

A Death for the Glory of God

Scripture: John 11:1–16

Code: 43-57

Turn to John 11, John 11. When we go through books as we do, we sort of take what comes, wonderfully so, joyfully so. That means that passages have different character as we go, depending on the passage. We've been through a lot in the gospel of John that's theological, and we've been dealing with some profound theological truth. In fact, really, that is the essence of the gospel of John. It is of the four gospels, the most theological. Profound truth that we have looked at, propositional truth, absolute truth has been disclosed through John's history of our Lord Jesus Christ, but as we come to chapter 11, we come to a narrative. Really, an account of a miracle, and it takes up the whole chapter, and it's a long chapter. We're going to have to break it into four sections, which means I can't tell the whole story. I wouldn't do that to this story. I wouldn't do that to this text. I wouldn't do that to you. We need to take this slowly so that we can absorb all of its incredible truth.

It was J.C. Ryle, the English cleric, who looked at this chapter and wrote these words, "For grandeur and simplicity, for pathos and solemnity, nothing was ever written like it." It's a pretty amazing statement from a man such as he was. This is an amazing chapter. It is the account of the miracle of our Lord raising Lazarus from the dead. And while the story, of course, in short is very familiar to us, in its detail, it is much more rich. So we want to make sure that we cover the detail. This is the climactic, culminating, fitting sign to end John's list of signs in this gospel that point to the deity of Christ.

John's purpose, we all know that, is to present Jesus Christ so that you might believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you might have life in His name. He has an apologetic purpose that you might believe Jesus is the Christ, and he has an evangelistic purpose that in believing you might receive eternal life, but it's all about Christ. It's all about Christ. Here, in chapter 11, we come to the last and most monumental public miracle that Jesus did. It's the climactic one for John. There is one later miracle, but it's in the dark and very private because of how it happened. It's in the garden and it was Jesus reaching over and giving Malchus a new ear after Peter had hacked it off. But apart from that miracle in the dark, this is the last great public miracle that Jesus did.

Nowhere in no other account of His miraculous work do we see more magnificently the coming together of His humanity and His deity. We see Him in His full majesty, in His full person. We see His humanity and His sympathy and His affections and His relationships to an earthly family. We see His sovereignty in His power and His display of glory in overwhelming death. This miracle, as important as it was, and being the culminating miracle in His public ministry, it is important, but this miracle occurs only in John. The other gospel writers don't give us an account of this.

But John writes that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit with very careful detail, and I think a unique beauty of expression. This account is provided for us for a number of reasons. First of all, as I said, to declare one more final supreme, incomparable, undeniable proof of the claims of Jesus, affirmed by many, many eye witnesses that He is who He claimed to be. This is the resurrection of a

man who had been dead for four days. Decay would have set in because Jews do not embalm, not like Egyptians who did everything they could to preserve the corpse. When someone died, they were in the grave as fast as possible because decay set in immediately.

The purpose of this miracle is, again, to put on display the power and sovereign, divine nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, but it's not just that. It's that for the sake of increasing the faith of those who were eager to believe. If you look at verse 15 in this passage, Jesus says about not being there when he died, "I'm glad for your sakes, I was not there so that you may believe." This miracle not only is an undeniable permanent evidence of the deity of Christ. It was for the purpose of producing greater faith in the disciples.

But there's also a third purpose of this miracle and that is to give the impetus to the skeptics to press the issue of Jesus's murder because God's timing is very near. This happens just before His final Passover. He is to die by God's plan on the Passover as the true Passover Lamb.

And while the Jews, the religious establishment and those who followed Him had tried on a number of occasions to kill Him, even spontaneously as well as plotting His death, they had never been able to succeed at that because it was never His hour. It was never His time. It was never in God's purpose, but now with this undeniable miracle, many, many eye witnesses in the hundreds and thousands who knew of this miracle, the unbelief, the rigid, fixed, permanent, irreconcilable unbelief of the Jews reaches a hostile level that leads to His execution, that within God's plan.

So this one great miracle precipitates His death and provides proof for His deity. It is a monumental thing. And by the way, I need to say this as an aside, we live in a culture that is overwhelmed with pseudo-supernaturalism. We live in a culture that is engulfed in phony stories about the supernatural, fake miracles, fake healings, fake resurrections. They are basically propagated as if they were realities all the time within the framework of "the church." And all of that nonsense tends to diminish the reality of this kind of real miracle.

