MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

# BELIEF BEYOND DEATH:

# A NARRATIVE COMPARISON OF JOHN 4:43–54 & 11:1–45

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The incredible stories compiled in the Gospel of John continue to fascinate both the academic and the believer, but entertainment is not the purpose of this book. Rather, the Fourth Gospel (FG) by its own admission has more of a rhetorical function: "But these (referring to signs) are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).[1] The death and resurrection of Lazarus is an impressive example of how a carefully crafted story can be used as a means of persuasion. In this paper, I argue that the storyteller of the FG uses death as a foil to reveal the glory of Jesus and seeks to persuade his audience to believe as the characters in the story believe.

Before examining the narrative elements of John 11:1–45, it is important that we establish a historical foundation. An attempt will be made to situate the FG in its historical context by noting a few general pieces of historical information and assessing the Jewish concept of death in the first century. Next, a brief overview of narrative criticism and its benefits will assist the reader in understanding how a narrative approach functions. Subsequently, we will direct our attention to the literary relationship between John 4:43–54 and John 11:1–45. We will begin by examining how the storyteller orders the events and develops the characters in each narrative. Then, we will identify some of the similarities between the two stories and suggest some possible implications. Lastly, in the postscript, we will summarize our conclusions and look at how they may affect an interpretation of the passion narratives of John 19—20.

## HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to situate John 11 in its proper historical context, it seems appropriate to make a few historical considerations. First we will examine issues related to dating, authorship, and place of composition. Then we will examine death from a Jewish perspective, paying close

[1] All biblical references come from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.

attention to Jewish practices and the concept of raising the dead. The first section will depend heavily on the work and conclusions of Raymond Brown and Craig Keener,[2] while the second section will be comprised of a variety of scholars.

## When was the Gospel written?

Although no scholar can definitively identify the precise date in which the author composed a gospel, one can infer a close approximation based upon internal and external evidence.[3] Additionally, it is important to realize that the FG underwent several editions and therefore multiple dates could be assigned depending on which version a scholar is dating. With these considerations in mind, Brown suggests that John, in its final written form, was probably written in 75 CE at the earliest and 110 CE at the latest, but he concludes that a date between 90–100 CE is most likely.[4] Keener, like many other scholars including Brown, posits a mid-nineties date, which situates the final composition of the Gospel sometime during the reign of Domitian.[5]

## Who wrote the Gospel?

In an attempt to identify the historical author, Brown asserts that "the solution that seems to do the most justice to the Gospel evidence is that the BD [Beloved Disciple] was the eyewitness who was responsible for the basic testimony/witness that was incorporated into the

[2] Both Brown and Keener are extremely important in Johannine studies. Brown's Anchor Bible commentary is the standard work on the FG, while Keener's two volume commentary is one of the more recent and exhaustive treatments of the Gospel of John.

[3] Although it is not the purpose of this paper to detail every piece of evidence regarding dating, one may benefit in knowing that P52—the earliest fragment of the Gospel of John—was found in Egypt and dates to about 130 CE. The dating for this fragment affords significant credibility to scholars who posit a late first-century date for the FG because a considerable amount of time would have had to elapsed in order for the Gospel to have been copied and transmitted to Egypt. In addition to the external evidence, one may also look to the expulsion of Christians from the synagogues (John 9:22) as a historical development that is entirely consistent with a late first-century date.

[4] Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John: 1—13* (AB 29, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966), 80-86.

[5] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003), 140.

Fourth Gospel. But others were responsible for composing the written Gospel and redacting it."[6] Keener comments that the exact identification of the author is not central to the entirety of his commentary, but he concludes that a Johannine school is the best possibility with the apostle himself as the next best option.[7] Both of these scholars are getting at the idea that no single individual wrote the FG, but rather, the document represents the views of multiple authors.[8]

**Where was the Gospel written?**

Identifying where a document was composed helps to explain who might have been the intended audience. After a detailed investigation, Brown concludes that "the question of the exact locale of the Gospel's final writing is not extremely important, for the Gospel's appeal to believers in 20:30–31 transcends place and perhaps even time. Yet, in my judgment the Ephesus region fits the internal evidence of John best of all the proposals, and is the only site that has ancient attestation."[9] Keener deals with the issue in even greater detail, and he provides a less decisive conclusion. He oscillates between Roman Asia (most likely Ephesus or Smyrna) and Syro-Palestine (most likely Galilee or Antioch) as the most probable, and widely accepted, sites for the Johannine community. He contends that "while a strong argument could be offered for either position, in this commentary we favor a location in Roman Asia, although substantial elements of the Johannine community's membership may have migrated from Galilee, and some of the situations addressed may be related to Galilee."[10] Therefore, to summarize our thoughts

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[6] Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (ed. Francis J. Moloney; New York: Doubleday, 2003), 195-196.

[7] Keener, *Gospel of John*, 115.

[8] By all accounts John 7:53—8:11 is a scribal insertion and it is not found in the earliest and best manuscripts. Furthermore, John 21 is clearly a later addition. Not only is 20:31 a fitting conclusion to the Gospel, but the epilogists addresses the misunderstanding about the death of the beloved disciple in 21:22-24, which was probably a later development that occurred after the Gospel was written and was intended to clear up confusion.

