

John, Part 44: "When Jesus Shows Up Late"

John 11:1 ESV Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. **2** It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. **3** So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." **4** 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."

5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. **6** So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. **7** Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." **8** The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" **9** 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. **10** But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." **11** After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." **12** The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." **13** Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. **14** Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, **15** and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." **16** So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

- I. At long last we have come to the end of one episode in the book of John: Jesus' discourse with the Pharisees, which began in chapter 7 and continued through most of chapter 10.
 - A. Jesus left Jerusalem after the leaders attempted to accuse, arrest, and even execute him. So Jesus "went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained." (John 10:40)
 1. We're not certain of his exact location, but chapter 3 mentions Aenon near Salim as a place where John baptized, about 48 miles from Jerusalem.
 2. That was quite a distance for a culture that travelled mostly on foot!
 - B. While Jesus was there something serious happened in Bethany, basically a suburb of Jerusalem, where they had just left. Jesus' friend, Lazarus had become critically ill.
 1. One of the blessings of living in modern times is that for so many different medical problems, there are reliable and readily available treatments.
 2. But until the advent of modern medicine in the 20th century, sicknesses and injuries that seem to us now to constitute no serious threat (the flu, malaria, etc.) could easily result in mortality; and more often than not, they did.
 - C. The message of Lazarus' illness is brought to Jesus' attention by a messenger from his sisters, Mary and Martha. We don't know a lot about them, but we can say confidently that they were very precious to Jesus, and he to them. Chapter 12 will give us more details into the story eluded to in verse 2, in which Mary anointed Jesus with precious ointment, but let's briefly look at another story from Luke's gospel that tells us a little more about the character of these two.

D. **Luke 10:38 ESV** Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. **39** And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. **40** But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." **41** But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, **42** but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

1. I don't have time this morning to really break down this story, but notice what it teaches us about the character of these two friends of Jesus.
 - a) Martha was obviously a generous, hospitable, and servant-hearted woman. She made sacrifices to make sure that the people around her were loved and cared for. After all, she had invited Jesus and his disciples into her home, so that she could serve their needs.
 - b) Mary, on the other hand, was a fully convinced worshipper, and we'll see more about that in the next chapter. She was satisfied just to sit at the feet of Jesus and get lost in his presence and teaching.
- E. So service and worship are natural responses in the heart of true a Christ follower, and should be regarded as inseparable attributes in our lives.
- II. In John 11, Mary and Martha send a message to Jesus, and I love the way they worded it: "Jesus, **the one you love** is ill". I am convicted. Often I approach the Lord with the attitude that, "Lord, the one who messed up royally needs you!", but may God enable us to see those around us, those in the deepest pits of despair as "the ones that Jesus loves"!
 - A. In 1st Peter, Peter is talking to a group of Christians that is suffering real hard times. in the light of the trials they are suffering, Peter encourages them to do what Lazarus' sisters did: "Cast all your anxieties on Jesus". It is a beautiful invitation. But Peter's invitation is anchored in a marvelous truth. Cast all your anxieties on him, Peter says, "because he cares for you."
 1. 'Tis the grandest theme through the ages rung; 'Tis the grandest theme for a mortal tongue; 'Tis the grandest theme that the world e'er sung, "Our God is able to deliver thee." - William Ogden, "He is able to Deliver Thee", 1887
 2. Nothing on earth or in hell can stop the Lord Jesus from rescuing you - but he under no obligation to do so. The majesty of his saving power is that it is given to us based solely in the fact that he loves and cares for us!
 - B. Jesus was not intimidated by his friend's sickness. He, being God, was confident. While Lazarus may have (at that very moment!) been delirious with fever, or in agonizing pain, Jesus accurately predicts the outcome of the seemingly impossible situation. **"This illness does not lead to death."**
 1. Jesus does not express doubt or fear by saying "I **hope** his sickness doesn't end in death!" He also doesn't give in to fatalism by telling the sisters that "his thoughts and prayers are with them".
 2. Christ declares his wisdom and his sovereignty when, as Lazarus' Lord, he pronounces God's judgement on Lazarus' illness - "It will not end in death!"
 - C. How many of us have heard the voice of Jesus when we were sinking down into the despair of our own sin, or sickness, or trial - "It will not end in death!"

