

THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel

Part forty-three - Sunday, April 6th, 2014, 10:00 a.m.

Teaching #1721 - Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church

WHY WAS JESUS GLAD LAZARUS DIED?

John 11:1-27 - "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." [17] Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. [18] Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, [19] and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. [20] So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. [21] Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. [22] But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." [23] Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." [24] Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." [25] Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, [26] and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" [27] She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

The title of this teaching comes from Jesus' strange words to His disciples upon receiving word that Lazarus, His dear friend - *"...he whom you love" (3)* - was sick. Then Jesus delays going to Lazarus for two whole days, until finally Lazarus dies. It's at this point Jesus speaks these words to His disciples - John 11:14-15 - "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....'"

Now, put Jesus' words together with Martha's words upon Jesus' arrival at the home of Lazarus - *"...Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (21)*. So, as John records it, Martha says Lazarus would have been *healed* if Jesus had come. And I think Jesus *knows* this to be true. He knows He would have been moved into healing Lazarus if He had been there. He would have been moved by the pleading of Martha and Mary. And *that's* why Jesus actually says he was *glad* (15) He *wasn't* there.

There seems to be no way around the implication that Jesus admits things would have ended differently if He *had* been there earlier. Otherwise He would have no reason to say He was *glad* not to be there. If He wasn't going to *heal* Lazarus even if He had come right away there would be no *difference* whether Jesus was there earlier or not. He would have no specific reason to *prefer* Lazarus' death (being *glad* about it) if He was going to let him die either way. So there's no way of avoiding Jesus' words that He waited - and was *glad* He waited - until Lazarus died *instead* of healing him earlier on.

So we need to answer the title question *why* was Jesus glad He let Lazarus die *instead* of healing him of his sickness before we finish this teaching. There are lessons we will miss if we don't tackle this question.

1) THE GOAL OF THIS LAST "SIGN" MIRACLE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL IS THE MANIFESTATION OF THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER AND GOD THE SON

John 11:1-4 - "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.

As John records his order of events this is the last miracle performed by Jesus before His death. Some nameless messengers bring word from Mary and Martha to Jesus about their brother Lazarus. And immediately Jesus makes, totally unsolicited, this striking comment about the **purpose** of Lazarus' sickness and impending death.

And the point of Jesus' comments is the whole Lazarus event - right up to and including his death - is for an appointed purpose. It is all going to be a manifestation of glory for the Father and the Son. But that hardly closes the matter. Exactly **how** are both the Father and the Son glorified in this whole miracle? Is it just a matter of Jesus manifesting His great power and everyone being amazed?

And yes, that's certainly part of it. But I think we have to go right to the **end** of this chapter to see how this whole Lazarus miracle will **ultimately** glorify God the Father through God the Son:

John 11:47-53 - "So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. [48] If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." [49] But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. [50] Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." [51] He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied **that Jesus would die for the nation**, [52] and not for the nation only, **but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad**. [53] **So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.**"

Significantly, this final miracle recorded by John is a picture of Jesus' power over death. But even that is just a part of this miracle's significance. John also tells us plainly that, like nothing else Jesus did, **this** miracle paved the pathway to **Jesus' own death**. And John also tells us **that** death was **"for the nation"** (51), and for the **"children of God who are scattered abroad"** (52).

In John's theology the death of Jesus, God the Son, in obedience to the will of God the Father is the **ultimate** manifestation of divine glory. Jesus says as much in this very gospel - **John 17:1** - "When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; **glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you....**"

Lazarus' resurrection from the dead is going to serve as the final picture of Jesus' own mighty, magnetic death and resurrection, pulling those of faith along with Him through both to eternal life and joy. Through God's mighty grace the death and resurrection of Jesus will pull far more out of the tombs than the voice of Jesus calling out the single name of Lazarus. **That's** the picture of glory Jesus says will be manifested in this miracle. And, according to the final words of this chapter, this miracle accelerated the atoning death (and resurrection) of our Lord like nothing else previous.

