

## John 11:1-16

*<sup>1</sup> Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.*

1,2 As the final Passover approached, Jesus and His disciples ministered on the other side of the Jordan River, an area ruled by a more benevolent leader. The family of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were friends with Jesus. Bethany is only a few miles outside of Jerusalem. It was a home where Jesus and His disciples could stay during their visits to Jerusalem. Mary was a common name, so John identifies her as the Mary in the next chapter who anointed Jesus' feet. (Not to be confused with Luke 7:36-38.)

*<sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."*

3 The relationship showed that Jesus had a real loving concern for individuals, not just mankind in general. (See verse 5.) We think of Jesus loving everyone, and that is true, but during the incarnation there were those who were especially close to Him. Is that not true now? Don't you want to be in that circle. While we are somewhat limited in the number of people whom we can say we truly love deeply, Jesus is not.

The fact that they knew where to send the letter shows a close relationship. They had probably seen Jesus heal people, so they asked for His help. We do the same in prayer, only our message arrives instantly.

*<sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."*

4 The Spirit revealed to Jesus that this would not end in death, but it would lead to God being glorified, and thus Jesus receiving glory through it as well. How easy it would have been to misunderstand Him when Lazarus died and say the prediction was not true. We sometimes draw the wrong conclusion because we too quickly judge.

Later He will be asked why He did not immediately come (John 11:21). We so often follow our first impulse or what we think others expect of us. Instead of listening to our Shepherd, we listen to others, or even our own anxieties. What an example Jesus set for us! Do not just rush off and do what you think should be done. Listen to the Shepherd. Wait on the Lord (Isaiah 30:21). He may impress on you to get up and go immediately or He may give you His peace that says to wait. It is a matter of where we are placing our trust.

Some illnesses do end in death. Ultimately, they are for God's glory as well. I have witnessed funerals where dozens of people came to Christ. I remember one in which the life of the one who died challenged everyone to live godlier lives. In every case, God has a plan, and His plan involves drawing others to Himself (Psalm 40:5).

God had a plan in this illness. It will be the seventh sign in John's Gospel. (Water to wine, healing the nobleman's son, healing the paralyzed man, feeding the 5000, walking on the water, healing the blind man, raising Lazarus/and His own resurrection)

*<sup>5</sup> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*

5,6 Why did not Jesus come? Verse 5 gives the reason for verse 6. He did not go because He loved them. That sounds contrary to reason, but Jesus has something more

than His mere physical presence to comfort a heart. He wants to take the family to a deeper place of faith.

When God is not answering our prayers, when it seems He is hard-hearted, we need to remember this passage. From the women's perspective, Jesus is not acting in love. From the heavenly perspective, Jesus is acting out of a greater love than they could comprehend. We can find ourselves with similar emotional conclusions. "What is God doing? Why does He not answer this prayer? Does He really care?"

You can put your name in the place of Martha, Mary, and their brother in verse 5. Jesus loves you. That is one reason He is allowing this painful thing in your life. He wants a deeper relationship with you. He is using this fallen world to draw you into a deeper relationship with Him. He is looking out for your eternal good. He is doing something greater than you would hope He would do because His love is greater than you can imagine.

*<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 seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?"*

7,8 Surely, they knew Jesus cared deeply for Lazarus, but they cared about their safety. Jesus was inclined to go immediately but had to wait on the Holy Spirit. The disciples did not want to go for fear for their own safety, and yet felt they had to follow Jesus. Whether you are anxious to go or dread going, the Lord's timing and direction are always best. Trusting God is always the right choice (Psalm 73:28).

*<sup>9</sup> Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. <sup>10</sup> But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."*

9,10 Jesus was telling the disciples that His time on earth is limited. While He can work among mankind in His incarnation, He must do the work of the One who sent Him. That work is to listen to and obey the Holy Spirit (the illumination). That is walking the light (John 12:35).

We should each be keenly aware that there is a mission for our life and the time to accomplish that mission is limited (Ephesians 5:8). To waste our days in disobedience to the Holy Spirit is to give up some of our allotted time to do God's work. The Holy Spirit gives light to our path through the Word of God (Psalm 119:105).

*<sup>11</sup> After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." <sup>12</sup> The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover."*

11,12 The Holy Spirit must have revealed to Jesus that Lazarus had died. Jesus is listening, but the disciples are not. They took Jesus' metaphor in a literal way.

*<sup>13</sup> Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died,*

13,14 The Hebrews used "sleep" as a polite term for death. We have a few of those expressions ourselves, like "passed away" or "gone on". The term "sleep" comes from the book of Daniel chapter 12 in which "those that sleep in the dust of the earth" wake and arise from death (Daniel 12:2).

*15 and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."*

15 Jesus realized that there was still some lack of belief in His disciples. He knew this seventh and final sign would help them to believe. He could see the reason the Spirit of God had Him remain on the other side of the Jordan until it was too late for man to do anything about it. In fact, we'll find next week that the time Jesus took to get there made it impossible (in the minds of educated Jewish people) for Lazarus to come back to life.

Jesus is speaking great faith in this passage. It is a long day's journey to Bethany. Lazarus is dead. Jesus said, "Let us go to him. I am glad we did not go earlier because this will help you believe." Believe what? Believe that in Him is life (John 1:4)! Believe that He is "the Resurrection and the Life" (John 11:25)!

*16 So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."*

16 I think perhaps Thomas missed the parable of Jesus about walking in the daylight. I suppose it was a noble thought, but it was a fatalistic view. It makes me wonder if he heard or understood anything that Jesus just said. Jesus just told them that God was going to be glorified, and through it, Jesus would be too.

We can be like Thomas. The Word of God is full of conditional promises, but we read them thinking that if we obey, we will be paying a big price. We don't even consider if Jesus will be glorified or how it will change us for the better. When Jesus says, "Take up your cross and follow me," instead of saying, "Let's go die with Him, how about saying, "Let's go live with Him!"

Questions: Where had Jesus been and why?

What would have been a natural reaction to the news?

What was the disciples' reaction? Why did Jesus react differently?

How did Jesus answer their fears? Why was it good for the disciples that Jesus waited?