1. We must strive to look away from our circumstance, our sin, the deck that is stacked against us! Look to Jesus and live!
 2. Only Jesus gets to have the final word; not those who would harm me, not the devil, not even myself. And he says, "It will not end in death."
- D. Furthermore, Jesus gives the reason why it will not end in death: This sickness was not about Lazarus. It was about God (you heard me right!)! Jesus said about his close personal friend's deadly illness, **"It (the sickness) is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."**
1. As one who has surrendered your life, lock, stock and barrel to Jesus Christ, you must surrender the right to put your life in context. You can not say "this happened to me **because...**" Only God gets to do that! Paul says "You have been bought with a price, you are not your own" so from here on out, only God gets to define the "why" of your circumstances.
 2. Remember the disciples looking on the blind man in John 9? "who sinned, Jesus? This man or his parents?" Jesus said neither had, but the God had a larger purpose of displaying his glory in the man.
- E. This truth might make you nervous! It may make you feel like a bug in a jar that God wants to experiment on! But can I tell you what the x-factor in this equation is? It's the fact that **God is good. God is always good. God is never not good.**
- III. You may have noticed them, But I want to point out three absurdities in our passage this morning. Jesus does not communicate like we communicate, because his thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Because of this, it can seem like Jesus is saying things that are untrue, or are contradictory, or maybe even a little insensitive. It is those kinds of statements that I am calling "absurd".
- A. We briefly spoke of the first one already. It is when Jesus says: **"This illness does not lead to death."** Amen Jesus! Our faith is soaring! But hold on! Do you remember what Jesus told the disciples later in verse 14? **"Lazarus has died"**.
1. Oops. Jesus got it wrong, didn't he? Now he has to go to Bethany and clear up this little embarrassment, right?
 - a) No! He said what he meant, and meant what he said. What are we missing here?
 - b) Simply this. No matter where you find yourself this morning, your story isn't over until Jesus says it's over. **Hebrews 12:2a ESV "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith (author and finisher - KJV)"**
 2. You may look dead, you may smell dead, you may be wrapped up like a mummy, with mourners surrounding your tomb, but if Jesus says you're not dead, you will live again!
 - a) Many people have counted themselves out; others might have told you that you're down for the count. You may have relapsed into the same old sin for the millionth time. You may have gotten the doctor's final grim prognosis. You may be so bankrupt that your books don't read "chapter 11" or "chapter 13" but "the end"! Your relationship with your spouse, your children, or your parents may be shattered in tiny pieces.
 - b) But if Christ the Lord says, "Lazarus! Come forth!" You **will** rise again!

3. This point is further illustrated when Lazarus has breathed his last and Jesus tells the disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." Protesting, they say, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover."
 - a) The disciples saw death as final and complete. But Jesus saw the **unseen realm** that scripture says is "more real" than the seen one. In the seen realm, people who sleep get up again and people who die don't.
 - b) But because Jesus saw the unseen realm, he saw Lazarus as merely sleeping. I have an alarm clock to tell me when it is no longer time to be asleep. Jesus was Lazarus' alarm clock. It wasn't time for Lazarus to be asleep, so Jesus was going to go wake him up.
- B. The second absurdity in this passage is the biggest one. First, though, let me give you an english lesson. The word "so" precedes an action that is rooted in previous information supplied. "I was hungry, **so** I went to lunch" - It is a "cause and effect" word. Got it? Now keep that in mind. as you read verses 5 & 6 again: "**Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.**" Did you catch the absurdity of that statement?
 1. "You were having a heart attack, **so** I didn't call an ambulance. You were on fire, **so** I didn't spray water on you." These statements make no sense. Nor does it make any sense when scripture says Jesus loved them, so when he heard his friend was sick unto death, he waited to go to them.
 - a) The context is that Christ loved that family! But the demonstration of that love seems very odd indeed! The text doesn't say he was hindered. The devil, the Pharisees, or the Romans had nothing to do with his delay! It is clear that he intentionally waited. He knew there was a need and didn't budge! But why! Because the Bible says he loved them.
 - b) You can put away your Greek dictionary and your commentaries. This scripture makes positively no sense...**unless**...you know who you have believed and are fully persuaded that he is able to keep what you have committed to him.
 2. Most people who are religiously affiliated in one way or another are seeking salvation. They are seeking a rescue, deliverance, healing. No one wants to go to hell, to die, to be oppressed, or to be sick. But what would you say if I said that orienting your life to seek those things is misguided at best.
 - a) What we need is a Savior, a Rescuer, a Deliverer, a Healer. And there is only one. His name is Jesus. You thought you needed something. But what you really need is someone.
 - b) Would your soul be satisfied to be rescued from hell if you could do it without Jesus? Would you be ok with being set free from your sickness, even if Jesus wasn't part of your healing?
 3. Pastor David has a friend in Austria where he grew up named Christoph. He was a young, successful man who was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. When people in his church offered to pray for his healing, he would politely refuse. He had determined that he didn't want to be merely healed if the result was that he didn't love and desire Jesus more.