So we've come around the long way to answering our opening question - **Why did Jesus say He was glad Lazarus died?** And we've opened this teaching by studying the middle portion of our text. Now we'll look at the beginning and the ending portions:

2) **DIVINE LOVE IN THE FACE OF DIVINE DELAY**

John 11:5-6 - "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."

Remember, the miracle John is about to record is the resurrection of a corpse - four days dead - from the grave. Why not just get to it? Just tell us how Jesus went to Bethany and, with nothing more than mentioning Lazarus' name, emptied a tomb?

Because John is a wise, old spiritual shepherd. He included this far more drab preamble to the miracle because he knows many future followers of Jesus will read his gospel. He has personally seen many of the other apostles executed for following their Lord. He knows he writes words for struggling churches. And he knows there are times when the **delay** of divine miracle can look for all the world like an **absence of divine care and love**.

John seems to know we will all face this. We, of course, have the benefit of John's complete story. **We** know Martha and Mary only have to wait another 48 hours for Jesus to arrive in majesty. But **they** don't know that. All they know is they prayed. They sent for help. They waited. And their beloved brother got worse, not better, until he finally died.

Full stop. Period. For all they knew that was the end of the story. Martha, like you and I, only hopes for the resurrection at the last day (24).

It's not accidental that John doesn't just tell us Jesus loved *them*. He makes it painfully specific, breaking all the rules of good writing, to emphasize what we all need to remember and can tend to forget - **John 11:5** - "**Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.**" Jesus doesn't love you *generally*. It's the *person* - it's the *you* as distinct from everyone else on earth - *that's* who Jesus loves.

Emphasize it this way. Pick the person you *know* loves you most deeply and warmly and whole-heartedly right now. Is it a friend? Spouse? Brother or sister? Father or mother? Now, with that person's face in front of your mind, tell yourself that Jesus loves you *more* - far more - than that person.

There will be times - they come to all of us - when you will have to hold on to that truth. There will come times when God disappoints you. But that disappointment is only *apparent* disappointment in our finite and impatient understanding. It is never a diminishing of God's tender love.

3) STAYING IN THE WILL OF GOD IS DIVINE PROTECTION FOR YOUR LIFE

John 11:7-10 - "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.**"

The disciples don't want to return to Bethany in *Judea*. The last time Jesus was in Judea the people wanted to kill Him (**John 10:31-39**). What possible good can come from returning there? Not only will *Jesus* be in danger, but, and more to the point, so will *they*. It's no wonder Thomas finally says they might as well go with Jesus and die there along with Him (**16**).

Jesus seizes upon another great teaching moment. This time it's about doing what He calls them to do and how it brings life's greatest protection - **John 11:9-10** - "Jesus answered, '**Are there not twelve hours 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.**'"

Let me tell you why these words are so very important. It is not at all uncommon for Christians to think of following Christ in this world as a difficult and costly task. And it *is* in a very specific way. It *is* difficult in that it almost always costs the acceptance and popularity of the majority in our culture. This world loves its own in the most discriminatory fashion imaginable. It is *biased* toward those partaking of its own value system. So, sure enough, it *is* a costly thing to follow Christ, though only His genuine and serious followers *experience* that cost.

But here, in our text, Jesus is talking about something very different. He's talking about how His followers can experience *accomplishment and fruitfulness as His followers in this dark world*. He's offering a path of *reward and fulfillment* for those who *do* count the cost and follow Him.

Here's what He says. His disciples don't have to be afraid of following him to Judea. He knows why He's going there and they share in that calling. And here's the "take-home-from-church" lesson: ***Obeying Christ is like walking in daylight. It keeps you from stumbling. You are safe in His will.*** You will never mess up your life by following Jesus - even when it's costly to do so. Believe that.

