



**“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth,  
will draw all people to myself.” John 12:32**

## Jesus, the Word Made Flesh (Part 2)

**T**he gospel according to John, as we began to understand in the first part of this study, demonstrates throughout that Jesus is the personal revelation of the unseen God. Because of the eternal bond of the Son with the Father, the life of God shines through the earthly life of Jesus. “The Father and I are one,” he says (10:30). This oneness of the Father and the Son is not a fusion in which they are merely different disguises of the same person. Rather, the person of the Father and the person of the Son are joined in a communion of love in which they are inseparably united and one. This divine oneness and love between the Father and the Son becomes visible through all the words and works of Jesus. As he proclaims at the end of his public life: “Whoever sees me sees him who sent me” (12:45).

Jesus’ revelation of the Father is a progressive process throughout the gospel. Beginning with a series of seven selected signs, Jesus reveals the Father through his words and works. The seventh and greatest of these signs, the raising of Lazarus, begins this second part of the gospel. This final sign of the series marks the beginning of the final week of Jesus’ life. Immediately after the raising of Lazarus, the religious leaders plot against him, and the narrator notes, “So from that day on they planned to put him to death” (11:53). The gospel begins to

move definitively toward the passion and death of Jesus, the climax of the gospel's revelation of the unseen God. The scenes of the next chapter, including the anointing of Jesus, his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and Jesus' words about the coming of his hour, are all dominated by the theme of Jesus' impending death. After Jesus entered the city, notes the narrator, Jesus departed and hid from the crowds (12:36). This begins the last section of the gospel, in which Jesus will direct his words not to the crowds, but only to his closest disciples.

Following the narrative of the seven signs of John's gospel, traditionally labeled as the "book of signs," the gospel enters a new section with the solemn announcement that "Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father" (13:1). This section, consisting of Jesus' final discourses, the passion account, and the resurrection appearances, is traditionally called the "book of glory." During the narrative of the seven signs, the attention of Jesus is directed toward the "world," the crowds, and the religious authorities of the synagogue and temple. But in the book of glory, Jesus focuses on his close disciples in a more private manifestation of his teaching and identity. As the gospel begins this final section, the narrator notes the intention of Jesus: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (13:1).

Yet, despite this traditional division into the book of signs and the book of glory, Jesus' revelation of the unseen God to the world and to his disciples is not clearly divided. At the first appearance of Jesus in the gospel, John the Baptist proclaims, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29). This announcement of Jesus' purpose and goal serves as an initial trumpet call that echoes throughout the entire gospel. The self-offering of Jesus as the Lamb of sacrifice would reveal the Father in the fullest way as Jesus is lifted up in glory on the cross. Likewise, by placing the cleansing of the temple toward the beginning of the gospel, an event that marks the beginning of the passion account in the other gospels, the writer sets the entire public life of Jesus within the framework of his passion. The new temple, which would be destroyed and raised up in three days, is the crucified and risen body of Jesus, the paschal sacrifice for the life of the world. Finally, though the seven signs demonstrate Jesus' identity as the fullest revelation of God, they are only a preparation for the fullest sign of all. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, his being lifted from the earth, is the ultimate sign by which he will draw all people to himself.

## Reflection and discussion

- In what sense do chapters 11–12 mark a transition from the first part of the gospel to the second?

- Why is it difficult to discern divisions within the gospel? In what sense can we say that the whole gospel is a progressive revelation of the unseen God?

## The Way to the Father

Jesus' revelation of the unseen God reaches its climax at the cross of Jesus. In his sacrificial passion and death, Jesus does the work of the Father in the most perfect and personal act of his life. He submits himself completely to the Father's will and, at the same time, expresses his complete freedom to lay down his life. At the cross, as both the Father and the Son are glorified, Jesus prays, "Glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you" (17:1).

Throughout his gospel, John uses the word "lift up" in connection with the climactic moments of Jesus' life and death. Like so many words in this gospel, it has both a physical and a spiritual meaning. The word describes the physical lifting up of Jesus on the cross and also the exaltation of Jesus. The first use of the term "lift up" compares the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness by Moses, to the lifting up of Jesus on the cross (3:14). Like the bronze snake that Moses lifted on a pole, which brought a cure to those afflicted in the desert, the ugly and shameful image of Jesus lifted on the cross brings healing and life. This crucified and exalted Jesus unveils his deepest divine identity: "When you

have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am” (8:28). The divine title “I Am” expresses the reality that at the crowning moment of Jesus’ life, on the cross, the Father and the Son are seen most fully as one.

At the final moment of Jesus’ public ministry in Jerusalem, he proclaims the ultimate effect of his being “lifted up” on the cross. His exaltation is a movement toward the Father, not only for himself but for all people: “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself” (12:32). This universal drawing power of Jesus on the cross brings believers into the unity that is shared by the Father and the Son.

