

The Resurrection, Life Eternal, and Authentic Living in Chapter 11 of the Gospel of John: Literally or Metaphorically? - and for Whom?¹

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Non Sequitur by Wiley Miller



¹ As I am responsible for all errors and omissions and I will take credit for same; however, it would add for the chosen readers of this paper to see the attached MEMO for a brief look at the task and outline before you start. Please note there are a lot of quotes and this is by design as the selected theologians can sure say it better than I can. Hope you enjoy the work and I will respect and respond to any comments.

Introduction

This paper is written for a small group of people who are friends, family², and folks interested, like me, in some of the questions of life, love, and authentic living. This paper will use examples from the Gospel of John and for the theme discuss the life, love, and living questions from Chapter 11 discerning the resurrection of Lazarus but specifically what Jesus responds to Martha's statement where he says "I am the resurrection."

This paper has a target audience of about eight people who range from literalist believers, believers, non-believers, to professed atheists. The joy of writing to this diversification is the ontological (science of being) questions are essentially the same for all (of us). The dread of writing for this group is the more I look, the more questions I have; however, this is kind of like life - the more we discover about living the more we want to ask, explore, spelunk, research, and find the truth, the truth of ourselves, our lives, and our future: maybe what happens and where we go when we die.

This paper however will not be the definitive word, will not answer all the questions, or be an exhaustive study but I do hope it will be a start - or another reason for us to continue with our quest for the word.

Couple of claims: (a) I received a book³ last week from an old friend that revealed some answers about life questions I have been unable to answer and can now share, (b) my notes here are Christian inspired notes. I bow my knee to the Lord God of history who gives and takes away and who is the Alpha () and the Omega ()...knowing this paper may not sound that way, but it is, (c) the task of this paper is to take the idea of Jesus as the resurrection from the conventional to the cosmic, from the literal to the liberal, from the dark to the light, and show regardless of

² See attached MEMO originally sent to my family to set the stage and purpose of this paper.

³ Gene W. Marshall (1998). *The Infinite Silence walks among us*. Bonham, TX: Realistic Living Press.

where you stand ontologically or theologically, this same Lord God of history loves you, me, and us, (d) the working progress of this paper is called, in part, "scientific biblical higher criticism."

The working questions:

1. Is the Lazarus story literally true or does the author tell us a metaphoric story?
2. Where Jesus says "Those who believe...will live" (11: 22-26) is the event meant to happen on the last day (atonement) or now (eschatological)?
3. What will be the judgment to the people who will not believe?
4. Who are the "included" people who can say "yes, I believe" or "no, I do not believe"?
5. **Bonus** "Can something be real yet not occur in history?" If yes give example.⁴

Quick outline in verses of chapter 11 using the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version).

1-16 The death of Lazarus

17-27 Jesus the Resurrection and the Life

28-38 Jesus weeps

38-44 Jesus raises Lazarus to life

45-57 The plot to kill Jesus

Scripture:

²³ Jesus said to her, "**Your brother will rise again.**"

²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?**"

John 11:23-26

⁴ This bonus question is applicable for this discussion but is not as pertinent for this level of conversation but I want to leave it in because it maybe a valid point (and is) for another paper so it is left here for us to ponder and think about.

Take a moment to reflect - from whatever your position maybe on these four verses. Is Jesus talking about "on the last day" as Martha asks or "now"? I will come back to this question.

Background on metaphors and Bible commentary

Back in the summer of 1993 (June 21), Jeanne, Pat, Greg, Jim, and I attended a Baptist funeral in Ardmore. During the meal afterwards I sat with the preacher Leonard Ezell and he told me of a book his father-in-law, Paul D. Duke, wrote titled *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*⁵. I have found out since then the book is well referenced in the Johannine community of scholars and writers.

Duke reminds the readers of John that the author employs "a number of devices which invite the reader from one level of meaning to another. Such devices include metaphor, double meaning, misunderstanding, and irony" (p. 142). The immediate example is the "I AM" sayings which Jesus applies to himself such metaphors as "bread," "light," "the way," "the vine," "the good shepherd." Duke says "Metaphor is like irony in that it says one thing and means another, presenting two levels of meaning which the reader must entertain at once (p. 144). Lastly, "in this Gospel we are beckoned beyond the surface of things. The reader is thus taught to read deeply, to 'not judge by appearances but judge with right judgment'" (John 7:24)(p. 145).