[9] Brown, *An Introduction*, 206.

[10] Keener, *Gospel of John*, 149.

based on the conclusions from Brown and Keener, we will operate on the basis that the FG was the result of a Johannine school of thought, which probably originated with John the apostle, and was written to an audience in Ephesus around 90 CE.

## Death from a Jewish Perspective

Explaining the "Jewish perspective" on death is a complicated matter because one must account for the development of beliefs over time and the fact that different groups maintained different viewpoints within that progression of ideas. Therefore, instead of providing an exhaustive description, I will present an overview of death in the first century. With respect to afterlife the Pharisees and Sadducees represented two prevailing ideas in the first century. The Pharisees believed in a post-mortem existence; whereas, the Sadducees believed that death ended one's earthly life and ultimately one's existence. Although both ideas were present, Geza Vermes concludes that "the notion of bodily resurrection propagated by the Pharisees was alien to first-century Hellenistic Jews and was on the whole unfamiliar in most layers of Palestinian Jewry."[11] Thus, most Jews viewed death as an event that brought finality to one's existence. This inevitable fact of life left families with the emotional burden of the loss and the physical burden of disposing with the body. Jews in the first century had established practices that addressed both of these concerns—burial and mourning.

Palestinian Judaism required that the deceased be buried on the day of the death.[12] The preparation began with the body being wrapped in linen and placed in a tomb.[13] Charles Talbert explains the linen process: "In Jewish burial, a corpse was normally placed on a length of linen, feet at one end, which was then folded over the head and stretched down to the feet where it was

[11] Geza Vermes, *The Resurrection* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 55.
[12] Keener, *Gospel of John*, 842.
[13] I am unaware of whether the wrapping of the linen came before the placement in the tomb or visa versa.

tied. Arms were tied to the body with linen strips. The face was bound with another cloth."[14] Talbert notes that this type of burial garb would make it extremely difficult for the individual to walk if he or she was in fact resuscitated.[15] Additionally, an individual walking out of a tomb would have been even more impressive depending on the type of tomb used. Brown explains that there were two types of tombs. Vertical shaft tombs were used in private burials and horizontal cave tombs were the more typical of the two. In any case, both tombs were covered by a stone to keep animals away and to make it more difficult for thieves to steal grave goods.[16] Before the tomb was sealed, the body was covered with oils and spices. These additives, unlike Egyptian embalming practices, merely masked the smell of decomposition and did not do much to preserve the body.[17] Interestingly, there was a Jewish belief that the soul lingered around the body for three days,[18] but when the corpse began to change colors and slowly decompose the soul would abandon the body knowing that a return to life was doubtful.[19]

In addition to prescribed burial arrangements, Jews in the first century practiced standardized mourning practices as well. Emanuel Feldman asserts that the mourning period was divided into five categories: the period between death and burial; the first day of post-burial mourning; the first seven days of post-burial mourning; the first thirty days of mourning; and the first year of mourning.[20] During each period, mourners were expected to adhere to certain

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[14] Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 176.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Brown, *The Gospel*, 426.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (rev. ed.; NICNT 4; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 485.

[19] Talbert, *Reading John*, 172.

[20] Emanuel Feldman, *Biblical and Post-Biblical Defilement and Mourning: Law as Theology* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1971), 81.

restrictions and guidelines.[21] Ben Witherington notes that during the time in between the death and the burial "there would be a period of loud lamentation … immediately followed by a period of public weeping and consolation."[22] He goes on to say that "every family was obligated to hire at least two flute players for mourning, and women might also be hired to weep at the grave."[23] Feldman states that the first week of mourning was the most intensive and included the most prohibitions.[24] The vast majority of mourning practices were visually observable, which illustrates Witherington's point that mourning was not intended to be a private matter.[25]

The last aspect of death from a Jewish perspective that we will review is the idea of individuals being raised from the dead. The Mediterranean world was not unfamiliar with resuscitation stories; in fact, they are found in both Greek[26] and Jewish[27] sources.[28] Typically these types of stories involved sorcerers who performed secret rituals under the cover of night where no one could see them; therefore, as Keener has indicated, "John's account undercuts accusations of secretive, magical activity."[29] What sorcerers performed in the dark alone, Jesus performed for all to see (11:42), and he even spoke in a loud voice for all to hear (11:43). At this juncture, it seems appropriate to note the difference between resuscitation and bodily

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[21] These restrictions and guidelines were intended to benefit the mourner. By mandating a mourning regimen, one would hopefully address the grief associated with the loss adequately and become integrated back into the community both physically and emotionally.

[22] Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 203.

[23] Ibid.

[24] For example, mourners during the first week could not cut one's hair, wash one's clothes, have sex, wear shoes, work, study scripture, or even offer a sacrifice. For further explanation see Feldman, *Biblical Mourning*, 83.

[25] Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 203.

[26] Asclepius, the son of a human mother and Apollo, was widely popular in second and third centuries BCE for his ability to heal people and even raise some from the dead. Additionally, Apollonius of Tyana was a first-century (CE) holy man who resembled the legendary Pythagorean philosophers from previous generations, and he too reportedly raised people from the dead. See Wendy Cotter, "Miracle Stories: The God Asclepius, the Pythagorean Philosophers, and the Roman Rulers," in *The Historical Jesus in Context* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine, Dale C. Allison Jr., and John Dominic Crossan; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 166-78.

