

The Gospel of John (66); Jesus with Lazarus and His Sisters (1)

Introduction:

In our study of this fourth Gospel we arrive today at the account of Jesus and Lazarus, in which Jesus raised his friend from death, restoring him to his sisters. In some ways this chapter may be regarded as the highpoint in the earthly ministry of our Lord as recorded by John. This is the last miracle of Jesus recorded in this Gospel, which is the seventh and final sign recorded by John. For your review, here is a list of these seven signs:

1. The turning of water into wine (John 2:1-12)
2. The healing of the royal official's son (John 4:46-54)
3. The healing of the paralytic at the Bethesda pool (John 5:1-17)
4. The feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-14)
5. The walking on water (John 6:15-25)
6. The healing of the man born blind (John 9:1-41)
7. The raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-46)¹

Up to this point in the unfolding story of Jesus, we have considered Him as He claimed and explained Himself to be. These were set forth in the "I am" statements of Jesus, in which He not only declared Himself to be eternal God, but He revealed Himself as the Mediator of the grace of God to His people. So far we have considered four of the total of seven "I am" statements. The ones we have considered are these, in which Jesus declared,

- (1) "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35) (This is the first)
- (2) "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5)
- (3) "I am the door of the sheep" (John 10:7, 9)
- (4) "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11, 14)

And here in John 11 we will read of His 5th claim, "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25).

This event of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead precipitates the last and finally successful effort of the Jewish leaders to arrest Jesus and move Him toward His execution. Here is a good summary of this event:

The miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead is a climax to all the preceding signs that have revealed God's glory through Jesus. Here death itself, the final enemy of humanity, is successfully confronted by the One who is Himself the Resurrection and the Life. Yet even this glorious sign divides those who witness it. Those who reject the glory revealed commit themselves to pursuing Jesus' death (vs. 46-50).²

The entire chapter may be regarded as a single literary unit in that there is this discernable structure:

1. The Introduction/setting of the episode (vs. 1-16), in which the location, setting, and people are identified.

¹ There are those who believe that this is not the seventh sign, but the sixth sign recorded by John. They pass over the fifth in the list above, choosing the resurrection of Jesus Christ to be the seventh and final sign of this Fourth Gospel. There are some very compelling reasons to be sympathetic with this view. See Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), pp. 825-827.

² R. C. Sproul, gen. ed., **The Reformation Study Bible** (ESV) (Reformation Trust, 2015), p. 1684.

2. The conflict is set forth (vs. 17-37), which is the death of Lazarus and the crisis of faith of his sisters and some of the Jews who were present.
3. The resolution of the conflict (vs. 38-44), in Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead and Jesus exhorting his sisters to full faith in Him.
4. The conclusion and interpretation of the event (vs. 45-57), in which the result is great glory given to Jesus by some and the intractable opposition of others who desired His death.

Although the account encompasses this entire 11th chapter, we will read only the first 16 verses at this time.

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. ²It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. ³Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."

⁴When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

⁵Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. ⁷Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

⁸The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?"

⁹Jesus 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. ¹⁰But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up."

¹²Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." ¹³However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep.

¹⁴Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him."

¹⁶Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

Let us work through these verses, attempting to understand what is being expressed and attempting to understand their implication and application.

I. Jesus learns of the sickness of Lazarus from Mary, his sister. (vs. 1-3)

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. ²It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. ³Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."

⁴When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

The account opens with a reference to Lazarus who was sick. It must have been a quite serious illness for his sisters to send for Jesus. Lazarus was sick unto death, while his sisters were sick with concern. "The sickness of those we love is our affliction" (Matthew Henry).

Lazarus was a rather common name in the ancient Jewish world.³ Those efforts to link this Lazarus with the Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16 are useless. They were two different men. One was a poor beggar (Luke 16). The other was from a stable, and apparently well-known and respected family (John 11).

This Lazarus was of Bethany, a town that the Evangelist had not mentioned to this point in the story. There is a reference to a "Bethany" in John 1:28, which reads, "These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing." That was a reference to John the Baptist baptizing Jesus in the Jordan

³ Lazarus was the Greek form. The Hebrew equivalent was Eleazar.

River. That Bethany was at least 20 miles east of Jerusalem just north of the Dead Sea on the Jordan River. The Bethany mentioned here in John 11:1 was located just 2 miles east of Jerusalem, just over the hill a little way beyond the Mount of Olives.