Then you can add this. We live in a culture that is relentless barraged with entertainment that elevates, escalates, and saturates with fantasy, unreal things. Unreal things are normalized in our culture, and I'm sure there are many people who don't know the difference between fantasy and reality. The line gets rubbed out. Movies and television are just jam packed with the unreal offered as if it's reality, the fantasy world. And in a culture that is engulfed in those kinds of pseudo-supernatural realities, it's hard for people to see the resurrection of a man 4 days dead who walks out of his grave in a small village in Judea 2,000 years ago as anything that matters.

There were no special effects. How do you compare that with Harry Potter, flying witches, angels, vampires, transformers, aliens who constantly defy natural law, time travelers, people who morph into some other entity, displaying supernatural powers? So what's the big deal about a resurrection in a village in Israel 2,000 years ago? Again, this is Satan's successful effort at confusing people about the miraculous and confusing them about reality, and Satan is very adept at this. By the way, as a footnote, Jesus told stories. He made up stories. They're called parables. He invented them. Not one parable Jesus ever created is a fantasy. It has no components of fantasy.

All His stories are in the real world, real people, real things, real issues, real relationships. He never used fantasy to articulate a spiritual truth, never. You're not going to find things like J.R.R. Tolkien

and C.S. Lewis in Scripture. You're not going to find them in the teaching of Jesus. Jesus never moved into the world of fantasy, but the closest He came as His depiction of the real world when He talked about the rich man in torment and Lazarus in the presence of God. But Jesus didn't use fantasy. He used reality to communicate reality.

So I know it's an uphill struggle to make this as meaningful as it should be. New Testament miracles somehow seem like insignificant competition to the bizarre world of special effects. Still, this is a miracle that is, frankly, undeniable, and it does expose skepticism. Do you remember in the Luke 16 story of the rich man who went to hell and Lazarus who was in Abraham's bosom? And the rich man said to Abraham, "Send Lazarus back from the dead to warn my brothers," and Jesus said in the story, "If they don't believe Moses and the prophets, they won't believe though one rose from the dead." And this is evidence of that. This massive miracle that everybody knew about, the raising of a man four days dead, who walked out of his grave, had no other explanation than that it was just exactly what it declared to be. But, again, this exposes skepticism and unbelief for what it is.

So, as we come to chapter 11, this story will unfold for us. And I feel a little bit badly today because we're just going to kind of set the scene, but you're going to be rewarded greatly through the rest of the process. The light has been shining in the darkness. The darkness hated it, but couldn't put it out, referring to Christ. The deep sin guilt of man has been demonstrated. The public ministry is over. With all the evidence provided over the three-year ministry of Jesus, the nation has rejected Him. The leadership has rejected Him, but he gives one great monumental final testimony to His nature.

And what's the purpose of this miracle? The purpose of this miracle is in verse 4, "For the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." This is to put His glory on display so that people might believe and some did, and some who already believed had their faith strengthened. Now, a little context; this is the seventh miracle John records in his gospel. The other six: turning water to wine, healing the nobleman's son, restoring the impotent man, multiplying loaves and fish, walking on the lake, and giving sight to the blind man, and now number seven, giving life to a dead man. Is this the first time Jesus raised someone from the dead? No, it is not. We have two others that are explicitly indicated in the New Testament gospels.

In the gospel of Mark, Jesus raised Jairus' daughter, who when He started the encounter with Jairus was only sick, but she did die, and He raised her immediately. And then there is the account in Luke's gospel of the funeral procession of the son of the widow of Nain. And while the funeral procession is headed to the place of internment, Jesus stops the procession and raises that dead son. But in both cases, they are recent deaths. We could assume that they had been very little time for decay, but in the case of Lazarus, by the time Jesus comes to the grave to find Lazarus there, verse 17 says he's already been dead for four days.

I don't think I need to be graphic to describe what a four-day old lifeless corpse would look like. This sets the miracle of the raising of Lazarus apart from all the other resurrections because of the very evidence decay. And there was a kind of tradition among the Jews that the spirit of a person hovered over the body for a first couple of days, and then vacated. So even in their tradition, if that's a legitimate tradition, there would have been the sense that this a real death, and that whatever spirit may have hovered was long gone.