[27] See 1 Kgs 17:17–24; 2 Kgs 4:18–36; 2 Macc 7:9; Mark 5:35–42; Luke 7:11–15.

[28] Keener, *Gospel of John*, 837.

[29] Ibid.

resurrection.[30] Although they appear to be synonymous, they are in fact not. Resuscitation refers to an event where a corpse returns to life for a period of time but eventually the individual dies again. Resurrection refers to an event where the deceased returns to life and never returns to death. Consequently, one should not view Lazarus' resuscitation and Jesus' resurrection as identical. The chief distinction is the end result. Lazarus returned to a body that was susceptible to sickness, limited to earthly existence, and ultimately resulted in death. Conversely, Jesus' resurrected body was incorruptible, transcendent, and eternal.[31]

To review, (most) Jews in the first century (1) believed that death signified the end of one's existence, (2) were expected to adhere to strict guidelines governing burial and mourning practices, and (3) were familiar with stories of miraculous men raising people from the dead. With the proper historical footing in place, we are now able to step into the world of the text.

## METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Narrative criticism is just one approach among many that scholars use to interpret the Bible. It is particularly useful in understanding stories; for that reason, it is applied to large portions of the OT as well as the Gospels. Francis J. Moloney[32] explains, "Contemporary narrative approaches to the Gospels attempt to enter into the process of communication between an author and a reader whom we do not know, and who are long since dead, so that the

[30] The Greek word for resurrection is ἀνάστασις and almost always refers to an event or existence that extends beyond the confines of Earth (Mark 12:23; Luke 14:14; John 5:29; Acts 24:15). Furthermore, a resurrection body is qualitatively different than an earthly body (1 Cor 15:42). In comparison, Jesus uses ἐγείρω and not some form of ἀνάστασις when he resuscitates a dead person (Mark 5:41; Luke 7:14). Therefore, a linguistic difference exists between the two concepts.

[31] Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 199.

[32] Moloney is one of the chief practitioners of narrative criticism, especially when applied to the Fourth Gospel.

contemporary reader might be moved and inspired by the passionate convictions of the author."[33] In order to enter into this dialogue between the author and the reader, one must first accept the story as true and abide by the assumptions espoused by the author within the text. Thus, one can not stand from the outside and poke the story with a stick in an attempt to find meaning; rather, one must become an insider and wiggle his or her way into the crowd of listeners and hear the storyteller reveal the narrative in all of its literary brilliance. One might ask: How do you suppose we do that?

First, narrative criticism is based on the assumption that texts are self-referential or that meaning is self-contained.[34] Additionally, there is a difference between discourse and story. The discourse is where the author and reader interact, and the story is where the characters interact. R. Alan Culpepper states the difference in linguistic terms: the discourse is the signifier and the story is the signified.[35] As narrative critics, we can only access the former through the latter. We understand the storyteller's message (i.e., the discourse) by understanding the relationships between the characters (i.e., the story).

If the goal of narrative criticism is "to determine the effects that the stories are expected to have on their audience,"[36] then narrative critics accomplish this objective by analyzing the

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[33] Francis J. Moloney, introduction to *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, by Raymond E. Brown (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 33.

[34] Some narrative critics take this as a pass to avoid all historical inquiries, but as you can see by the previous section I am not one of them. Actually, I find them—both historical and literary approaches—to be a nice complement for one another. As Moloney explains in *An Introduction* (31-33), historical methods limit modern interpreters' imaginations and can never be totally absent from the mind of the narrative critic. For additional narrative practices and assumptions see Derek Tovey, *Narrative Art and the Act in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup 151; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 21-22.

[35] R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 53.

[36] Mark Allan Powell, "Narrative Criticism," in Hearing the New Testament, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 239-55.

interaction between the implied author and the implied reader.[37] Mark Powell provides a simplified understanding of these terms. An implied author—which we will refer to as the storyteller[38]— is a "perspective from which the work appears to have been written, a perspective that must be reconstructed by readers on the basis of what they find in the narrative."[39] An implied reader—which we will refer to as (a member of) the audience— is "one who actualizes the potential for meaning in a text, who responds to it in ways consistent with the expectations that we may ascribe to its implied author."[40] Narrative critics use these terms to assist them in their literary investigations of narrative sequence, setting, character analysis, symbolism, irony, and intertextuality to name a few. Due to space and time, our investigation will only encompass how the storyteller of the FG uses narrative order and characterization to communicate to his or her audience.[41]

## NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Our narrative exploration will begin with identifying the characteristics of both the storyteller and his or her audience. Then we will examine how the storyteller orders the events of John 4:43–54 and John 11:1–45 and observe the similarities between the two accounts. Subsequently, we will inquire about how the storyteller develops characters by being aware of

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[37] Some narrative critics also employ additional terminology that includes the narrator and the narratee of a text, but as Culpepper and others have noted, there is no distinction between the implied reader and narrator in the FG. See Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 8.