This Bethany was the home “town of Mary and her sister, Martha.” It does not say, “The town of the sisters, Mary and Martha”, but it was “the town of Mary”, “and her sister, Martha.” It would seem that Mary was perhaps the perhaps the better known. John identified her as “that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair.” There are a number of Marys mentioned in the Gospels. Actually the name, Mary, is referenced 45 times in the New Testament. Of these there are at least five different women identified. They include:

(1) Mary, the mother of Jesus

(2) Mary Magdalene. Her name probably indicates that she was from the town of Magdala, on the Southwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had cast seven demons out of her (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2). There is no clear indication that she had been an immoral woman before becoming a disciple of Jesus. She had followed the ones who took the body of Jesus to the burial site (Matt. 27:61). She was also the first person to learn of the resurrection of Christ on that day that He came forth from the dead (Matt. 28:1-8; Mark 16:9; Luke 24:1, 10).

(3) Mary, who was the mother of John Mark, in whose house the early Christians met for prayer (Acts 12:12)

(4) Mary, the mother of James and Joses. She may have been the Mary who was the wife of Clopas. She was also among the women who went to the tomb on the morning of His resurrection but fled after they saw and spoke with an angel (Mark 16:1-8).

(5) And then there was this Mary of Bethany, whose sister was Martha and brother was Lazarus. She and her sister are mentioned in the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus was staying with them for a meal. We read of this in Luke 10:38ff

³⁸Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. ³⁹And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.”

⁴¹And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. ⁴²But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38-42)

Mary seemed to have a very close, devotional regard for Jesus and relationship with Him. She desired to hear from Him and sit at His feet. Maybe this is why John in His Gospel made mention of Jesus being in the “town of Mary, and her sister, Martha.” But perhaps it is more likely that Mary is mentioned first because of what is said of her next.

We read in **verse 2** a further identification of this Mary. “***It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair.***” This event of Mary anointing the feet of Jesus actually took place after these events recorded in John 11. Very soon after this, Jesus was invited to have dinner in the house of Simon the leper. Here is the account in **Mark 14:3-9**:

³And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head. ⁴But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, “Why was this fragrant oil wasted? ⁵For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.” And they criticized her sharply.

⁶But Jesus said, “Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. ⁷For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have

always. ⁸She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. ⁹Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.”

We also read of John’s account in the next chapter of his Gospel. Here is John 12:1ff.

Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. ²There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. ³Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

⁴But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, who would betray Him, said, ⁵“Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” ⁶This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.

⁷But Jesus said, “Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. ⁸For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.” (John 12:1-8)

This is not to be confused with the occasion that Jesus was invited to dinner in the house of a Pharisee, which is recorded in Luke 7:36-50. On that occasion a woman “who was a sinner” broke an alabaster box and anointed Jesus’ feet and wiped His feet with her hair. That probably occurred in Galilee. This event occurred in Bethany, near Jerusalem. There were two different occasions when two different women each had an alabaster box, each having broken them open. But one of these women was an immoral woman. The other was this woman of devotion—Mary. One of these occasions occurred in the house of a Pharisee (the immoral woman). The other took place in the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, in Bethany near Jerusalem. But because of the similar details, these two events are often conflated so that often the character of the immoral woman is projected upon Mary, the woman of devotion.

Now after John identified this Mary as the one who later anointed Jesus in view of his death, John identified her brother. Again, verse 2 reads, “It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, *whose brother Lazarus was sick.*” John seems to hold up Mary. He does not speak of *the sisters*, “whose brother Lazarus was sick, but *of “Mary*, whose brother Lazarus was sick.” BY the way, Martha was probably the elder sister, for she served as the host for Jesus when he was in their house. She was busy preparing and arranging for the meal. It would seem that Mary was the younger sister, but who is set forth as a woman of great devotion to her Lord.

We read in **verse 3** that the sisters sent word to Jesus that their brother was sick. ***“Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, ‘Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.’”*** Jesus was probably due east at the Jordan River where John had been baptizing (cf. John 10:40), or He may have been back in Galilee. The sisters knew their brother was very ill in that they sent for Jesus. They seemed to have little doubt that He would come to heal their brother. As they were assured of Jesus’ concern for them and their brother, so we should not doubt His concern for us whom He also loves as His own.