Back in the late 1960's (May '68) before I left for Korea, I bought a few volumes of the Bible to include (for sure) "The Gospel According to St. John" (Vol. VIII Luke; John). As this was one of my first commentaries a few new terms for me were: hidden allusion, scribal insertion, eschatology, Paraclete, sacramental mystic, cosmological speculations, 'seamless robe,' theory of redaction (Bultmann, of course!) - some revisited here just to entice you to read 4G.

⁵ Duke, P. D. (1985). *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press.

This volume was *The Interpreter's Bible*⁶ and is broken down on each page with text (KJV and RSV side by side), exegesis (to relate in detail or to expound), and exposition commentary (should be critical).

The commentary says that "which has been recited at innumerable funerals to poor souls stunned and agonized...hearing it their heads went up, and their hearts rallied. **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.**

"It is stupid and futile to attempt to comment upon a passage so majestic and unfathomable; which indeed has the quality of music rather than of words, in that it suggests and brings home to the mind truths too deep and profound to be bluntly expressed in our stammering human speech..." (p. 643). And a few more selected comments:

"That is the claim made confidently everywhere in the N.T...thus Paul...as these are proved in the resurrection of our Lord...and what he said leaped out across the barriers of death, giving us a tremendous promise for the future life...its assurance of the fact of immortality (p. 644)...and that in him our dreams are not only dreams, but rather audacious prophecies of what one day will really be" (p. 645).

Yes, I know this was the selected words of the commentary but they do serve to be the jest of what he is saying, therefore, does the exposition have to do with a future day or is this for now? The first question is 1. Is the Lazarus story literally true or does the author tell us a metaphoric story? What do you say?

⁶ *The Interpreter's Bible*. (1952). Volume VIII. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.

Well, from my side of the argument he missed it. The commentator "literally" missed it. What he missed was what the author of John is saying. He is using heaven talk as in atonement theology and heaven talk is not in John. Jesus saying "I am the resurrection" is an eschatological statement for right now not for "on the last day." Let me be clear here as about 90% (if not more) of the church say the last day, when Jesus comes back, the second coming, the end of times, and this is fine because the Synoptic Gospels, Paul, and the Revelation say the same thing. The Fourth Gospel does not. Hence the argument about reading literally or reading metaphorically.

Let me move on from conventional to cosmic.

Bultmann - The judgment and the resurrection

Back in the early '70s I was introduced to Rudolf Bultmann who has been a mainstay and bulwark in my theological studies in the Fourth Gospel (4G). He backs up his work with explanation of the Greek and then explains in more detail in his masterful and fatherly commentaries. One key book I bought at Perkins and it has been key ever since - especially Part III, Volume 2 on the *Theology of the Gospel of John*.⁷

But first, to show a beyond literary scope and how John is different than the synoptic tradition, Bultmann makes these truncated claims:

(a) "The miracle stories...indicate by their very style a more advance stage of development than that of the synoptic tradition (p. 3).

(b) "John adopted out of the synoptic tradition..." using "Themes not found in the synoptics" (2:19; 4:44; 12:25f.; 13:16, 20; 15:20) (p. 4). [Take time here to read and review these verses.]

⁷ Bultmann, R. (1955). *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. K.Grobel, Vols. I & II). New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.

(c) "Clearly, then, John is not of the Pauline school and is not influenced by Paul; he is, instead, a figure with his own originality and stands in an atmosphere of theological thinking different from that of Paul" (p. 9).

Hang in here with me as the next point will not only answer one of the questions but will define the radical truth of John's eschatology and is next only to his theme of "realized eschatology" (the NOWness of the word). Remember Duke's earlier clue on double meaning? Listen to Bultmann here with "judgment" and "sunderance" (act of dividing; severance) being highlighted in this rather long but important quote:

The historizing of eschatology...is radically carried through by John in his understanding of $\acute{\iota}$ [judgment] and $\acute{\iota}\mu$ as both having the double sense "judgment" and "sunderance." The judgment takes place in just the fact that upon the encounter with Jesus the sunderance between faith and unfaith, between the sighted and the blind, is accomplished (3:19; 9:39). He who believes is not judged (i.e. not condemned), but he who does not believe remains in darkness, remains under the wrath of God, and is thereby judged (i.e. condemned):

[Bultmann then quotes (3:18; 5:24f.; 5:21f., 26f.; 3:36, ending up with:)]

Jesus declares:

"I am the resurrection and the life⁸;
he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,
and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (11:25f.)

