luke uses this travel time to fit in many of the sources he hopes to include in his text (Luke 1:1–3).
2. *Mishnah, Shekalim* 1:1.
3. *Mishnah, Tractate Ta'anit*, 3:8. Mikvaot (singular is mikveh), are purification immersion baths, most often with seven steps down into a small square (or rectangle) pool of water.
4. Charles R Barnes, *Dictionary of The Bible; Biographical, Geographical, Historical, and Doctrinal* (NYC, NY: NY University, 1900). 60.
5. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, Reprint, 1980), vol. 6:314.
6. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (SLC, UT: Bookcraft, 1969), 123.
7. Russell M. Nelson, "Revelation for the Church, Revelation for our Lives," General Conference (April 2018).
8. Hugh Nibley, "Leaders and Managers," BYU Speeches, Commencement Address, August 19, 1983.
9. Steven Harper, "All Things Are the Lord's: The Law of Consecration in the Doctrine and Covenants," published in Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo L. Gaskill, ed. *The Doctrine and Covenants: Revelations in Context* (Provo and SLC, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, and Deseret Book, 2008), 212–28.
10. Web site accessed 4/13/19. <https://biblehub.com/topical/e/endow.htm>
11. Larry Y. Wilson, "Take the Holy Spirit as your Guide," General Conference (April, 2018).
12. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: GP, 2015), chapter 8.
13. Kent Brown, Eric Huntsman, *The Testimony of Luke—A New Rendition*, Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 663.
14. John W. and Jeannie Welch, *The Parables of Jesus Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019), 68–70.
15. Kent Brown, *Luke*, 670.
16. Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1035.
17. *Ibid.*, 1040.
18. *Ibid.*, 1044. These two-twin passage in Luke both end sections that only Luke record.
19. *Ibid.*, 1045.
20. Welch, *Parables*, 98.
21. *Mishnah, Ketuboth*, 4.7; 5.1. The contract included the groom's payment of a "bride price." The minimum sum was 200 denarii for a virgin, with no maximum (a denarius was one day's minimum wage, thus 200 days' labor).
22. Kent P. Jackson, Robert L. Millet, *Studies in Scripture: The Gospels* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 5.356.
23. Gordon B. Hinkley, "Of you it is required to Forgive," General Conference October 1980.

24. Bruce A. Van Oren, and Brent Top eds., *The Lord of the Gospels: the 1990 Sperry Symposium on the New Testament* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Education, 1990), 58.
25. The ideal age for a young man to marry was 18, though it was legal at 12 ½. If he were still single at 25, he would have to pay a higher tax. See Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women*, chapter 7.
26. Welch, *Parables*, 106.
27. Jeffery R. Holland, "The other Prodigal," General Conference April 2002.
28. Welch, *Parables*, 109, paraphrasing Tertullian.
29. Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible Series: John 1–XII* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 420; "a sign that Jesus is the life."
30. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Collegeville, MN: the Liturgical Press, 1988), 61.
31. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 1.363. Josephus describes more than a month-long procession and other elaborate displays in conjunction with Herod the Great's death.
32. Jacob Neusner, ed, *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), "mourning."
33. Jackson, *Studies in Scriptures*, 5.334.
34. Raymond Brown, *Anchor: John*, 426.
35. C. Wilfred Griggs, ed., *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1986), 93.