

Walking in Light John 11:1-16 www.bible-sermons.org January 11, 2009

Jesus and His disciples had gone out of Judea to the other side of the Jordan, an area ruled by Philip the tetrarch. It was a safe place to minister while awaiting the final Passover. But while they were there, Jesus received word that His friend Lazarus was ill. Jesus had become acquainted with this family and stayed with them when He was visiting Jerusalem. It was apparently a wealthy and influential family with Martha as the owner of the home, the host. Mary had a much more outgoing personality and wide circle of friends. From what they said in the following passage, we can tell that they listened carefully to Jesus' teaching and believed Him.

The village of Bethany is just a few miles outside of Jerusalem. There are a number of other Marys in the New Testament, so John distinguished her as the one who, in the next chapter, will pour perfume on the Lord and wipe His feet with her hair. (not to be confused with another similar event, [Luke 7:36-38](#))

³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." When their brother was seriously ill, they knew where to turn. They had heard the stories and probably even witnessed His power to heal. There was such a close relationship between them that Jesus must have told them where He would be. They knew where to send a messenger.

Many of us do the same thing that these women did. When someone we love is ill, we turn to the One we know loves them. We send a message via prayer. Mary and Martha knew it would be at least a day's journey one way, but we know He hears us immediately.

⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus, in tune with the Holy Spirit, knew that the situation would not "end" in death. He did not say that it would not go through death. I've heard others quote this verse in an application to someone who was seriously ill. Sometimes they were in tune as well. Other times they were not. In Jesus' case, we can be sure He heard from the Father. ([John 8:28](#))

Jesus knew that it was for God's glory and that He would also be glorified through it. Remember, glory is the manifestation of the heart of God, when His attributes are seen. I don't know if Jesus could supernaturally see the entire scenario, or if He just had this assurance from the Holy Spirit without the details. Either way, He was walking in the light of the revelation that had been given to Him. He knew it must have been a serious illness. He loved Lazarus, yet He trusted the direction of the Holy Spirit to be the best course of action. ([Proverbs 3:5](#))

Later He will be asked why He didn't 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! Don't 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

Commented [notes1]: 36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.
37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume,
38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.
[Luke 7:36-38 \(NIV\)](#)

Commented [notes2]: 28 So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [the one I claim to be] and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me."
[John 8:28 \(NIV\)](#)

Commented [notes3]: 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
[Prov 3:5 \(NIV\)](#)

Commented [notes4]: 21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died."
[John 11:21 \(NIV\)](#)

Commented [notes5]: 21 Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."
[Isaiah 30:21 \(NIV\)](#)

and go immediately or He may give you a 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've witnessed funerals where dozens of people came to Christ. I remember one in which the life of the one that died challenged everyone to live a more godly life. 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) Jesus' obedience to the Holy Spirit will result in God being glorified, and through that, the Son of God will be glorified as well. It will show that *"in Him was life"*. It will verify Jesus' teaching in the last chapter, *"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."* Even death is not the final say! But for that lesson to have its greatest impact, Jesus had to wait. He had to trust His Father. He had to set aside man's natural inclinations to act. We men have an especially hard time standing back and not jumping in and trying to fix things. (Proverbs 20:22)

⁵ Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. The sisters were right when they said Lazarus was one that Jesus loved. The text tells us again so that when we face these kind of difficult decisions in life, decisions that involve a loved one, we know that Jesus has been there too. He showed us how to handle it. He obeyed the Holy Spirit. He trusted His Father.

Put yourself in that place. Who is your closest friend? Imagine receiving a message about them being on their deathbed? Jesus stayed two more days. Would you?

From the sister's perspective, it was impossible to understand why Jesus had not come. The timing in the story appears to indicate that Lazarus died around the time the message arrived. Martha and Mary would have been in great grief. Why didn't Jesus go? Verse 5 gives the reason for verse six. He didn't go because He loved them. That sounds contrary to reason, but Jesus has something more than His mere physical presence to comfort at 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 can comprehend. We can find ourselves with similar emotional conclusions. "What is God doing? Why doesn't He 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's allowing this painful thing in your life. He wants a deeper relationship with you. He's using this fallen world to draw you into a deeper relationship with Him. He's looking out for your eternal good. He's doing something greater than you would hope He would do because His love is greater than you can imagine.

Commented [notes6]: 5 Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare. Psalms 40:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 22 Do not say, "I'll pay you back for this wrong!" Wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you. Prov 20:22 (NIV)

Finally, he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."⁸ "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" "Don't you remember the attempts to stone you? There is a reason that we left the territory." 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 didn't 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)

Commented [notes8]: 28 But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds. Psalms 73:28 (NIV)

To their voice of fear, ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. ¹⁰ It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light." The Hebrew day was divided into 12 parts of daylight. The summer hours were longer than the winter hours. One would rise with the sun and begin working and end their workday as darkness set in. In an era with limited manmade lighting, it was the practical thing to do. That limited your day and meant you had to accomplish what needed to be done in those daylight hours. 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)

Commented [notes9]: 35 Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. John 12:35 (NIV)

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) We must listen and act on what is given us while we are here in this short experience of earthly life.

