

SO THAT GOD'S SON MAY BE GLORIFIED

John 11:1-16

Key Verse: 11:4

“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.’”

In John’s gospel, raising Lazarus from the dead is the climax of Jesus’ earthly ministry and a prelude of Jesus’ own resurrection. Jesus revealed that he is the resurrection and the life, an aspect of his deity that his people had not experienced before. People assume that death is the final destiny of mankind. Under this assumption we suffer from fear, sorrow, anxiety, a sense of futility and failure. This leads us to a pleasure-seeking lifestyle which wastes our precious lives. Jesus wants us to believe that our destiny is not death but resurrection and life. This is not just a conception in our minds; it is something we experience with Jesus in our personal lives. When we do, we can grow in faith, a faith that is alive and dynamic. We can also grow in our love relationship with God, and have a sense of God’s victory. Most importantly, God’s glory is revealed.

To the people in this event, Lazarus’ sickness was serious and of utmost urgency; it was a matter of life and death. We have the same kinds of experiences in our own lives. They are very personal. When we face serious matters, we easily become fearful, sorrowful and anxious, and fall into a sense of failure. But from Jesus’ point of view, this is the opportunity for us to experience who Jesus really is in a way that we had not done before. Jesus wants us to grow in faith and experience that he can do even more than we ask or imagine. Let’s learn of Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life, so that we may have real victory in our lives for the glory of God.

First, “This sickness will not end in death” (1-4). This story begins with sad news: a man named Lazarus was sick (1). Who was Lazarus? He was from Bethany, a small village on the outskirts of Jerusalem. He was the brother of Mary and Martha. Mary seems to be a very romantic, quiet and meditative woman, who loved to sit at Jesus’ feet listening to his teachings (Lk 10:39). She later poured out her heart and treasure upon Jesus in an expression of gratitude and love (2). Martha, on the other hand, was a hard worker who managed practical matters very well. She was generous, and had opened their home to Jesus (Lk 10:38). We don’t know much about Lazarus except that he was sick. There is no mention of parents. It seems that these three siblings lived together. Luke tells us that Jesus often stopped by this home and had a very personal relationship with them (Lk 10:38).

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In that society, Lazarus' role as the only male was very important. So for him to be sick was a real crisis for this family. We can imagine how it happened. Perhaps Lazarus had felt tired and run down after a day of hard work. So he visited the doctor for some cold medicine and was told that he had cancer in advanced stages. The doctors could do nothing to heal him. It was time to put his affairs in order, for he would die soon. Anyone else might have given up at this point, but the sisters found hope in Jesus who had healed many sick people. So they sent an emergency text message to Jesus, saying, **“Lord, the one you love is sick”** (3). They expected Jesus to drop everything he was doing and come immediately to help them. Here we can realize that the people Jesus loves, still become sick or poor or have a hard time. Unbelievers may despair over these things; however, Jesus' people can cry out to him, like the sisters did. Such times are the opportunity to draw closer to Jesus and learn from him. That is why Psalm 119:71 says, **“It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn from your decrees.”**

How did Jesus respond? Verse 4 says, **“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.’”** To his family members, Lazarus' sickness seemed to be misfortune. But to Jesus it was not misfortune. It was the opportunity to reveal God’s glory. Especially, Jesus would reveal that he is the Son of God. Often, after experiencing a tragic event, the first words out of our mouths are, “Why me? Why did this happen to me?” Some young people from troubled homes, not knowing one or both of their parents ask, “Why me?” On the other hand, some young people with two God-fearing parents who love their children wholeheartedly ask, “Why me?” Some people ask, “Why me? Why was I born into such a poor family that I cannot buy new school clothes, or a used car like other kids?” Others groan, “Why me? Why was I born into this rich, snobby family which has totally spoiled me?” In fact, it may be that everyone has “Why me?” in their hearts. This “why me?” causes us to doubt God’s love and become angry at him. We feel that life is unfair and fall into sorrow and depression. Then we become powerless. At such times, hearing theological explanations about the meaning of suffering do not help us much. People’s comfort does not really heal our hearts. But when we come to God personally and hear his voice, we can find true comfort, assurance of his love, and his greater purpose for us. So the time of hardship and trial is the time to experience God’s love and power. Then God can reveal himself in and through us and receive glory.