[38] For this paper, I am going to use "storyteller" to describe the "implied author." Not only is "storyteller" more natural, I think it also reflects a historical probability. Because the expense of written documents and the low literacy rates, it seem likely that most first-century believers would have heard the Gospels read to them as opposed to them reading the Gospels for themselves. Therefore, it seems like a natural fit to describe the author—either historical or implied—as the storyteller.

[39] Powell, "Narrative Criticism," 240.

[40] Ibid., 241.

[41] The reason I limit my investigation to narrative order and characterization is because these two aspects of narrative criticism are the most advantageous for establishing connections between John 4:43–54 and 11:1–45. Of course if one had unlimited space and copious amounts of time, then it would be beneficial to examine each and every aspect of narrative criticism.

what the characters say and do in both stories. Finally, we will make some concluding remarks and infer how these two stories affect one's interpretation of John 19—20.

## The Storyteller

It is obvious that the storyteller tells the story, but he or she also explains (John 2:21–22; 4:9; 6:71; 9:23) and clarifies the story (John 4:2, 8; 7:39) as well. Culpepper refers to this type of editorializing as explicit commentary. The storyteller "is the one who speaks in the prologue, tells the story, introduces the dialogue, provides explanations, translates terms, and tells us what various authors knew or did not know."[42] Essentially, the storyteller informs the audience on how to think. Furthermore, as Mark Stibbe has correctly demonstrated, the storyteller speaks from a specific point of view and with a specific purpose: "This point of view is the omniscient perspective of one who sees the events of the story in the light of the resurrection of Jesus and, indeed, in the light of eternity."[43] In addition to explicit commentary, Culpepper identifies characterization, misunderstanding, irony, and symbolism as ways in which the storyteller implicitly communicates to his or her audience. Understanding the significance of these developments requires the reader to go beyond the surface and enter into the world of the text by reading or hearing the message multiple times.

## The Audience

The audience is composed of three groups: the original reader, the first-time reader, and the paradigmatic reader.[44] Within narrative criticism, the focus is on the paradigmatic reader or the one who is aware of the storyteller's subtleties. This member of the audience is familiar with

[42] Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 17.
[43] Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 15.
[44] Ibid., 16.

most of the characters in the story, with the exception of a few (e.g., the Beloved Disciple, Nicodemus, and Lazarus).[45] Additionally, this audience member knows about broad geographical designations, but is unfamiliar with specific locales. Also, as Moloney explains, the paradigmatic reader "is able to understand double meanings behind words (e. g., 3:3–5, 14; 8:28; 12:32), subtle ironies (e. g., 9:28–29; 19:14–15) and language that was used in the sacramental life of the community (3:3, 5; 6:51–58; 19:35)."[46] Furthermore, the audience is able to hear and understand Greek. Lastly, Culpepper proposes that "the intended readers are not Jewish, but their knowledge of many parts of the gospel story shows that the intended audience is either Christian or at least familiar with the gospel story."[47] Simply put, the intended audience recognizes or understands anything that is not explained in the text.

## Narrative Sequence

Now that we have established who the storyteller is and what his or her audience knows, we are in position to observe how the storyteller orders the events of the narrative. Let us begin by acknowledging that the Gospel of John is a composite of episodes, with each episode building on one another.[48] The result is a series of interconnected stories that combine to form a cumulative story. Therefore, a single episode depends upon both events which precede it and events which follow it. Obviously, there is not sufficient space to assess how every literary

[45] Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 224.
[46] Moloney, *An Introduction*, 35-36.
[47] Culpepper, *Anatomy*, *224.*
[48] Tom Thatcher, "Anatomies of the Fourth Gospel: Past, Present, and Future Probes," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (ed. Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 1-38.

component prior to John 11 affects it; thus, we will look at how the events of John 4:43–54 shape the events of John 11:1–45.[49]

After Jesus had met the woman at the well, she testified to her fellow Samaritans of Sychar (4:39). The Samaritans asked Jesus to stay for an additional two days (v. 40). What was intended to be a trip from Judea to Galilee, turned into a mandated, two-night stay in Samaria (v. 4). The storyteller narrates the next sequence of events: "When the two days were over, he went from that place to Galilee" (v. 43). Upon Jesus' arrival in Galilee, he was welcomed because all of the miraculous signs (2:23) he had done in Jerusalem (4:45).[50] Jesus' next stop was in Cana, which the storyteller reminds his or her audience was the location where Jesus transformed water into wine (v. 46).[51] The storyteller uses verses 43–46a to set the stage for Jesus' second sign.

Conflict arises when the storyteller informs his or her audience that "there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum" (v. 46b). This statement initiates the narrative sequence. The action intensifies when the official begs Jesus to heal his son who was not only sick but nearing death (v. 47). Jesus statement, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe" heightens the tension (v. 48). The audience now wonders: "Is Jesus going to heal the boy because if he doesn't decide soon, then the boy is likely to die at any minute." The story reaches its climax when the official says to Jesus, "Sir, come down before my little boy[52] dies" (v. 49). Jesus concedes and informs the man that he can go because his son will live (v. 50). The action

[49] Raymond Brown discounts scholars who seek to establish literary similarities between John 4:43-54 and John 11:1-45 and calls their findings dubious, yet he makes a connection between the Lazarus story and the healing of the blind man. Brown states that the "writer intended such an association" because of the overt reference made in 11:37. See Brown, *Gospel*, 423, 430. If Brown sees similarities between John 9 and 11, then I think that it is entirely plausible that connections exist between 4 and 11, especially in light of some of the blatant parallels between the characters and the way the story is ordered.