Commented [notes10]: 8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light Eph 5:8 (NIV)

For Jesus to go early would have been to walk in darkness and stumble. To listen to the disciples' fear and not go would be to waste the daylight hours. What peace the believer should have when he or she knows that they are walking in the light, making use of the limited daylight hours we have. We can be sure that the LORD will guide our steps and make our actions bear fruit that lasts. (Proverbs 3:6)

Commented [notes11]: 105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. Psalms 119:105 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. [Prov 3:6 (NIV)

That little parable begs the question, "Are we walking in the daylight? Do we hear from the Holy Spirit and follow His leading as opposed to our natural inclinations? Do natural impulses and fear dictate our decisions?" In my personal devotions, I have noticed that one of the things that the LORD had against the nation of Judah in the books of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 6:10) and Zephaniah (Zephaniah 3:2), is that they refused to listen to the LORD, nor did they trust in the LORD. God had spoken through His Word, but they refused to listen. He spoke through His prophets, but they turned away or killed them. He speaks today through His Word and the Holy Spirit. Are we listening? Do we trust Him? Or are we self-reliant?

Commented [notes13]: 10 To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the LORD is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it. Jer 6:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: Zephaniah 3:2 (NIV) 2 She obeys no one, she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the LORD, she does not draw near to her God.

Certainly our nation on the whole, like Judah of old, has quit listening to the LORD and His Word. Our financial crisis came about because we did not listen to the LORD or hear His Word. He tells us not to owe any man anything. (Romans 13:8) He tells us we should not covet. (Exodus 20:17) It is clear from the Word that we should enjoy the production of our own hands, not demand that others give us what we

Commented [notes15]: 8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. Romans 13:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Ex 20:17 (NIV)

desire and more than we earn. (Ecclesiastes 2:24) But most have ignored that and given in to our greedy hearts. (Proverbs 30:15)

Now, in the midst of the crisis, is there a national day of prayer seeking God and repenting? Even the idea today would be laughed at. Religious leaders would even argue about whether or not it was appropriate. Instead, we have turned to borrowing to solve the crisis. Isn't that what started the crisis? Home buyers borrowed more than they could afford hoping the value of housing would increase, which created a crisis, and now the Government wants to solve it by borrowing more than the nation can afford hoping for economic growth. Every one of us now owes \$35,000 dollars as our share of the national debt and the plan is to vastly increase that amount. For the past 25 years the godly leaders have told us to be debt free. Did we listen?

I'm not beating us up over the past to condemn us. I'm reminding us of where we have failed so we will see the broader implications for our daily life. If we don't want to continue to stumble around, we need to walk in the light. We can go through all our religious routine, but if we don't let the Word and the Holy Spirit direct our steps, which is to walk in the daylight, we are going to stumble. When we walk in the light we have no fear! This is what is crippling the world today. We should fear if we are relying on our own solutions and ignoring God's Word. But if you are walking in the light of day, you need not fear stumbling. God will guide you and keep you through whatever comes your way. (Isaiah 43:2)

You will turn to the one you trust. If you trust in yourself, that is where you will turn first. There are some amazing promises in Scripture to those who trust in the LORD. Keep in mind that we are talking about trusting in the LORD when a loved one passes on. *A call to trust in God is central to biblical religion (Psalms 62:8; 115:9-11; Isaiah 26:3-4; cp. 30:15). The Bible offers great promises to those who find such security in God and in him alone: deliverance from enemies (Psalms 22:4-5; cp. 25:1-2; 28:7; 31:14-15; 86:2; Jeremiah 39:18); answered prayer (1 Chronicles 5:20); straight paths for life (Proverbs 3:5-6); joy and gladness (Psalms 16:9; 33:21); inner peace and absence of fear (Psalms 4:8).*— New American Commentary

¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." ¹² His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." The Holy Spirit must have revealed to Jesus that Lazarus had died. Jesus is listening. The disciples are not. Of course, they are not yet filled with the Holy Spirit. (John 14:17) As is so often the case in John, Jesus is saying something in a metaphorical way, yet taken literally by those who hear Him. They think Jesus means sleeping, and sleeping often helps one recover from illness. They are happy to interpret that as the need not to go back to the danger near Jerusalem.

¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. ¹⁴ So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, Jesus had to spell it out for them. The Hebrews used "sleep" as a polite term for death. We have a few of those 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

Commented [notes17]: 24 A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, Eccl 2:24 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 15 "The leech has two daughters. 'Give! Give!' they cry. "There are three things that are never satisfied, four that never say, 'Enough!': Prov 30:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. Isaiah 43:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 8 Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. Selah Psalms 62:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 9 O house of Israel, trust in the LORD-- he is their help and shield. 10 O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD-- he is their help and shield. 11 You who fear him, trust in the LORD-- he is their help and shield. Psalms 115:9-11 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he tr... [1]

Commented [notes23]: 15 This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentanc... [2]

Commented [notes24]: 4 In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. ... [3]

Commented [notes25]: 1 To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul; ... [4]

Commented [notes26]: 7 The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am he... [5]

Commented [notes27]: 14 But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." ... [6]

Commented [notes28]: 2 Guard my life, for I am devoted to you. You are my God; save your servan... [7]

Commented [notes29]: 18 I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, bec... [8]

Commented [notes30]: 20 They were helped in fighting them, and God handed the Hagarites and a... [9]

Commented [notes31]: 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understandi... [10]

Commented [notes32]: 9 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest se... [11]

Commented [notes33]: 21 In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. ... [12]

Commented [notes34]: 8 I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in ... [13]

Commented [notes35]: 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees ... [14]

arise from death. (Daniel 12:2) The doctrine of soul sleep comes out of the Daniel text and a passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:14. This is not a major issue, and if you choose to disagree, I won't hold it against you. This passage demonstrates for us that sleep is used for the word "death". It is not teaching the doctrine of our soul sleeping until the resurrection. Our physical body does stay in the earth "asleep" so to speak until resurrection, but our soul is immediately with God. The Apostle Paul said clearly that he desired to die and be with Christ rather than to go on living. (Philippians 1:23) He didn't say "die and go to sleep until the resurrection". The great cloud of witnesses about us are not just angels, they include the saints of Hebrews 11. (Hebrews 12:1) They are not asleep. They are with the LORD and are cheering us on.

Commented [notes36]: 2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Dan 12:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes37]: 13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 1 Thess 4:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes38]: 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; Phil 1:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes39]: 1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Heb 12:1 (NIV)

15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him. 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 days journey to Bethany. Lazarus is dead. Jesus said, "Let's go to him. I'm glad we didn't 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) Jesus knew He would raise Lazarus from the dead through the power of God. He didn't think God might answer His prayer. He knew God would, and that the result would be the disciples entering into greater faith in Him.

Commented [notes40]: 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. John 1:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes41]: 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; John 11:25 (NIV)

16 Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." 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 pessimistic and fatalistic view. It makes me wonder if he heard or understood anything of what Jesus just said. Jesus just told them that God was going to be glorified and through it Jesus would be too. He said He was glad that it happened this way so they would believe. Thomas response, "Oh well, if He is determined to go, then lets go die with Jesus." It reminds me of a little child exaggerating the affect obeying his parents' command will have on his life. Do you suppose Thomas was a drama king?

"If I say 'Yes!' to Jesus, I'll probably end up a missionary in some rat infested, cockroach covered third world country. If I get up every morning to get in the Word, I'll be so tired through the day I'll probably get sick. If I forgive that person they'll just walk all over me and do it again." It's our way of saying, "Let us go, that we may die with Him". It's our way of being our own drama king or queen. Where is our trust in the LORD and His promises? Do we hear what He said in His Word? Do we believe Him? Are we listening to the Holy Spirit? We have been given the greatest mission on this planet, the power to follow through, and the promises that guarantee ultimate success. Who are you trusting this morning? The daylight hours are limited. If you'll walk in the light you won't stumble. Let's start walking? Amen?

Page 4: [1] Commented [notes22] Paul Wallace

3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.
4 Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.
Isaiah 26:3-4 (NIV)

Page 4: [2] Commented [notes23] Paul Wallace

15 This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.
Isaiah 30:15 (NIV)

Page 4: [3] Commented [notes24] Paul Wallace

4 In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.
5 They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.
Psalms 22:4-5 (NIV)

Page 4: [4] Commented [notes25] Paul Wallace

1 To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul;
2 in you I trust, O my God. Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.
Psalms 25:1-2 (NIV)

Page 4: [5] Commented [notes26] Paul Wallace

7 The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.
Psalms 28:7 (NIV)

Page 4: [6] Commented [notes27] Paul Wallace

14 But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God."
15 My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.
Psalms 31:14-15 (NIV)

Page 4: [7] Commented [notes28] Paul Wallace

2 Guard my life, for I am devoted to you. You are my God; save your servant who trusts in you.
Psalms 86:2 (NIV)

Page 4: [8] Commented [notes29] Paul Wallace

18 I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me, declares the LORD."
Jer 39:18 (NIV)

Page 4: [9] Commented [notes30] Paul Wallace

20 They were helped in fighting them, and God handed the Hagarites and all their allies over to them, because they cried out to him during the battle. He answered their prayers, because they trusted in him.
1 Chron 5:20 (NIV)

Page 4: [10] Commented [notes31] Paul Wallace

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.
Prov 3:5-6 (NIV)

Page 4: [11] Commented [notes32] Paul Wallace

9 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure,
Psalms 16:9 (NIV)

Page 4: [12] Commented [notes33] Paul Wallace

21 In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.
Psalms 33:21 (NIV)

Page 4: [13] Commented [notes34] Paul Wallace

8 I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.
Psalms 4:8 (NIV)

Page 4: [14] Commented [notes35] Paul Wallace

17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him.
But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.
John 14:17 (NIV)