Notice their appeal, that it was based on His love for Lazarus. They did not appeal to Jesus based on the love that Lazarus had for Jesus, but for the love that Jesus had for Lazarus. This is certainly the more powerful and wisest appeal. “Our love to Him is no worth speaking of, but His to us can never be enough spoken of” (Matthew Henry).

Here we see also what a blessing it is to have those who will pray for us in our need. Lazarus may have been too ill to pray. But he had two sisters who would “pray” for him to their friend, the Lord Jesus, to come help him. Only eternity will reveal the indebtedness we owe our friends and family who know the Lord and who have been faithful in praying for us, especially in those times when we were perhaps not praying for ourselves.

And consider also the confidence that these sisters had in appealing to Jesus because they knew that their brother was loved by Him. They sent word, ***“Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.”*** We may have much more faith that God will answer us when we are praying for someone we know is beloved of the Lord.

We then read in verses 4 through 7 that...

II. Jesus determined to go to Judea again. (vs. 4-7)

⁴When Jesus heard that, He said, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

⁵Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. ⁷Then after this He said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.”

First, Jesus declared in **verse 4** that God would glorify Himself through glorifying His Son through this. “When Jesus heard that, He said, ***“This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”***”

The Lord gave an encouraging word. Perhaps this message was returned to the sisters which gave them encouragement while they waited for the Lord’s arrival. His word of promise would be a word of comfort to their souls. May we similarly encourage souls who are waiting on God.

Let this comfort those whom Christ loves under all their grievances that the design of them all is that *the Son of God may be glorified thereby*, His wisdom, power, and goodness, glorified in supporting and relieving them. (Matthew Henry)

His disciples must have thought that Jesus would immediately go to heal this man of his sickness as they were so accustomed seeing Him do. But instead, He stayed two more days where they were.

Notice, by the way, that God the Father is glorified when Jesus Christ His Son is glorified. We are to attribute glory to the Son of God to the same degree that we attribute glory to God the Father. Jesus said on another occasion,

“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, ²³that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” (John 5:22f)

Those who do not honor the Son of God, do not honor God at all.

We then read quite an amazing detail in **verse 5**. John wrote, ***“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.”*** Jesus had a special relationship with these three people in this family. Jesus loved them. It is difficult and perhaps a little unsettling for us to think in terms of Jesus loving some of His followers in special ways. But in His human nature, this was true of His experience. As one wrote,

The sisters’ reference to their brother as the one Jesus loves is touching. It hints at friendships and relationships that are barely explored in the Gospels, and it suggests that some at least felt peculiarly loved by Him.⁴

We read elsewhere that Jesus loved John the apostle, the writer of this Gospel, in a special way. And the other disciples knew that this was the case, for they would have John approach Jesus with their concern to the identity of the one which would betray Jesus, knowing that Jesus had this special, close relationship with John (cf. John 13:23-26).

We then read of Jesus’ response to the news that His good friend was sick. We read in **verse 6**, ***“So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.”*** There seems to be a

⁴ Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 406.

rather cold indifference on His part to the need of His friend and the concern of His friend's sisters. It seems incongruent that Jesus would wait two days and yet love Lazarus and his sisters. Calvin wrote of this:

These two things appear to be inconsistent with each other, that Christ *remains two days* beyond Jordan, as if he did not care about the life of Lazarus, and yet the Evangelist says, that Christ *loved him and his sisters*; for, since *love* produces anxiety, he ought to have hastened immediately.⁵

But our Lord had a greater purpose than just relieving the suffering of His friends. He would glorify God His Father through this miracle, and so, He would wait. I suspect that Mary and Martha were quite distressed that Jesus did not immediately come to them in their time of need. But of course later, after their brother is restored to them, the glory of that event would far outweigh the worry and grief they had while they waited. They would no doubt later thank God that Jesus did not immediately come if that would have resulted in a lesser blessing that he did bestow upon them. The Scriptures declare what was true of them is true for all the Lord's disciples. Paul would later write: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are ***not worthy to be compared*** with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). The Lord's purposes are all good toward us and even His delays in timing are best for us and for His intention to glorify His Father through us.

When Jesus later raised Lazarus from the dead, he had been dead for four days. The journey was only two days at the most from where He and His disciples were. Although Lazarus was still alive when the messengers first brought the news to Jesus, he probably died shortly afterwards.