- a) A person, not a healing, was his driving passion. I am happy to tell you today that because **at the point of death** he sought a Savior when he needed healing, God granted him both. He is 100% healed today.
 - b) Jesus wanted his beloved friends not to merely get **something**. He loved them way too much...so he waited to come to them. Mary had already chosen the better thing in Luke 10, (which was being in Jesus' presence). So Jesus was going to once again give her, Martha and Lazarus the better portion...himself; displaying all of his glory, glorifying the Father.
- C. Absurdity number 3 is similar. It is here where Jesus sounds completely insensitive to people who are hurting. **“Lazarus has died, and...I am glad that I was not there...”** Can you imagine if your friend said this? “Your loved one died. You lost your job. You were depressed...and I’m glad I wasn’t there.” I can only imagine that they wouldn’t be your friend for long!
1. But if you’re paying close attention to your Bible, you’ll see that is not **all** that Jesus said to his disciples before they left for Bethany. He said, **“Lazarus has died, and I’m glad for your sake that I was not there...”**
 - a) Jesus was about to do something, and what he was about to do would be for his glory, and would glorify the Father, but the disciples themselves and all who were to be witnesses of what was coming would be benefactors as well. His delay was not insensitive, it was for their sake.
 - b) I have lost count of how many times I have wanted to cry out “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?” in a moment when I felt abandoned or ignored by God. But I also cannot tell you how often I have discovered that the timing of God (including the delay) was “for my sake.”
 2. In the same passage from 1 Peter that I quoted earlier, the apostle says, **1 Peter 5:6 ESV “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you...”**
 - a) If there’s one thing I’ve demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt throughout my life, I have very little intuition for when it’s the “proper time” for deliverance, exaltation, healing, etc. But God does not share my lack of wisdom. His timing is always perfect.
 - b) But did you also notice the word “so” (like we saw earlier) in the 1st Peter verse? It says “Humble yourself under God’s mighty hand **so** he may exalt you at the proper time.” This is saying that God’s exaltation isn’t guaranteed. There is a pre-requisite; and that is our humility.
 3. We are told to humble ourselves which means that we acknowledge that he is God and we are not. We bow both the head and the knee in honor of his worth and superiority compared to our lack of holiness and power.
 - a) We are told to humble ourselves under “God’s mighty hand”. This recognizes the fact that all of the power to save us from our sin, our daily trials, persecutions, sicknesses, and confusion rests with him alone.
 - b) So how do you know if you’re doing this or not. Simple. If you are still operating under the delusion that the course of your life is in any way under your authority or control, if “you got this”, than you need to humble yourself under God’s mighty hand today.

4. But Jesus not only tells the disciples that his delay is for their benefit, he tells them exactly what that benefit is. **“Lazarus has died, and I’m glad *for your sake* that I was not there, *so that you may believe.*”**
 5. Our greatness need is that we believe. Believing is where salvation begins. **Acts 16:31 ESV** **“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”** But as I am growing and maturing in Christ I am realizing that my need to believe didn’t end when I acquiesced to some gospel sales-pitch years ago, but that I have been called to a life of constant and ever-increasing belief.
 - a) I don’t know how many times I am reading the Bible and I find the voice of the Holy Spirit saying to me, “Do you really believe this? Does your life demonstrate that you do?”
 - b) I am convinced as a man who has followed Christ for 30 years, who has dedicated my life to proclaiming the gospel of Jesus to others that my greatest enemy is unbelief. Far too often do I find it creeping in to my life!
 6. It happens when I believe my problem is out of God’s reach or that I am hidden from his eyes. It happens when I’d rather stay home and watch TV than gather with God’s church or help someone in need; when I’d rather lavish my resources on myself than invest them in the works of God’s kingdom. How often must I cry out to God like the man with the demon-possessed boy, “Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!”
- IV. But Jesus loved his disciples. He loved Mary and Martha, he loved Lazarus...so he waited. He wanted something so much better for them than just a mere healing. He wanted them to see his glory so that they might believe.
- A. What about you? Have the circumstances around you caused you not to believe? Are things, dreams, people around you dying while you keep checking your watch and saying, “where is he?”
 - B. His delay is for your sake that you might believe. To humble yourself under God’s mighty hand means to trust that is true. He is coming. At the proper time he will exalt you in a way you never expected...by giving you not a mere healing, a mere deliverance, a mere rescue, or even a mere resurrection, but by giving you himself.