In his life’s work, Jesus enables us to “see” the unseen God in two ways. First, he descends from the Father and reveals the Father through the words and deeds of his public life. Secondly, he ascends to the Father by his being lifted up on the cross and thereby draws us up to the Father. Not only are we able to see God through our union with Jesus, but we are brought into a sharing in the very life of God. Through the unity of the Son with the Father that is manifested finally on the cross, the Father’s love for humanity shines through fully. We are drawn into that eternal union of love between the Father and the Son. It is this communion with God in love which is the fullness of life, the expression of life’s ultimate purpose and meaning.

## Reflection and discussion

- What is the meaning of the verb “lift up” in John’s gospel? What does Jesus mean when he says, “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself” (12:32)?

- In what way does the Gospel of John invite us to both see God and share in his life?



**“I am the resurrection and the life.**

**Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,  
and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”**

John 11:25–26

## The Death of Lazarus

**JOHN 11:1–27** <sup>1</sup>Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup>Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup>So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” <sup>4</sup>But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” <sup>5</sup>Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, <sup>6</sup>after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

<sup>7</sup>Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” <sup>8</sup>The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” <sup>9</sup>Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. <sup>10</sup>But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” <sup>11</sup>After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” <sup>12</sup>The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” <sup>13</sup>Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. <sup>14</sup>Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup>For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you

may believe. But let us go to him.”<sup>16</sup> Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

<sup>17</sup>When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup>Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, <sup>19</sup>and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. <sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” <sup>24</sup>Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup>and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” <sup>27</sup>She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

**T**he narrative of the raising of Lazarus is the climax of the book of signs, with its seven manifestations of Jesus’ identity, and the transition to the book of glory, in which Jesus will give his life as the fullest revelation of his glory. The news that “he whom you love is ill” (verse 3) is a call to return to Judea, the place where his life is in danger from the religious authorities in Jerusalem (verse 8). Jesus is going to Judea for Lazarus, but also to meet the decisive danger of crucifixion and, ultimately, his glorious victory. Caring for those one loves is often a perilous undertaking that takes us to a dangerous place. But it is the only way to love as Jesus loved.

Like most of the Gospel of John, the account of Lazarus must be read on at least two levels. It is about a man named Lazarus, a dear friend whom Jesus loved. But it is also about each of us, whom Jesus loves, and about the universal fate of death with which we must all sooner or later cope. Lazarus represents all of us as we come to Jesus for healing and life.

On hearing the news of Lazarus’ illness, Jesus looks beyond the immediate situation to its end. The end is not death, but God’s glory and the glorification of the Son of God (verse 4). This is the reason for the curious comment that Jesus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, “stayed two days longer in the place where he was” (verse 6). The glory of which Jesus speaks is possible only

through death—first the death of Lazarus and then the death of Jesus himself.

When Jesus enters the town of Bethany, his first encounter is with Martha, who has come to meet Jesus. Her initial greeting might strike us as a reprimand that Jesus delayed too long and did not come in time to save Lazarus from death (verse 21). But her words seem to be more of a statement of her confidence in the power of Jesus to heal the sick. If Jesus had been present a few days earlier, he surely would have made Lazarus well. She continues her greeting by stating her confidence that, even in the present situation of death, God would do whatever Jesus asks (verse 22).

The response of Jesus is intended to draw Martha to a deeper level of faith in Jesus. His initial statement that Lazarus will rise again (verse 23) seems to Martha only a pious consolation expressing a common Jewish belief in the resurrection of the just at the end of time. Like the common Christian sentiment at funerals, “He’s in a better place now,” the words of Jesus seem to Martha a polite sentiment that doesn’t cut the grief of the moment.

But Jesus goes on to proclaim, “I am the resurrection and the life” (verse 25). He places faith in himself at the center of the hope of resurrection, and he transforms that hope from a vague and future expectation to a present experience. Because Jesus is the resurrection, the one who believes in Jesus will live, even though he dies; and because Jesus is the life, the one who lives and believes in Jesus will never ultimately die. Resurrection and eternal life are the fruit of a relationship with Jesus; wherever Jesus is, there is life that never ends.

## Reflection and discussion

- How was the two-day delay of Jesus an expression of his love? Have I ever experienced God’s delays as an expression of his love?

- When Jesus announced that he was going to Judea, Thomas replied, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (verse 16). Some commentators think that he was expressing courage and strong devotion; others think he expresses a skeptical realism about the fate that awaits them. Does Thomas seem to be sincere or sarcastic?

- How does Jesus deepen the faith of Martha by his statement: “I am the resurrection and the life”?

- What do I believe about the relationship of Jesus to my eternal destiny? How does faith in Jesus affect the quality of my life here and now?

## Prayer

*Jesus, you loved your friend Lazarus. Help me to experience your tender love for me, and comfort me with your assurance as I consider my own inevitable death. Help me to trust in you as the resurrection and the life.*