

## 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.’”

Every day we hear of someone who became sick, suffers and dies from some kind of disease. Last week Sh. Noah Zaikin from Kiev was ready to get on a plane and come to Chicago for spiritual revival. At that moment, his brother-in-law Yaroslav, who had been sick with blood cancer, passed away at the age of 35. So, Noah had to postpone his trip. Sickness and death constantly break into our daily lives and disrupt everything. Facing the reality of death causes people to suffer mentally, emotionally and spiritually. One godly woman who has worshiped the Lord for many years experienced her elderly mother’s death. Though it was expected, the reality struck her so hard that she was crushed. As Dr. Lee used to say, “Mankind is swimming in a sea of death.” Is there any hope? Sure, there is hope! In today’s passage Jesus helps his disciples see beyond death to his glory through resurrection. Let’s listen carefully to Jesus’ words and have the hope that he wants to give us.

First, it is for God’s glory (1-4). We have studied six of Jesus’ seven signs in John’s gospel. Now we come to the final one, the climax. It is the raising of Lazarus from the dead, a prelude of Jesus’ own resurrection. Jesus revealed his glory as the Son of God so that we may put our faith in him, overcome the power of death, and live a vibrant life for the glory of God.

In verse 1 the author introduces Lazarus and his family. The only mention of this Lazarus in the Bible is in John chapters 11-12. We know very little about him. All we know is that he became very sick. We don’t know why or what kind of sickness it was. Yet, clearly, his sickness was critical. We also know that he lived in Bethany, which was less than two miles from Jerusalem (17). And he was the brother of Martha and Mary. When Jesus

visited Jerusalem, he often stopped by the house of Martha and Mary. They opened their home to Jesus and his disciples for eating fellowship and Bible study (Lk 10:38-42). We know the story of Martha and Mary very well. Martha is practical, hardworking, and busy, while Mary is romantic, passionate, and attentive, but not practical. We usually pray to be like Mary, not Martha. But we should know that without Martha there would be no home to open for Jesus. Thank God for the Marthas among us!

The most striking thing about Martha and Mary is that they were dearly loved by Jesus, and they loved Jesus. In verse 2, the author reminds us of Mary's extravagant act of pouring costly perfume on Jesus' feet and wiping them with her hair. This event was so famous that the author assumes everyone knew it. It underscores the intimate love relationship between Jesus and this family, as well as his identity as the one worthy of worship. When Lazarus became sick, the sisters were sure that Jesus would come immediately and heal him. So, their message was simple: "Lord, the one you love is sick" (3). The words "the one you love" imply that their love relationship was very strong. They felt fully loved by Jesus. It is important for us to feel the love of Jesus in this way. Some people, though Jesus loves them to the point of dying for them, do not feel fully loved by Jesus. As a result, their lives become dry and burdensome. This love relationship with Jesus is the basis of our Christian life. This is not built up in a day, but over time as we interact with Jesus. When we have this kind of relationship, we can receive faith training from Jesus.

How did Jesus respond to the sisters' urgent notice? Let's read verse 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.'" The words, "This sickness will not end in death," tell us that Jesus is the Lord of life. In fact, as we know, Lazarus did die. But to Jesus that was not the end. Jesus could call him back from death to life again. Jesus is the author of life and the giver of eternal life. Not only can he give life, but he can also take it away. As Job confessed, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21b). Through the sickness of Lazarus, Jesus wanted to display God's glory. It was because his motive and life purpose were to glorify God in all that he did. Whenever Jesus performed a

miraculous sign, it was done to glorify God--not just to satisfy human need, or to display his own power. Jesus sought God's glory first, and as he did so, his own glory was revealed as the Son of God. Jesus never performed signs when people demanded them with a wrong motive. For example, when a crowd of people demanded bread as the condition to believe in him, Jesus refused to give it (6:15,25-71). Jesus always sought God's glory first, in any situation. When problems come, we tend to seek solutions first with a great sense of urgency. But in any situation, we should seek God's glory first because glorifying God is our life purpose. Paul said, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1Co 10:31). Let's seek God's glory first.

Seeking God's glory is great. However, we sometimes feel that if we seek God's glory, we become nothing because it is unrelated to us. That's not true. Jesus said, "...so that God's Son may be glorified through it." When Jesus honored God, God honored him. How? Jesus said in John 5:20-21, "For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it." Jesus demonstrated the life-giving power of God when he raised Lazarus from the dead. In the same way, Jesus gives eternal life to those who believe that he is the Messiah, the Son of God (Jn 10:28; 20:31). Jesus teaches us that seeking God's glory leads us to true blessing. Are you seeking God's glory or your own glory? Usually, human beings seek their own glory, out of their sinful pride. They see others as steppingstones on their way to success. So, they hurt others and even crush them. However, when we seek God's glory, we can see others from God's point of view. We can respect them, love them and serve them. Yesterday, we had the wedding of Michael and Anna Diaz. At one time, Anna saw her parents' small house church from a human point of view, and she was rather ashamed. But after she met Jesus and began to seek God's glory, she could see them from God's point of view. She was amazed at the life-giving beauty of God in their house church and came to deeply respect her parents as God's servants. Now she is proud of their faith, devotion and sacrifice for the glory of God. Jesus said, "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me"

(Jn 12:26). When we live for the glory of God, our lives become truly glorious. We will be honored by God.

Second, so that you may believe (5-16). In this section, we can think about three key points: true love (5-6), overcoming fear (7-10), and resurrection faith (11-16).