[50] When the storyteller looks back to an event that has already happened it is called an analepsis. This flashback technique is one of many that the storyteller uses to interconnect stories. See Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 56-70.

[51] Verse 46 is yet another internal analepsis, meaning that the connection is within the text. See note above.

[52] It appears to this reader that the storyteller strikes a sentimental chord with his or her audience by mentioning that boy is not just a boy but a young boy (παιδίον).

begins to descend when the official believes Jesus' word and returns home (v. 50b). He is greeted by his servants who inform him that his son is well (v. 51). The official inquires when his son got better, and the servants tell him that it occurred "yesterday at one in the afternoon" (v. 52). The story comes to a resolution when the official realizes that his son was healed at the same time that Jesus said that his son would live (v. 53a). As a result of the healing, the official and his whole house believe in Jesus (v. 53b). The storyteller concludes by explaining that "this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee" (v. 54).

In this account, the storyteller uses death, or at least the threat of death, to reveal the glory of Jesus. The storyteller frontloads the first part of the story (vv. 47–49) with references of death and despair: death is mentioned twice (vv. 47, 49), the boy's illness once (v. 46), and the need for healing once (v. 47). The storyteller counterbalances the first part of the story with the latter part of the story by including multiple references to life (vv. 50, 51, 53). Jesus, a character in the story, divides the disparate references (v. 50). Leon Morris explains, "Throughout the ancient world the fear of death was universal. Death was a grim adversary that everyone feared and no one could defeat."[53] It is as if the storyteller is trying to communicate to his or her audience that although death seems to be an incomparable force, Jesus can prevail over the powers of death. Based on John 4:46–54, the modern reader might not be convinced of the storyteller's claim, especially since the boy was not even technically dead, but one must remember that the cumulative story has not ended, and the storyteller has two (if not several) more opportunities to persuade his or her audience that his or her claim is in fact true.

[53] Morris, *The Gospel*, 481-82.

The storyteller begins John 11 by introducing a conflict in vv. 1–4.[54] Lazarus is ill, and the storyteller ensures that the audience recognizes this by reiterating it multiple times (vv. 1, 2b, 3, 4). Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, send word to Jesus that Lazarus is ill (v. 3). After hearing this message, Jesus then makes a provocative statement: "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" (11:4). The scene is set and the audience expects Jesus to heal Lazarus like he healed the official's son—by his command. The storyteller informs the reader that Jesus does not command Lazarus to be healed, but rather the suspense ascends as Jesus delays his trip for an additional two days (v. 6) before deciding to go to Judea (v. 7). Additionally, the disciples warn Jesus (and the audience) that a trip back to Judea could be dangerous (v. 8). The action continues to escalate as Lazarus' sickness goes from bad to worse. The storyteller uses Jesus' discussion with his disciples as way of communicating to his or her audience: "Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him'" (vv. 14–15).

When Jesus arrives, Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days (v. 17), and Jesus makes the audacious claim that Lazarus will rise again (v. 23).[55] Martha (v. 21), Mary (v. 32), and the Jews (v. 37) all agree that Jesus could have healed Lazarus if he had been there earlier.[56] The anticipation continues to build as Jesus asks for the stone to be removed (v. 39a). Martha's rebuttal that Lazarus is dead and the odor has already set in only adds to the audience's anxiety

[54] In verse two, the storyteller uses a prolepsis, which is similar to the analepsis. The prolepsis is a flash-forward technique that the storyteller uses to connect current events with future events that have yet to happen in narrative time. Moloney explains how an event that has yet to happen "must be regarded as a gap in the narrative." He goes on to say, "The use of this literary technique rouses the reader's curiosity and gives energy to the reading process, as the resolution of this indeterminacy must be sought further on in the narrative." See Francis J. Moloney, "Can Everyone be Wrong? A Reading of John 11.1—12.8," *NTS* 49 (2003): 505-27.

[55] Recall that in Jewish thought, the soul left the body after three days. See notes 18 and 19 above.

[56] Note the emotional nature of the crisis: Mary (v. 33), Jesus (v. 35), and the Jews (v. 33) all cry at some point in the story. The storyteller uses this emotion to heighten the tension with his or her audience.

(v. 39). The story arrives at its apex when the stone is rolled away (v. 41) and Jesus prays and commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb (vv. 41–43). The tension dissolves as the dead man comes out of the tomb wrapped in his burial clothes (44a).[57] Jesus then instructs them to unbind Lazarus and let him go (44b). The episode comes to a resolution when the storyteller informs his or her audience that "many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him" (v. 45).