"The judgment, then, is no dramatic cosmic event, but takes place in the response of men to the word of Jesus" (p. 38). [Note the operative words are "**response of men to the word.**"]

Bultmann says "As 'signs' the miracles of Jesus are ambiguous. Like Jesus' words, they are misunderstandable (think Duke read Bultmann?)...But the bread-miracle (6:1-15), the cure of the blind man (9:1-7), and the raising of Lazarus (11:1-44) have specific symbolic meaning: they represent the Revelation as food, light, and life, respectively" (p. 44).

⁸ Look in your Bible and see if there are any foot notes for the last part of this verse or maybe a $\acute{\iota}$ and the live marked with the symbols representing a textual variant. This means we could read the verse without "and the life."

So, where are we? In my opinion we could end the paper here because you have the keys to the kingdom. You have most of the questions answered. You have the verses of John that hold the Gospel together - both promise and response.

To review how are the following questions answered so far?

2. Where Jesus says "Those who believe...will live" (11: 22-26), is the event meant to happen on the last day (atonement) or now (eschatological)? - NOW!
3. What will be the judgment to the people who will not believe? - will remain in the dark.

Spong - On the Tales of a Jewish Mystic

Last summer before I audited The Gospel of John at Perkins, I was introduced to a book⁹ by John Shelby Spong and it is the most important source of Johannine literature since Bultmann. Please bear with me while I pluck out Easter and resurrection comments of two¹⁰ of his books that form a review, better, a gestalt of his works that fit the scope and theme of this paper. We are working from conventional to cosmic, from literal to liberalism, from a three-level-universe to the big-bang in Christian theology.

Spong says "Let me first state the obvious: No one can finally do anything other than speculate!...I will not allow my twentieth-century mind to be compromised by the literalism of another era that is not capable of being believed in a literal way today...For that view of resurrection is not believable...If that were the requirement of belief as a Christian, then I would sadly leave my house of faith. With me in that exodus from the Christian church, however, would be every ranking New Testament scholar in the world...like" (for instance) "E. C. Hoskyns, C. H. Dodd, Rudolf Bultmann, Raymond Brown, R. H. Lightfoot, Karl Rahner, Maurice Goguel, and countless others. These are scholars of great personal integrity. They do not

⁹ John Shelby Spong. (2013). *The Fourth Gospel: Tales of a Jewish mystic* New York, NY: HarperOne.

¹⁰ John Shelby Spong. (1994). *Resurrection: Myth or reality? A Bishop's Search for the origins of Christianity*. New York, NY: HarperOne.

literalize the Easter narratives, but they also do not abandon the worship of Jesus as their Lord. Neither do I..

We can reject the literal narratives about the resurrection and still not reject the truth and power of the resurrection event itself. That is the distinction that must be made" (Resurrection, pp. 237-238).

Spong says in his definitions - which will tie into and link to the last author of this paper, "I began to rethink and ultimately to dismiss the theistic definition of God and start moving away from an understanding of God as 'a being' to and understanding of God as 'Being itself,' or as Paul Tillich, the formative theologian of my early training, would say, as 'the Ground of Being' " (Tales, p. 7)...The resurrection is not the appearance of a physical apparition. It is the experience of the indwelling life of God in the form of the spirit. It comes as the life-giving breath of God flows to the disciples from Jesus, who has passed from death into life because he could give his life away in love for others. He could live the life of God. He could share in the oneness of God. He could open the door for us all to step into the reality of God. The glorification of Jesus was in the crucifixion¹¹; the return of Jesus was in the imparting of the spirit on Easter evening. From Friday to Sunday is in fact 'a little while.' There is to be no further wait for the second coming¹² (Tales, pp.297-297).

"That is what resurrection means for John, and it is not something that occurred just in the life of Jesus; it occurs or it can occur in each of us. The Christian life is not about believing creds and being obedient to diving rules; it is about living, loving and being. Resurrection comes when we are freed to give our lives away, freed to love beyond the boundaries of our fears, free not only to be ourselves, but to empower all others to be themselves in the full, rich variety of

¹¹ This topic for a later chapter.

¹² Spong says on a previous page "The second coming is the birth of all of those who choose the light and enter into the mystical source of oneness with God" (p. 296).

our multifaceted humanity. Here prejudice dies. Here wholeness is tasted. Here resurrection becomes real" (p. 298). Where does Spong speak for everyone? - see footnote below...says all.