The danger, totally unobserved by this careless world, is the pretend freedom that ignores the will of God. Anyone choosing that path can't help but *stumble*. Jesus says so - **John 11:10** - "**But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.**"

Night is anywhere people walk *outside the will of Jesus*. Night is any choice that *replaces* His will with our own. Night is any time the voice of the Shepherd is tuned out. And Jesus says, sure enough, sooner or later, *that's* what makes people stumble. This is Jesus' way of saying hearing and obeying Him *matters* in a way that we will realize here and now.

Believe these words from our Lord. Most people live life in the dark. They spend precious hours trying to calculate the way out of the messes their own desires have created. Jesus alone keeps our lives upright and clean. His Lordship lights up lives. He puts people on their feet in a way no one else ever can. His will is our deepest protection in this world.

There are only so many hours given to us. Jesus reminds us we get **12 in a day (11:9)**. Make every one of them count for your Lord. You'll be protecting your very life at the same time.

4) **IT'S IMPORTANT THAT JOHN INCLUDES THE DETAIL THAT LAZARUS HAD BEEN DEAD FOR FOUR DAYS**

John 11:17-19 - "Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus ***had already been in the tomb four days.*** [18] Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, [19] and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother."

Rabbinic teaching held that the departed soul lingered around the body for three days after death. John includes the four day detail to purposely emphasize Jesus was facing a definitive ***postmortem***. Lazarus was genuinely dead by any measurement. The miracle of Jesus was a miracle of ***resurrection***, not ***resuscitation***. The body of Lazarus may as well have been in the grave twenty years. The miracle wouldn't have been any greater.

5) **JESUS SEPARATES HIMSELF FROM ALL OTHERS IN CALLING HIMSELF THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE**

John 11:20-25 - "So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. [21] Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. [22] But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." [23] Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." [24] Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." [25] Jesus said to her, ***"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live...."***

What does Jesus mean in calling Himself ***"the resurrection and the life"***? It's an important title. Remember, Jesus wasn't the only, or even the first, to raise someone from the dead. It happened several times in the Old Testament. Several of the Apostles did it later on in the New Testament.

But they ***didn't*** do it by their own power. The actual capacity to ***give*** life to the dead didn't ***reside*** in those people. They did it by the power of God, the Creator of life in the first place.

Not so with Jesus. He has death-conquering life ***residing in His own Person***. He has divine life in the sense that ***death has no power over Him whatsoever***. Death is what happens to ***us*** due to our sin. Death is ***natural*** to our present condition. But death is ***unnatural*** to the life giving Messiah. What He ***is*** is ***resurrection*** and ***life***. This is what ***defines*** Jesus Christ. No other prophet or leader or teacher ***is*** the resurrection and the life.

6) **DIVINE TRUTH MUST BE HELD ACTIVELY IN THE MIND TO SUSTAIN OUR SOULS**

John 11:25-26 - "Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, [26] and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. ***Do you believe this?***"

It would be tragic to close off this text and miss this point. Jesus isn't asking Martha if she ***knows*** this resurrection truth. And, more importantly, He's not even asking her if this is ***one of her beliefs***. He's asking her if she ***is believing this***. Does she believe this ***right now?*** Is this a ***currently active belief?*** Is this belief ***functioning as it should be in her present situation?***

Martha - and we - learn about ***living faith*** as opposed to ***religious doctrine***. Now doctrine is very important. You can't summon belief in nothing in particular. There must be understood ***content*** to strong faith. There is no virtue in ***ignorance***.

But take this truth home today. Everything you believe - every single Biblical truth - needs ***constant attention***. Faith isn't sustained by what you ***once*** knew. It's sustained by what you ***are believing*** right now. Your faith is only as deep as the ***convictions that steer you***. The only faith you have is the faith you are ***using*** right now.

Martha, by every measurement we can use in a pre-crucifixion faith, ***is*** a believer. Jesus isn't asking about that. He's not asking if she's a ***believer***. He's asking if she's ***believing***.

Summon your beliefs to life. Slap them in the face to wake them up. Turn off the TV. Get alone with Jesus. And ***believe*** all over again. Beliefs are like parachutes. They only function when kept open and used.