Scott Hamilton won an Olympic gold medal in men’s figure skating in 1984. Shortly after that, his mother died from cancer. She had been his greatest supporter and he missed her a lot. Right after that Scott himself was diagnosed with cancer. It

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was too much for him to bear. At that time, a woman who later became his wife helped him go to a Christian pastor for counseling. The pastor explained that God loved him and would help him discover the truth. Scott accepted it; he began to seek God. In the course of time, he was healed of cancer, he married and even had a child. But soon after, he was found to have a brain tumor. As he told his wife, she began to pray. Then Scott experienced the most powerful expression of God's presence he had ever felt. Through surgery the tumor was successfully removed. It was discovered that he had this tumor from birth, and that it had stunted his growth. One reason for his skating success was his short height. Scott realized that because of the tumor he became a world champion. So he thanked God for the tumor. About six years after this, he was found to have another brain tumor. This too was successfully removed. Through all of this, Scott grew closer to the Lord and now has confidence that with Jesus he can go through all things. In this way he has been used to glorify God in his sickness. In Jesus there is no misfortune. In Jesus we can find the meaning and purpose in any sickness or tragedy to glorify God.

Second, Jesus loved them and delayed (5-6). Verse 5 says, **“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.”** To us it seems that since Jesus loved the family, he would drop everything to go help them in their time of need. Or he could have healed Lazarus with his word, from a distance, as he had the royal official's son (4:50). But to our surprise, he stayed where he was two more days. It was not because he was too busy; it was a deliberate delay for their sake. Here we learn two things about Jesus' love.

In the first place, Jesus wanted to give them the best gift, that is, resurrection faith. If Jesus had healed Lazarus immediately, it would solve their problem for the time being. However, Lazarus would become sick again, and they would face the same trial again. Furthermore, they would not experience Jesus as God Incarnate. Their relationship with Jesus would remain on a human level. Jesus wanted them to know that he is God who raises the dead and experience this in a way that would transform their lives. Then, whenever a problem came, they could ask Jesus, who is God Almighty, for help. This would solve their problem from the root. It was the best blessing Jesus could give. Practicing this kind of love requires bearing pain and misunderstanding. For Lazarus it meant experiencing the pain of death. For the sisters it meant losing their only brother and the leader of their family. This would bring them sorrow and deep despair for a time. Jesus' point was not just to solve their problem, but to help them to have resurrection faith and to grow in a deep love relationship with him. In the same way Jesus wants to give us the best gift. Everybody wants to receive a gift, especially during a holiday

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season. What kind of gift do you want? A new I-phone or I-pad? New clothes? A gift card from Best Buy? How about resurrection faith? That is the best gift. But we should know that Jesus gives this gift through discipline and trial. One man was trapped in the high mountains by accident. As a result, he lost one of his legs. But in the midst of the trial he met Jesus who gave him new life. After being rescued, he said, "Losing a leg is nothing. I gained the best gift: resurrection faith."

In the second place, God's time is best. In order to give the best gift, Jesus gives it at the right time. His delay did not mean that he did not love them. Rather, it was the expression of his love. By remaining two more days, Jesus arrived at Lazarus' tomb on the fourth day. In Jewish thought, after a person died, their spirit would remain around the body for as long as three days. But by the fourth day it was gone. That meant the person was finally dead and there was no hope for them to come back. Thus by delaying, Jesus let Lazarus and his sisters experience the full measure of death. Of course, it was painful. But without death there is no resurrection. Here we learn that to gain resurrection faith we need to persevere through trial and patiently wait on God's time. There have been many heroes and heroines of faith who have done this, like Monica, the mother of St. Augustine. She prayed 17 years for him and finally he was changed from a hedonist into a Christian. He became one of the most influential Christian leaders of all time. He is still unsurpassed in our time. So parents of wayward children: keep on praying, patiently and with hope, until God's time comes. God is the best of time-keepers. He created time; he is never late for his appointments.