John 11:1–45, like 4:43–54 before it, combines the elements of death and belief into a suspenseful narrative.[58] Both stories have a surprising amount in common, which leaves the audience to question: What exactly is the storyteller trying to accomplish? First, we will describe the similarities, and then we will infer the implication. Both stories contain someone who is sick[59] (4:46; 11:1), and the sick person is absent when Jesus receives the news of their illness. In each account, Jesus' trip is delayed by two days and therefore the sign (miracle) is delayed as well (4:40, 43; 11:6). Jesus predicts in both stories that the afflicted will live (4:50; 11:4). Each pericope has a petitioner who believes that Jesus is able to perform the sign (4:50b; 11:21-22, 32). In both stories Jesus performs a sign (4:53; 11:43–44), and as a result of the sign people believe in him (4:53; 11:45). Additionally, the storyteller uses setting focalization to zero the audience's attention on the sign and the characters' response to it.[60] Ultimately, both stories combine the despair of death and the hope of divine intervention, which is exclusively available

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[57] Mark Stibbe observes that the plot sequence of the Lazarus account is unique because "the miracle itself takes place at the end of the story. Typically, the sign occurs at the beginning or the middle of the story. See Stibbe, *John*, 122.

[58] Mary Coloe sees a similar connection between the two stories and organizes their similarities based on the schema of a miracle story. See Mary Coloe, "Households of Faith (Jn 4:46–54; 11:1–44): A Metaphor for the Johannine Community," *Pacifica* 13 (2000): 326-335.

[59] This fact becomes even more compelling when the reader/hearer realizes that the same Greek verb (ἀσθενέω) is used.

[60] This is an adapted idea from Mark Stibbe. In John 4, the storyteller moves the story from Judea, to Samaria, to Galilee, to Cana, to the official's home in Capernaum. Likewise, in John 11, the story progresses from outside Judea, to outside Bethany, to outside the tomb. In both cases the audience's focus ends on the site of the sign. See Stibbe, *John*, 124.

at Jesus' command. The storyteller uses death (or the threat of death) as an opportunity for Jesus to display his glory. In this way, the storyteller presents death as a literary foil.[61]

## Characterization

The two stories not only have a similar sequence of events, but the storyteller develops characters in analogous manner as well. In what follows, we will examine how the storyteller uses the characters in the story to communicate to his or her audience. Moloney suggests that the storyteller is not exclusively interested in conveying the faith commitments of the characters, but uses various characters to address the audience.[62] The way in which the storyteller communicates to his or her audience is through characterization, which consists of what is said about the characters, what the characters do, and how other characters within the story interact with one another.[63] We will begin with the characters in John 4:46–54, followed by the characters of John 11:1–45, and then a brief comparison of the two.

The storyteller begins and ends with his or her main character (4:46, 54)—Jesus. The main interaction occurs between Jesus and the royal official.[64] They are in Cana, which is the site of a previous miracle (v. 46a). The location leads the audience to believe that Jesus is probably going to perform another sign. The first description of the official is his title and the illness of his son (v. 46b).[65] The storyteller portrays the official as urgently seeking Jesus:

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[61] A literary foil typically refers to a character who contrasts with the protagonist of story and the differences between the two demonstrate some positive characteristic within the protagonist. I am using the term in a little different way. Instead using a character within the story, I think that the storyteller uses an idea or concept (i.e., death or the threat of death) to reveal or reflect positive characteristics within Jesus.

[62] Moloney, "Can Everyone be Wrong,"

[63] Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 106.

[64] Although there are other characters in this account, the focus is obviously on Jesus and the official. It is also interesting to note how the official's son is entirely passive in the story; he does not say or do anything directly.

[65] Notice that the storyteller does not mention the official's name. From a narrative perspective, anonymity is a way in which the storyteller can draw the audience in by allowing them to identify with the unnamed character.

"When he heard that Jesus had come from Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death" (v. 47). Interestingly, Jesus does not respond to the man exclusively; rather he speaks to a group of people: "Unless you [people] see[66] signs and wonders you [people] will not believe" (v. 48). This verbal exchange is the first of two. The official continues to display his urgency: "Sir, come down before my little boy dies" (v. 49). Jesus concludes the conversation: "Go; your son will live" (v. 50).[67]

At this point, we can observe what the storyteller has to say about the characters in the story. First, the official believed what Jesus said and returned home (v. 50). The storyteller is making a clear distinction that the official believed what Jesus said without the benefit of seeing the sign; in this way, he is the model of Johannine faith (cf. 20:29).[68] On the journey home, the official receives news that his son is well and he inquires when it happened (vv. 51–52). The slaves inform him of the time (v. 52b), and the official realizes that it occurred at the same time Jesus told him that the boy would live (v. 53a). The storyteller uses the official's temporal recognition to inform the audience that Jesus' words are connected to corresponding actions: when Jesus says that the boy will live; the boy lives. The understanding of the official leads him and his entire household to believe, not only in Jesus' words, but in Jesus himself (v. 53b). In this episode, the official is portrayed as someone who is persistent in seeking (v. 47), relentless in his approach (vv. 47, 49), convinced of what he has heard (v. 50b), and a believer of Jesus (v. 53). He is unique because his faith is not predicated on seeing; therefore, the storyteller presents the official as an exemplary character in the story that the audience is to emulate.

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[66] The Greek verb is ἴδητε.