Marshall - Cosmic Biblical Scholarship

Gene Marshall was a pedagogue with the Ecumenical Institute (EI) in Chicago back in the early 70's when Dr. E. C. Rowand and I attended EI's Academy and this is where I met Gene while he was teaching. In my opinion his book *The Infinite Silence Walks Among Us* is his best work. Some of his re-designed or re-named terms are meant to be a more accessible language. He calls them "poetic" and claims less mis-communication when dealing with contemporary Christian theology so he says for instance "a poetic phrase like 'The Infinite Silence' can build up poetic power as it is used more and more in connection with real life experiences" (Silence, p. 1). Do you have a poetic name for God? What words express your idea of "God?"

Marshall uses the name "Ultimate Message" for Jesus (and of note Bultmann uses "The Revealer"). Marshall's renaming names is demonstrated with his interpretation of John 1:1-2: **When all finite things began, the Ultimate Message already was. The Ultimate Message dwelt with the Infinite Silence and what the Infinite Silence was the Ultimate Message was. The Ultimate Message, then, was with the Infinite Silence at the beginning...**

"The writer of the Fourth Gospel is not saying that some human person, Jesus, existed before the big bang. No, the gospel writer is speaking of cosmic realities...And the Ultimate Message is not Christianity. The Ultimate Message predates Christianity by at least 15 billion years. And if we welcome this Ultimate Message as the meaning and allegiance of our lives, we do not thereby become a Christian. *We become something far more wonderful than that. We become an Offspring of the Infinite Silence* (emphasis mine) (p. 3).

***Note below is the answer to question four - which really asks WHO can be Offspring? This paper finally answers the question for me. Now we know who, WHO the Infinite Silence loves.

Here it is:

"Do we think that there are no Hindus who are Offspring of the Infinite Silence?

Do we think that there are no Buddhists who are Offspring of the Infinite Silence?

Do we think that there are no Jews who are Offspring of the Infinite Silence?

Do we think that there are no atheists who are Offspring of the Infinite Silence?

Well, if we do, why do we think like that? Because we are Christian bigots! Because we confuse Offspring of the Infinite Silence with being members of some Christian group!" (p. 3).

"The entire gospel of John was written to clarify...the Ultimate Message with this single phrase: 'The Infinite Silence loves us' (p. 4)...And what does that mean? It means that the Infinite Silence, in spite of all our 'darkness,' welcomes us home to the 'Light' of our authentic life of Awe in the presence of the Infinite Silence (p. 4)...And this acceptance into our 'true home' is the Ultimate Message. Accepting this Message does not make you a Christian, it makes you a Son or Daughter of the Infinite Silence. A Hindu can accept the Ultimate Message and go being a Hindu. A Jew can accept the Ultimate Message and go on being a Jew. Yes, even an atheist can accept the Ultimate Message and go on **not** believing in most of what people mean by the word 'God.' The Ultimate Message is not the message of any particular religion. It is a cosmic message...Jesus was not a Christian. He was a Jew. and he did not ask us to become Jews or Christians. He asked us to become Offspring of the Infinite Silence (p. 6).

"So what is the Ultimate Message? The Infinite Silence loves you. No matter what religion...no matter what doctrines...no matter what petty moralities you attempt to keep or refuse to keep. the Infinite Silence loves you. That's it" (p. 6).

Lastly, here it is...you have now heard the altar call (more or less - we are not done yet) but Marshall's theme has a choice. Just like the Fourth Gospel, you have a choice. There is a judgment. You must believe - or not. You must have a spiritual rebirth - or not. You must chose - or not. Marshall says "But here is the hitch: each of us, you and I must consider whether or not we understand what it means to say that the Infinite Silence loves you or loves me. [Here are the questions I pointed to in my MEMO that we must answer.]

"Do you know in your own experience what is meant by the Infinite Silence?

"Do you know in an experiential manner what it means to say that the Infinite Silence loves you?

"Do you even know who 'you' are in the Spirit depths of your actuality?

If the answers to any of these questions is 'No' then you live in 'darkness' (p. 6).

Conclusion

Time to go. Easter is this weekend - I will tout the timing for this paper, as the last few comments are made and to help celebrate my 924 months of life, I hope this paper is like a big ole yellow tennis ball that has whizzed over into your court and left a big ole red burned 'tat' mark on you to get your attention. Now you must hit it back.

In these days and times if I were to get a tattoo it would go on my left forearm and say:

Ε ὡ εἶμι ἡ ἀ - of course this is the Greek for "I am the Resurrection." Of course

(again) this is a metaphor. Resurrection is a metaphor - a metaphor about an actuality.