The first point is true love (5-6). Verses 5 and 6 say, "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days ..." At first glance, these verses seem to be contradictory. Since Jesus loved them, we would expect him to rush to heal Lazarus right away. Why wait two more days? Lazarus was about to die. This was hard for the family to understand. They could have thought, "Why did Jesus, who regularly attended meals, not come when we needed him most?" Their attitude toward Jesus would become sour. Nevertheless, Jesus stayed where he was two more days, until Lazarus was dead and in the tomb. In this event we can see that Jesus' love required bearing pain, not only for the family members, but also for Jesus. People say that love is a feeling. If that is true, then when we do not feel love, there is no love. But here we see that even though Jesus loved them, they did not feel loved at that moment. Rather, they experienced pain and sorrow. Even so, Jesus loved them just the same as he always had. In fact, Jesus' love is deeper and higher than we imagine. In his great love, Jesus wanted to give them the best gift, resurrection faith. For this purpose, Jesus bore the pain of their misunderstanding.

In what sense is resurrection faith the best gift? Because it gives us the victory over our greatest enemy, death. Death is the great horror which sin has produced (Ro 5:12; Ja 1:15). Physical death is the divine lesson which teaches us what sin does in the spiritual realm. As physical death ends life and separates people, so spiritual death is the loss of life which is in God and separation from him (Jn 1:4). Death is the consequence of sin which is at the root of all human misery. Yet resurrection faith solves this problem completely and gives us new life in Jesus with everlasting joy and peace. Jesus loved us so much that he died on the cross for our sins and rose again.

This is fact. It is true love. We should not live only by our feelings but accept the facts of what Jesus has done for us.

The second point is overcoming fear (7-10). After two days, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea" (7). Their immediate response was, "But Rabbi..." Or, as the Message Bible says, "Rabbi, you can't do that." Jesus' proposal seemed crazy to them. They said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?" (8) They remembered that when Jesus declared that he and the Father are one, the Jewish leaders picked up stones to stone him (10:31,39). Jesus and his disciples had barely escaped with their lives. The disciples might have had nightmares of being stoned. They were very fearful. Where did this fear come from? On the surface, it was due to conflict with the religious leaders who wanted to execute Jesus. Fundamentally, they were afraid of death. This fear of death came into the world through the sin of disobedience to God's word (Ge 3:17-19; Ro 5:12). This fear of death produces all kinds of side effects, such as meaninglessness, anxiety, depression, despair, and hedonistic fatalism. The fear of death leads us to gloomy passivity and paralyzes us. When fear of death overcomes us we cannot challenge hardships. How can we deal with this fear?

To his fearful disciples, Jesus answered, "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 by night that they stumble, for they have no light" (9-10). Jesus taught them how to overcome fear by means of a metaphor. Figuratively speaking, walking in the daylight means to walk with Jesus, the light of the world. The reason people stumble is that they have no light. It is not because of the outer circumstance or threat, but because they have no light in themselves. Rather, they are in the darkness of fear. Fear makes people cowardly and ungodly. This fear is rooted in the power of death. Jesus' purpose of coming into the world was to break the power of the devil, who holds the power of death and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (Heb 2:14-15). As long as we follow Jesus, we will not die until God's appointed time. So, we don't need to be afraid of death.

The third point is that Jesus planted resurrection faith in the hearts of his disciples (11-16). Jesus went on to tell his disciples, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up” (11). Jesus referred to Lazarus as “our friend.” This tells us what kind of relationship Jesus has with people. Jesus makes us his friends (Jn 15:14). It is amazing that we can be friends with Jesus, the Creator God. What a friend we have in Jesus! Jesus described Lazarus’ death by saying, “he has fallen asleep.” Sleep is good. According to Harvard researchers, sleep plays a critical role in having a healthy immune system and metabolism, and enhancing memory and learning, and other vital functions.<sup>1</sup> Though sleep is good, we don’t want to sleep forever. We need to wake up at the right time. Jesus is the one who can wake us up. In Jesus, death is like having sweet sleep and waking up. When we die in the Lord, we are blessed. We will rest from our labor (Rev 14:13). It is the end of all our sufferings and pain. We will awaken in the presence of Jesus and live with him forever (Php 1:23). Furthermore, when Jesus comes again in glory, our bodies will be raised as imperishable, powerful, glorious and spiritual new bodies which are fit to inhabit heaven (1Co 15:42-44,48-53). We recite this every Sunday in the Apostle’s Creed: “I believe ... the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” What a hope! Let’s hold on to this hope!

Jesus’ disciples did not understand what Jesus was talking about. They said, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better” (12). Jesus did not get upset at their spiritual dullness (13). Rather, he proceeded to plant resurrection faith in them. He 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 took great pains to plant resurrection faith in his disciples. Why is it so important? Without resurrection faith we remain under the power of death, suffer from all of its symptoms and cannot be true witnesses of Jesus. Jesus was just about to leave this world, and his disciples would succeed his ministry. What they needed, more than any kind of method or skill, was resurrection faith. When they had resurrection faith, they preached the gospel boldly all over the world. They became world changers. But at that moment, Thomas did not understand what Jesus meant. He was ready to die

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<sup>1</sup> <http://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/healthy/matters/benefits-of-sleep>

for the cause, but his human loyalty would not enable him to be Jesus' witness. Let's remember that the Lord works through all our troubles to plant resurrection faith in our hearts. When trouble comes, let's not seek simply to get out of it, but find how to glorify God and grow in faith. May the Lord grant resurrection faith so that we may overcome all kinds of hardships, live a victorious life, and glorify God.