[67] Notice that Jesus does not say "Go your son will be healed;" rather Jesus says "Go; your son will live." Both Jesus and the storyteller seem to view this sign as more than just a healing; it is a matter of life and death.

[68] Craig R. Koester, "Jesus' Resurrection, the Signs and the Dynamics of Faith in the Gospel of John," in *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (ed. Craig R. Koester and Reimund Bieringer; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 47–74.

In John 11, the storyteller does not present a story about believing without seeing like in 4:46–54, but rather believing in spite of what one sees.[69] In this way, the storyteller continues to use character development as a means to persuade the audience. He or she utilizes the following characters or character groups in varying degrees: Jesus, the disciples (specifically Thomas),[70] Martha, Mary, Lazarus,[71] and the Jews. Instead of analyzing every character, we will narrow our examination by understanding how the storyteller develops Martha, Mary, and the Jews in relationship to Jesus. Sandra Schneiders suggests, "Martha, Mary, and the Jews represent the full range of possible responses to the sign by which Jesus reveals his glory, that is, his identity as the Resurrection and the Life."[72] Thus, we will examine these three characters in hopes of covering the spectrum of responses narrated by the storyteller.

After informing the audience of Lazarus' condition (v. 17) and of the geographical location of Bethany (v. 18), the storyteller now launches into the interaction between Jesus and Martha. When Martha hears that Jesus is on his way, she leaves Mary and the mourners behind to go and meet him (v. 20).[73] Martha says to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him" (vv. 21–22). Dorothy A. Lee suggests that "Martha expresses both regret for the past (v. 21) and yet hope for the future (v. 22), all of which (including the contradiction) is part of her struggle to

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[69] Ibid., 64.

[70] The disciples only appear at the beginning (vv. 7-16); thus, their role is minimal in terms of the entire pericope. Mark Stibbe believes that they are portrayed "as the typical, ignorant buffoons" because of their inability to grasp simple material. See Stibbe, *John*, 125.

[71] Lazarus, like the official's son, is almost entirely absent from this story. He does come walking out of the tomb (v. 44), but this action is subsequent to Jesus' command. Craig Keener believes that Lazarus' inactivity makes "his sisters the main characters of this narrative and their faith the primary issue." See Keener, *Gospel of John*, 838.

[72] Sandra M. Schnieders, "Death in the Community of Eternal Life: History, Theology, and Spirituality in John 11," *Int* 41 (1987): 44-56.

[73] Martha's actions may be an indication of the respect she has for Jesus. See Keener, *Gospel of John*, 843.

understand. Martha's faith is real but still to be developed."[74] Martha's struggle to understand continues when Jesus replies: "Your brother will rise again" (v. 23). Martha affirms resurrection (v. 24), but Jesus has something else in mind. In confusing fashion, Jesus describes how he is the resurrection and belief in him results in life despite death (vv. 25–26).[75] Jesus then asks Martha if she believes what he has just said (v. 26b). Martha answers in the affirmative, but goes on to identify Jesus as the Messiah (v. 27). Her answer does not fit with the question and is probably an indication of her confusion. The next time we hear from Martha is when Jesus commands the stone to be removed (v. 39). She tries to reason with Jesus that the removal of the stone will result in a terrible stench (v. 40). Moloney explains that Martha's objection "is an unexpected response from someone who supposedly believes that Jesus is the resurrection and the life.[76] It appears that Martha's rebuttal is a further indication of her confusion.

Mary, who is mentioned before Martha in v. 1, is introduced to the audience as "the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair" (v. 2). These initial remarks by the storyteller indicate Mary's importance in the ensuing narrative.[77] After Martha concludes her conversation with Jesus, she returns home to inform Mary that Jesus wants to talk with her (v. 28). Mary responds to Martha's message by getting up quickly and going to him (v. 29). When Mary arrives, she kneels at the feet of Jesus and says: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v. 32). Mary's statement to Jesus is very similar to Martha's in v. 21. Lee views Mary's statement as "both a gesture of faith (understanding) and an

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[74] Dorothy A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning* (JSNTSup 95; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 202.

[75] Modern audiences should be aware of an important distinction regarding death in the Fourth Gospel. Jaime Clark-Soles explains, "Death appears to have a double meaning in FG, signifying both physical death, which no one escapes, and Holy-Spiritual death, which only believers escape." See Jaime Clark-Soles, *Death and the Afterlife in the New Testament* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 124.

[76] Moloney, "Can Everyone be Wrong?" 520.

[77] Ibid., 510.

expression of disappointment (misunderstanding)."[78] Mary, unlike Martha, does not make any additional comments and her conversation with Jesus concludes. The storyteller seems to present Mary as the character who exhibits or elicits emotion: she stays with the mourners (v. 20); she stands up from a seated position, which is a common posture for those in mourning or grief (v. 29);[79] when she goes to see Jesus, the mourners follow her (v. 31b); she weeps in front of Jesus (v. 33); and Jesus weeps during his exchange with her (v. 35). The storyteller uses Mary's emotional demeanor to represent the grief that is associated with death. Her sadness and despair dictate her behavior, which limits her ability to believe.