It was after two days that Jesus told His disciples that they would travel to Bethany. We read in **verse 7**, "***Then after this He said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.'***" Although Jesus knew the danger of doing so, Jesus would go help His friends. He said "Judea", not "Bethany", which suggests that He knew the great danger to which He would be subject for going to that region. The two Greek words translated as "then" and "again" that sound somewhat repetitious gives emphasis to the delay. It was with intent and purpose that Jesus waited the two days where He was.

III. Jesus responds to His disciples who questioned His decision to travel to Judea again (vs. 8-11)

⁸The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?"

⁹Jesus 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. ¹⁰But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up."

There is no indication how long before this that they had been in Jerusalem. Some time had passed since the hostilities in the temple recorded in John 10, but the time is imprecise in our account. They said to Him in **verse 8**, "***Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?***" Those events had occurred in the early winter during the Feast of Dedication. Their arrival in Jerusalem in John 11 appears to have been shortly before the Passover, when Jesus was arrested, tried and crucified. Perhaps about 3 to 4 months had transpired between the end of John 10 and the beginning of this account in John 11. We are dealing with the last few weeks of our Lord's earthly ministry, perhaps the week before His Passion Week.

But then in response to the disciples' surprise, and what appears to be their objection, Jesus gave this word in **verses 9** through **10**: "***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. ¹⁰But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.'***"

Rather than the Lord Jesus answering His disciples directly, He cited what must have been a commonly known proverb. What was Jesus saying by these words? Here is how **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) paraphrased our Lord's words:

⁵ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. XVII (Baker Book House, 1993), p. 426.

“Are not the working hours of the day twelve? You know they are, speaking generally. If a man on a journey walks during these twelve daylight hours, he sees his road, and does not stumble or fall, because the sun, which is the light of the world, shines on his path. If, on the contrary, a man on a journey chooses to walk in the unreasonable hour of the night, he is likely to stumble or fall, for want (need) of light to guide his feet. It is even so with me. My twelve hours of ministry, my day of work, is not yet over. There is no fear of My life being cut off before the time: I shall not be slain till My work is done. Till Mine hour is come, I am safe, and not a hair of My head can be toughed. I am like one walking in the full light of the sun, and cannot fall. The night will soon be here when I shall walk on the earth no longer: but the night has not yet come. There are twelve hours in My day of earthly ministry, and the twelfth with Me has not arrived.”⁶

To express the essence of the idea through another old proverb, we may say, “Every man is immortal till his work is done.” This is only believed, however, by one who knows that life has a divine purpose that was designed an overseeing, purposeful, and powerful God, who assures that people will accomplish His purposes that He has decreed for them.

The Evangelist then added an explanatory statement in **verse 11**. It reads, “*These things He said, and after that He said to them, ‘Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.’*” Here Jesus refers to Lazarus as one who “sleeps.” He was speaking of the state of death which now characterized His friend, Lazarus. The Bible speaks of the bodies of Christians upon death as being “asleep.” The physical bodies of Christians lie in their graves as ones who are sleeping which shall be awakened on the Day of the resurrection.

¹³But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those *who have fallen asleep*, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him *those who sleep in Jesus*.

¹⁵For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words.

This matter of being asleep upon death, however, only applies to the physical body. The soul or one’s spirit is that person that occupies the body. Upon death the soul departs from the dwelling place of the body to be with the Lord. Paul wrote of this:

⁶So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. ⁷For we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. (2 Cor. 5:6-8)

The soul of the one who has salvation is brought into the presence of God, even the presence of the Lord Jesus. The soul has the capacities of self-consciousness, self-awareness, thought, feeling, and will. Until the day of the resurrection, the souls of Christians are with the Lord, enjoying holiness, communion, and peace and delight, even as they look forward to their future bodily resurrection. On the other hand, the souls of the lost, those who died without Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, even while their bodies also are buried, their souls go to a place of punishment and torment, awaiting the final Day of Judgment, when their eternal sentence will be pronounced by the Lord after a thorough and just judgment of how they lived out their lives.

There are those that teach that both the body and soul of the believer sleeps until the day of the resurrection. The Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah Witnesses teach this doctrine of soul-sleep. It is not biblical. When the Christian dies, his soul departs immediately to be with the Lord. Jesus told the thief on the cross: “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). This errant doctrine does not

⁶ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 279f.

rise to the level of heresy, which would be a doctrine that would reveal someone not to have salvation. But it is an error that has important implications and is to be repudiated before others.

IV. Jesus informed His disciples that Lazarus had died. (vs. 12-16)

¹²Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.” ¹³However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep.

¹⁴Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.”