Third, anyone who walks in the light of Jesus will not stumble (7-16). After waiting two days, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." To the disciples this was not good news. They said, "But Rabbi, a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?" They still had in their minds the image of snarling religious leaders, sneering at Jesus with rocks in their hands to throw at him. They even had nightmares about this. To be precise, they were fearful. And at the root of their fear was the fear of death. This paralyzed their minds and hearts and made them powerless. In this way they were intimidated by the devil inwardly.

What did Jesus do for them? **In the first place, Jesus helped them to walk by his light (9-10).** Jesus explained their problem and its solution through a metaphor. He said, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light" (9-10). Here walking in the daylight means walking with Jesus' light in one's heart. The reason

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people stumble is that there is no light. It is not because of outward threats, but because of inner darkness, such as fear, anxiety or sorrow. These cause us to walk at night; then we can stumble. For the disciples, their biggest problem was fear. Fear has always been a problem for mankind. Fear makes people cowardly and ungodly. Someone has counted 530 kinds of fears or phobias. Included are cyberphobia, that is the fear of computers, decidophobia—fear of making decisions, ebephobia—fear of teenagers, gamophobia—fear of marriage, gynephobia—fear of women, and phobophobia, that is, fear of fears. We probably know more about fear today than at any time in the past. But analyzing fear has not helped us to overcome fear; it has made us more fearful. Ultimately, fear is rooted in the power of death. The purpose of Jesus' coming into the world was to free us from the fear of death. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, **“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”** Jesus did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (2 Ti 1:7). When Jesus, who is the light of the world, is in our hearts, we can go anywhere without fear. Even if we walk through the valley of the shadow of death we will fear no evil, for Jesus is with us (Ps 23:4). The book of Acts tells us that the disciples became great gospel messengers when the Spirit of Jesus was upon them. They could proclaim a clear, convicting message even to the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem. With Jesus' light in his heart, St. Paul said, **“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed”** (2 Cor 4:8-9).

In the second place, Jesus helped them to experience resurrection faith (11-16). After Jesus had said this, he went on to tell them, **“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”** Jesus called Lazarus “our friend.” We are Jesus' friends when we do what Jesus commands us, that is, to love one another (15:13-14). Jesus was going to wake up his friend Lazarus. Here we learn Jesus' view of death; it is like sleep. I like to sleep. Sleep is very good for us. According to researchers, sleeping well improves memory, increases life span, curbs inflammation, spurs creativity, strengthens endurance, improves grades, sharpens attention, helps to lose body fat, lowers stress, avoids accidents and safeguards against depression.¹ To Jesus, death is like sleeping. The Bible says that believers who die have fallen asleep (1 Cor 15:6,18; 1 Th 4:14). Revelation 14:13 says, **“Then I heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest**

¹ http://www.health.com/health/gallery/0,,20459221_12,00.html

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from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.” In Jesus, death is true rest. It is also the door to the glorious kingdom of God. D.L. Moody said, “One day the newspapers will say that D.L. Moody died. Don’t believe it. I will be more alive at that moment than I have ever been before.” Just before he died, Mr. Moody said, “Earth recedes. Heaven opens before me. If this is death, it is sweet! There is no valley here. God is calling me, and I must go. I have been within the gates. This is my triumph; this is my coronation day! It is glorious!”

Though Jesus had taught clearly that death is like sweet sleep, the disciples were puzzled by his words. They said, **“Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better”** (12). So Jesus told them plainly, **“Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him”** (14-15). Jesus wanted to give his disciples his best gift, resurrection faith. With resurrection faith they could overcome the world and live a victorious life. According to Christian history they spread the gospel all over the world in their own generation. They became world changers.

However, at that moment, Thomas still did not understand Jesus’ words. He did not see the victory that was coming, but only death. Still, he was loyal to Jesus and said, **“Let us also go, that we may die with him”** (16). Some people admire Thomas’ human loyalty to Jesus. But it cannot last. We need resurrection faith. When we have resurrection faith we can know Jesus better through all kinds of hardships and trials. We can overcome the world and live a victorious life and render glory to God. Let’s learn resurrection faith, whatever we may be experiencing in our lives.