Now, as we open the chapter, let me read you the beginning of the account. "A certain man was

sick, Lazarus of Bethany, in the village of Mary and her sister, Martha. It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair whose brother Lazarus was sick. So the sisters sent word to Him saying, 'Lord, behold he whom you love is sick,' but when Jesus heard this, He said, 'This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.' Now, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was. Then after this, He said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to Him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he doesn't stumble because he sees the light of the world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him.' This He said, and after that, He said to them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go so that I may awaken him out of sleep.' The disciples then said to Him, 'Lord, if he's fallen asleep, he will recover.' Now, Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. So Jesus then said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead, and I'm glad for your sakes, that I was not there so that you may believe, but let us go to him.'"

Now, as you look at this story and its initial section, we're just going to look at the characters in the story, which means the man Lazarus, the sisters, and the disciples. But, of course, as we look at those characters, the dominant character in the whole story is obviously going to be Christ, but let's meet this man. Back to verse one. "A certain man." That's about all we know, folks, a certain man. We don't know anything about him. This is the only time he's mentioned. We have no idea about his past. We can assume that he was a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ because Jesus loved him. We can assume that he was a believer in Jesus Christ because his sisters confirmed that down in verse 27. "Lord," says Martha, "I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world." And Mary responds the same way, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you."

So this is a family that had come to believe in Christ. That's all we know about them. His name, Lazarus, not to be confused with the Lazarus in the beggar story, but an interesting parallel, isn't it? That it was an issue of resurrection that was brought up in that story about that other Lazarus. That was a fictional Lazarus in the story that Jesus invented. But why two named Lazarus? It was a very common name, a very common name from the Old Testament name, Eleazar, Eleazar, a very familiar Old Testament Hebrew name. It means, whom God helps, whom God helps.

So here is a man, a Jewish man, given a wonderful familiar, common name. We know nothing about him except that he had two sisters who were believers, and we assume he was a believer by what we read in this account. They lived in the village of Bethany. That's another interesting note because at the time that Jesus gets this message, He's in another Bethany. The tenth chapter ends in verse 40. "He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing and was staying there." That place, according to 1:28 of John was also called Bethany. So there was a Bethany beyond Jordan a day away from the Bethany of Lazarus and his two sisters.

Bethany is a small village. It means, house of the poor, house of poverty. That would be characteristic of that village. Perhaps that's characteristic of the other village where Jesus was currently ministering. And by the way, many were coming and believing in Him. That's how chapter 10 ends. Once He got out of Jerusalem, and out beyond the Jordan back where John started to minister, He began to reap the harvest of what John had planted in proclaiming Him. And the people out there said everything John said about Him is true, and they came to believe. That's how chapter

10 ends.

So they're having a wonderful ministry there in that other Bethany, but here comes a messenger to Him with word about this man, Lazarus. It also tells us that Bethany was the village of Mary and her sister, Martha. Now, that's fine. Those are also very common names, especially Mary. Mary is an extremely common name. When we get to the story of the cross, there are going to be Mary's everywhere. It was a very popular name because it was a variation on the name Miriam. Miriam was the sister of Moses. Miriam was the deliverer of the deliverers. She was the savior of the savior. She is the one who saved the life of Israel's greatest hero, Moses. So many parents named their children, their daughters, Miriam.

But this Mary, verse 2, is further identified for us. This is the Mary, who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. It's that Mary, that Mary from Bethany. Bethany, two miles from the eastern wall of Jerusalem, down the back slope of the eastern wall, across the Kidron brook, up the Mount of Olives around the bend and you're in this little village of Bethany.

I can remember many years ago when Patricia and I were there and a number of times visiting there myself, but Patricia and I were there. I would say when we were there to find the traditional site of the grave of Lazarus and to go down the deep stairs into what is traditional said to be the place where he was entombed. I remember it was an Arab village at the time. There were Arabic women living there, Palestinian women living there, and we had the very bizarre occasion – Patricia will remember this – of having a lady offering us the opportunity to purchase her baby.