If Martha is confused and Mary is filled with emotion, then does either character exhibit true faith? Scholars are split on this issue. Jerome Neyrey views Martha as a unique character with high status because she receives special revelations from Jesus (v. 25), and because she addresses Jesus with special titles (v. 27).[80] Conversely, Neyrey views Mary as a character who does not represent any Johannine virtue.[81] Moloney views the two characters in the exact opposite way: "Mary is the character in the story reflecting true faith (see vv. 29–32), while Martha has fallen short of such faith (see vv. 21–22, 24, 27)."[82] He points to Mary's humble prostration before Jesus as a display of true and sincere faith; furthermore, he rejects notions of Martha's ascending faith because she discourages the removal of the stone in v. 39.[83] Both characters have their deficiencies; thus, neither character demonstrates true Johannine faith.[84]

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[78] Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel*, 208.

[79] Mark W. G. Stibbe, "A Tomb with a View: John 11:1-44 in Narrative-Critical Perspective," *NTS* 40 (1994): 38-54.

[80] Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John* (NCBC; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 197.

[81] Ibid., 198.

[82] Francis J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5—12* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 166.

[83] Francis J. Moloney, "The Faith of Martha and Mary: A Narrative Approach to John 11.17-40," *Bib* 75 (1994): 471-93.

[84] For a further comparison between Martha and Mary see Ruben Zimmerman, "The Narrative Hermeneutics of John 11: Learning with Lazarus how to Understand Death, Life, and Resurrection," in *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (ed. Craig R. Koester and Reimund Bieringer; Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck,

Yet, there may be another character or set of characters within the story with which the storyteller may want the audience to imitate.

The storyteller subtlety develops the Jews—or at least a portion of them—from mourners to believers.[85] The Jews first appearance occurs when they arrive to console Mary and Martha (v. 19). They then follow Mary as she goes to meet with Jesus because they think that she is going to mourn at the tomb (v. 31). When Mary begins to weep in front of Jesus, the Jews replicate Mary's action (v. 33). Thus far, their only action is to sympathize and mourn alongside the bereaved. In vv. 36–37, two separate views emerge amongst the Jews in response to Jesus' weeping: some notice his compassion, while others respond with skepticism and sarcasm.[86] Jesus prays and acknowledges that he is praying for the benefit of the crowd. His prayer comes to an end with the hope that the crowd will come to believe that God sent him (v. 42). After Lazarus comes out of the tomb, the storyteller informs the audience that many Jews came to believe in Jesus as a result of the sign (v. 45), yet some of them told the Pharisees what had happened (v.46). This report is an invitation of sorts. The storyteller invites his or her audience to respond to the sign like the Jews in the story—either to believe in Jesus or to reject him.

In both John 4:46–54 and 11:1–45, the storyteller uses characters and their development to address the audience. In the first account, the storyteller uses the official to model faith; whereas in the second account, the storyteller uses the Jews to display faith. Additionally, in both accounts the recipient of the sign is almost entirely passive. Neither the official's son nor Lazarus says a single word; their healing and resuscitation respectively are secondary to the faith

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2008), 75-100; Moloney, "The Faith of Martha and Mary," *Bib* 75 (1994): 471-93; and John M. Howard, "The Significance of Minor Characters in the Gospel of John," *BSac* 163 (2006): 63-78.

[85] Notice that the storyteller does not refer to specific Jews by name; instead, he or she uses a generic term, the Jews. This faceless designation is yet another opportunity for the audience to identify with the characters within the story. See note 65.

[86] Stibbe, "A Tomb with a View," 48.

commitments made by the characters in the story and the audience outside of the story. Similarly, the official's slaves and his entire household are somewhat analogous to the Jews in John 11. Both groups play minimal roles, but more importantly, both groups come to believe in Jesus. Lastly, the storyteller presents Jesus as a character who can not only heal a boy on his proverbial deathbed from many miles away, but he can also command the dead to come to life. Simply put, Jesus controls life and death and his exploits are on display for all to see, hear, and believe.

## POSTSCRIPT

Thus far, we have concluded that the storyteller of the FG uses his or her stories as a means to persuade the audience to believe in Jesus. In the two accounts examined above, the storyteller intertwines both death and belief. Strategically, the storyteller constructs and positions each story with increasing detail, suspense, and improbability. Death (or the threat thereof) repeatedly provides an opportunity for God's glory to be revealed through his Son's signs. These signs, then, are a means to persuade not only the characters in story but the audience outside of the story. Additionally, the storyteller uses the character development of both the official and the Jews to implore the audience to believe as they believed. Thus, the arrangement of the stories and development of the characters are ways in which the storyteller seeks to persuade his or her audience. With these conclusions in mind, how does this affect one's interpretation of the most miraculous sign of all—Jesus' resurrection?

Jesus' death, like Lazarus' death, is yet another opportunity for the audience to believe. His life does not end on the cross, but rather, he once again triumphs over death. This sign is the most incredible sign of all and is an unmistakable indication (by the storyteller) that Jesus is in

fact the Son of God. Therefore, interpreters should view the passion narratives of John 19—20 in light of Jesus' previous encounters with death: Jesus is the one who overcomes death, and his victory is an opportunity for all who hear his story (20:29) to embrace a faith that extends far beyond the limitations of death.

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