Resurrection is "a prominent metaphor in the Christian heritage because if we die to our ego-enthralled finite network of relatedness and see we have a relationship with the Infinite Silence then we become what we are, and always were, and always will be...We have become our authentic life. We experienced 'resurrection from the dead' " (p. 50).

"And RESURRECTION is ETERNAL LIFE NOW. This chapter says absolutely nothing about immortality or about anything that might transpire after our physical deaths or at the end of time. This chapter is about the dynamics of the present moment - of each and every present moment. RESURRECTION is a dynamic within the ever-present NOW. NOW, only NOW, is the time when we can LIVE the RESURRECTED LIFE.

"And if we have been so 'resurrected,' then we have, like Jesus, become the RESURRECTION. We have been given the power to go to all the tombs around us and cry out in a LOUD VOICE, 'COME OUT.' " RESURRECTION walks up to us in the present moment and calls to us in a LOUD VOICE, 'Gary, Pat, Greg, Jim COME OUT of your tomb. COME OUT of that stinky fallen life that most people consider to be a hopeless case...It is our authenticity that makes our voice LOUD. Dead men and women hear us because they too, in their deepest essence, are the RESURRECTION" (p. 50).

Benediction (well, almost)

The Kysar¹³ quote below is from my final paper in my audit class last fall and uses specifically three terms used in this paper but said maybe in a less cosmic way, but for sure expressed in a way we can all see/feel/believe - I wish you luck...and thanks for reading this paper.

"The Fourth Evangelist found that the present is pregnant with possibility and wanted readers to be sensitive to those possibilities and to actualize them. Eternal life? It is yours now as you live a new kind of existence on the basis of the revelation of God in Christ. Resurrection? Being born to a new life as a result of faith in Christ is resurrection. Judgment? You are judging yourself by the kind of response you made to the proclamation of the Christian gospel. Parousia? Christ comes again when you believe in him" (Kysar, Maverick, p. 124).

¹³ Kysar, R. (2007). *John, the maverick Gospel* (3rd ed.). Louisville, KY: John Know Press.

TO: Greg, Jim, and Pat
 FR: Gary
 SU: Some ontological and realistic comments
 DA: March 20, 2015

This past week has been for me a rather hectic one and *I have made a decision to not play my griever card* but to spend the next couple of weeks working on a paper which just came into being and which will connect the dots from the late 60's and answer some questions I have not been able to answer.

The paper hopefully to get done (I am working on it) is for us all. We are all in the same problem of what to do with our lives, how to live authentically, how to make it to the end and have a good death, how to complete the task we were sent here to complete - like those who have died before us have completed - Jeanne being the most recent one to make it.

My paper will address these issues by using some new terms like Infinite Silence and Ultimate Message. I want to go from conventional to cosmic. I really believe I have some clarity on where we will go - or could go - and answer the questions we all have on "who" will go...

In short **the message is Infinite Silence loves us all**. Ultimate Message was there during the Big Bang and "all that came to be was alive with the Life of the Ultimate Message, and that Life was the Light for all humanity. That Light still shines on in the darkness: the darkness has never overcome it." Sounds like the Fourth Gospel (4G) doesn't it? Well, it is.

The paper will say we can become Offspring of the Infinite Silence. This means "other people" can become Offsprings regardless of their status, beliefs, religion, or sexual orientation. Of course, you will have to stick with me as I will go from the basic/literal three level universe to a cosmic adventure where a very small number will even want to read - much less believe. This paper will say All is Good, All is accepted, All is Received. This paper will say regardless of who you are, God loves you...warts and all. **THIS IS A BIG STATEMENT.**

Ah, you ask what the catch is. Good. There is one. Well, there is a hitch. I will explain but have discussed this in the last paper. John says it quite plain. There are some questions you, me, and all of us must answer with respect to Infinite Silence and if you answer NO to them you will still be in darkness. Therefore we must find the Light. This is a Spirit rebirth discussed literally in the third chapter of John. We must be reborn of the Spirit.

Then what? John again using a metaphoric tale in chapter 11 has the character Lazarus "COME OUT." I will answer what this means in more detail but it means RESURRECTION. This means for you, me, and all of us RESURRECTION is ETERNAL LIFE NOW.

Key words: Infinite Silence, Ultimate Message, Infinite Silence loves us, Offspring, Spirit rebirth, RESURRECTION, ETERNAL LIFE NOW.

Please tell me if you would like to read the final paper, or not. Just a simple YES or NO will be fine as I am off to be a MONK for the next few weeks.

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