Now, I don't know whether that was something she used as a device, but we were not interested in buying her baby. But that village, to this very day, is in Arabic named after Lazarus. So that's the little village, and it is as nondescript, the last time I was there perhaps as it was even in ancient times. This is the Mary who lived there with her brother. Now, notice verse 2. "It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair."

Oh, that Mary. But wait a minute, that story doesn't come until chapter 12. What's going on here? That story doesn't come until chapter 12. But listen, that's okay because that story had already been told in detail in Matthew and already told in detail in Mark and Matthew and Mark had been circulating for a very long time by the year 90 in the first century when John writes this gospel. And so even though he hasn't yet given his account of it, he knows they know that that Mary is the one he's talking about.

And so he literally builds his comment on the knowledge of Matthew and Mark, gospels written very much earlier. So, it is this Lazarus, the brother of this Mary and this Martha in this place called Bethany. Now, all we know about him is he was sick. That is the only thing we know about him. No diagnosis. We don't know what his illness was. We know why he was sick, which is pretty important. We don't know what he was sick with, but we know why he was sick. You say, why was he sick? Verse 4, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God." He is sick for the glory of God. Well, that's not new to us. Who else had an infirmity for the glory of God? Chapter 9, the man born blind, and what did the leaders say? "Who sinned? This man or his parents?" Jesus said, "Nobody sinned, but this is for the glory of God." I'm going to put my divine glory on display.

Mark that out folks. There is sickness that is just natural sickness. It's just natural sickness. It just comes because we live in a fallen world. It's inevitable. There is sickness that is a discipline from God on His own people. "Some of you," Paul says, "are weak and sick, and some of you sleep because of tampering with the sanctity of the Lord's Table." Careful how you deal with the Lord's Table. And there is sickness that is a divine judgment. God actually smites a man in Acts 12, and he's eaten with worms, but there is sickness that is for the glory of God.

I was at the hospital yesterday and stood over the bed of a man in serious condition with heart issues, and I prayed that his sickness would be for the glory of God, and that God would graciously raise him up and give him strength and bring him back if it would glorify God. I don't know what God's purpose is in his sickness, but Jesus tells us what the purpose was in this man's sickness, to put His glory on display.

So we meet Lazarus. We can call him the critical man. Yeah, he's in critical condition. His case is critical to the declaration of the deity of Christ and then we meet the concerned sisters. So the sisters in verse 3, Mary and Martha, sent word to Him. So this is going to take a day, a day to get from Bethany one to Bethany two. The message is very cryptic, very short. "Lord," they acknowledge He is Lord. "Behold," which means, this is urgent; this is sudden; this demands immediate response. "He whom you love is sick." That's the whole message. "He whom you love is sick."

Since Jesus had left back in verse 40 of chapter 10 some weeks earlier, this man had become sick. His sickness has reached a critical point, and they send this messenger to say, "He whom you love is sick." They need to say nothing more. They don't give Jesus any instructions. They don't demand a healing. They don't say they have faith to believe. They just give Him the information. "He whom you love is sick." And their appeal, listen, is not based on Lazarus's love for Jesus. They don't use Lazarus's love for Jesus as if it's some kind of mechanism that activates Jesus.

They talk only of Jesus's love for Lazarus. They think that will catch His heart, and here's a very important insight: "He whom you love." The word love here is not *agapaō*, not divine love. This is *phileō*, the love of a friend, personal affection, human love. Jesus loved this man as a friend. He had personal affection for him. It's obvious that as God, He loves the world, that as God He loves His own who are in the world, and He loves them to perfection. He will tell them that in the upper room, but that's not the thought here. That thought comes later. The thought here is this is a man for whom Jesus had deep affection. This is a man who filled a need in his own life for a friend.

I know we talk about the humanity of Jesus and we have to, and He's fully human. But almost all the time you hear someone talk about the humanity of Jesus they say, "Well, He lived and He hungered, and He thirsted, and He slept, and He was weary, and He died." And all of those are human things, but what makes humans unique is relationships, and this explains why when He gets to the grave, He cries. He cries at the thought that His friend is dead. This is a beautiful insight into the full humanity of Jesus. He is a man and like every person, He requires a friend, somebody who cares about Him. A perfect man with all the needs of a man.

You see, this is part of what makes Him such a merciful, faithful High Priest able to be touched with all the feelings of our infirmities because some of our infirmities have nothing to do with physical well-being. They had to do with relationships, right? Right? I mean isn't the worst of it all? Isn't that where the most pain comes from? You could probably take the cancer if all the relationships were

what they should be, but His sympathy extends to understanding relationships. He's been there. His friend that He had great affection for was sick, seriously sick.

So the sisters send that message, and they know that's all that has to be said. The messenger arrives after a day. It's a day's journey. And when Jesus hears from him, verse 4, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death." It's not going to end in death. There will be death. There already is death because by the time the messenger gets there, Lazarus is dead. He may have died as soon as the messenger left. They may have realized the critical condition of Lazarus and dispatched the messenger, and he died right after that.

But it's not going to end that way. That's not the end of the story. "But for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." This sickness is not unto death. It is a sickness to the glory of God. Verse 5 adds another component. "Now, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." This time the word changes. This is *agapaō*. This is divine love. He loved this man Lazarus, about which we don't know anything. He loved an obscure man like a man loves a friend. But he also loved this whole family with a divine love because they belonged to Him spiritually, like He loves His own who are in the world even to the maximum. So much love. He loves with a divine love and He loves with a human love.

So when He heard that he was sick, you expect to read, "He went as fast as He could." It doesn't say that. He stayed two days longer in the place where He was. He's been dead a day while the messenger has gotten there. He waits two more days, and then after two days, and the disciples are probably processing this because they're aware of the meeting. Why is He waiting? But they're grateful. They think this is good. This is really good. He's not going back. He's got enough common sense to know you can't go back because we just escaped a stoning. Chapter 10, verse 31 and the end of chapter 10, they tried to grab Him again to kill Him. We just got out of that situation.

This is good and so for two days they keep preaching and ministering, and people are believing and they're having a great time. And then after two days, He says to His disciples, "Let's go to Judea again." Their worst fears. The disciples said to Him in verse 8, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now recently seeking to stone you and are you going there again?" Are you thinking this through? I mean the sisters wished He had been there and never left. Verse 21, Martha says to Him when He gets there, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." And later on, Mary says in verse 32 the same thing, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." But He couldn't be there because He had to run for His life.

But now it's time to go back, and of course they see it as highly dangerous. So they remind Him that He just escaped a stoning and it makes no sense to go there again; to which He answers with a very interesting Proverb. Verses 9 and 10, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he doesn't stumble. That is, nothing bad happens to him because he is in the light and he can see what he is doing and where he is going. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles. Bad things happen because the light is not in him." What is the point of that sort of strange introduction?

Well, at this point we are now moving from the man, the critical man and the concerned sisters to the disciples. Now, they are puzzled. Why would you step back into this and here's His answer. It's a proverb, and the proverb is simple, very simple proverb. You can't lengthen the daylight. You can't shorten the daylight, right? Nothing any friend can do can lengthen the daylight. Nothing any enemy can do can shorten the daylight. It is what it is and it is fixed by God, and so is my life. No enemy

can shorten it. No friend can lengthen it. It is what it is. And in that light of life which God has ordained for me, I will not stumble. That is to say, nothing will happen to me that is outside the plan. I'm not going in the dark. I'm going in the light of God's divine day. A day can't finish before it's ordained end.

The time allotted to me to accomplish my earthly ministry is fixed. It's fixed by God. It can't be lengthened by any precautionary measures. You don't have to go hide somewhere in a cave. You don't have to avoid conflict. You don't have to run from your enemies because you can't lengthen your life, and you can be bold and you can step right into the face of your enemies because they can't shorten it. I tell you, just from my own personal standpoint, I live in that confidence. I can't do anything. Neither can anybody else to lengthen my life. I'm not afraid that somebody, some enemy can do anything to shorten my life. My day is what God has ordained it will be, and in that I go forward with confidence and boldness.

Jesus knew that His hour was coming, but it hadn't come yet, and many times He'd said, "My hour hasn't come. My hour hasn't come." And He escaped all of the plots and all of the mob violence. This has great application for us I think to realize that if you're walking in the Spirit and serving the Lord, you have your day. Being a coward and taking all kinds of precautionary steps and not being faithful isn't going to lengthen it; and being bold in the face of enemies isn't going to shorten it because it is what God has ordained it to be.

So this He said, verse 11, "And after that He said to them, 'Our friend.'" Now we know Lazarus knows everybody. He knows all the disciples. They've probably stayed in his house many times because it was right on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem, which is the way that everybody came from Galilee to go to the Passover and every other feast. It must have been like an inn on the way, especially for believers. "Our friend, Lazarus," He says, "has fallen asleep." That's a tender way to refer to his death, isn't it? And it was temporary. That's why He used that symbol.

"'But I go so that I may awaken him out of sleep.' So the disciples said to Him, 'Lord, if he's fallen asleep, he will recover.'" They're diagnosing the situation saying, "Well, if he's sleeping, that's a good thing, right? If he's sleeping, he's going to gain strength. That's what you want to do when you're sick is get lots of sleep. So he's going to be fine. Let's just stay here. He's sleeping. Don't go. He'll recover. He's going to get better."

"Jesus had spoken of his death, verse 13, but they thought He was speaking of literal sleep. So then Jesus said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is,' read my lips, 'dead.'" Dead. Wow, the messenger said he's sick. The Lord said this sickness is not going to end in death. Now, the Lord declares he is dead, plain and simple, and they need to understand that when He said I'm going to awaken him out of sleep, He means that I'm going to raise him from the dead.

Jesus didn't know Jairus' family. Jesus didn't know the widow of Nain's family when He raised those two people. This is somebody He really loved, and He is going to raise him from the dead for His glory and the glory of God. So in verse 15 He says, "I'm glad he's dead." I'm glad he's dead, on the divine level. "For your sakes, I'm glad that I wasn't there. Let us go to him." Let's go, guys. The disciples were always struggling with faith, weren't they? "O ye of little faith, O ye of little faith, O ye of little faith. Why don't you believe?"

Yes, they believed in Him. Yes, they had affirmed that He was the Christ, the Son of God, but they needed faith to be strengthened and strengthened and strengthened. I mean it wasn't just that they would believe, but that Mary and Martha would have their faith strengthened. And then down in verse 45, many Jews who came to Mary and got the whole story of the resurrection first hand, and were eyewitnesses of the living brother, believed in Him. This is a glory display that'll produce faith, and it'll also produce hostility that drives Him to the cross right on schedule.

Then in verse 16 we meet Thomas. He doesn't say much, but he's well-known for being a pessimist and a doubter. "Therefore, Thomas, who is called Didymus, means the Twin," he obviously had a twin, "said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go so that we may die with Him.'" Hey, what a downer. "Let us also go that we may die with Him." He gets a lot of bad press for that, but just think about this. This is a courageous pessimist. This is not a cowardly pessimist. He didn't say, "Let's get out of here or we will all die with Him." He said, "Let's go and die with Him." This man has great faith, and this man knows what Luke 9:23 means. "If you want to come after Me, deny yourself. Take up your – "what? " - cross." It might cost us our lives, men. Let's go.

And so they go, and when they arrive he's been dead four days; the day the messenger came, the two days, the day back, four days. Now the story gets very fascinating, and that's for next time, as you could well tell.

Lord, we're grateful for such rich textured detail about real people, real places, real issues of life. The Bible is so historical, natural, and at the same time supernatural. Such a wonderful thing to be in a position now to become eye witnesses together of this most monumental miracle. This miracle that is John's culminating evidence of Jesus's deity, this miracle, which strengthens the faith of those who already believed and becomes the motivation for the faith of those who are about to believe. This miracle, which becomes the final impetus to hard-hearted unbelievers to execute the Son of God, but only on your schedule, your time, your place, your means.

Father, we look forward to all that is ahead of us, and at the same time, we're grateful for what we've seen even at this juncture in the story; that you desire to be glorified, that you call people to believe and be saved, to be delivered from hell and death and judgment by putting trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. As Christians, may our faith be strengthened. Give us greater faith as we see this unfolding glorious evidence of our Lord's divine nature. May it be the means that you use to bring people to saving faith; and, Lord, if necessary, let it be a savor of death unto death to those who deny what is undeniable. But, Lord, accomplish your purpose to your glory because that's the purpose for which we have this record. Be glorified, every way. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21, "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

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