¹⁶Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”

Jesus told His disciples that Lazarus was asleep, that is, his body was asleep for he had died. But His disciples thought that Jesus was speaking of normal sleeping. We then read, “Then Jesus said to them plainly, ‘*Lazarus is dead.*’”

Now in verse 4 Jesus declared that this sickness of Lazarus was not unto death. But here in verse 14 we read, “Lazarus is dead.” How can this be? We understand this in the light of our conception of the meaning of death. **Matthew Henry** wrote:

Death is an everlasting farewell to this world; it is the way whence we shall not return; and in this sense it was *not unto death*. The grace was not his *long home*, his *house of eternity*. Thus Christ said of the maid whom He proposed to raise to life, *She is not dead*. The sickness of good people, how threatening soever, is *not unto death*, for it is not into eternal death. The body’s death to this world is the soul’s birth into another world.⁷

I wonder to what degree that our Lord became somewhat frustrated with His efforts to speak and teach His disciples, especially on those occasions that they exhibit a measure of denseness in comprehending what He had to say to them. Of course our Lord was characterized by all patience, but in His human nature He did at times express frustration and anger at the error, ignorance, weakness of faith, and resistance of those about Him. It is actually a testimony to His great condescension that He would be patient with us and put up with all of the nonsense and resistance we exhibit toward Him and His will.

Jesus said to His disciples on this occasion in **verse 15**, “*And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.*”⁸ Thankfully He saw ahead of the spiritual benefit this entire episode would bring to His disciples. His work would be done in such a way that they “may believe.”

The disciples were willing to die with Jesus. And it would seem by the words of Thomas, that is what they were anticipating in their return to Judea with their Master. We read in **verse 16**, “*Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him.’*” Thomas was apparently a twin, although we are told nothing of his twin brother or sister. Thomas was a doubter, and perhaps a rather pessimistic man to be around. This was not an inspiring or encouraging word to the others.

A few words of application:

⁷ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 4 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 1044.

⁸ Notice that Jesus said of the body of Lazarus, “*Nevertheless let us go to him.*” Some Christians, in my opinion, have too low view of the human body. They know that their soul is their true “self” so to speak, but they tend to think of their body merely as a shell, only as something to be discarded. But we are to read and treat the body of the Christian who died as yet “him.” There is a sense of identity of one’s own person with his body, that should not be disregarded. We show love and respect for one who has passed away by the careful, thoughtful, respectful regard and treatment of the physical body. Consider the care and regard those showed the body of Jesus as they prepared Him and sealed Him in burial. Jesus, said, “Nevertheless let us go *to him—his body.*”

1. God's delays in delivering us from that which troubles or threatens us is no grounds for assessing His concern for us who are in Christ.

We read that our Lord delayed two days in coming to Lazarus and his sisters even though the event seemed so terribly critical and urgent. Often times God's delays or perhaps even denials of our petitions to Him leave people with the belief or feeling that He does not care. But we see in this passage that even though the Lord Jesus had a special love for Lazarus and his sisters, Jesus delayed His coming to them, allowing them to suffer terrible anguish and sadness. **John Calvin** (1509-1564) drew this lesson:

As Christ is the only mirror of the grace of God, we are taught by this delay on His part, that we ought not to judge of the love of God from the condition which we see before our eyes. When we have prayed to Him, He often delays His assistance, either that He may increase still more our ardor in prayer, or that He may exercise our patience, and, at the same time, accustom us to obedience. Let believers then implore the assistance of God, but let them also learn to suspend their desires, if He does not stretch out His hand for their assistance as soon as they may think that necessity requires; for, whatever may be His delay, He never sleeps, and never forgets His people. Yet let us also be fully assured that He wishes all whom He loves to be saved.⁹

2. Let us learn from the fear of the disciples not to be like them.

We read of the initial reluctance of the disciples to travel with Jesus to Judea. When Jesus announced to His disciples that they would go to Judea, the disciples somewhat protested, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?" It would seem that the fear of danger to their lives would persuade them not to go. Of course Jesus assured them in verses 9 and 10 that the purpose and providence of God would protect and preserve them until He had accomplished His mission.

But fear should not be the ground of deciding whether or not to do the will of God. We should be as the apostle Paul who was willing to encounter all danger and even death if it would result in the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When Paul was returning to Jerusalem, He kept being warned by his Christian friends and acquaintances that he should not go to Jerusalem. He even had the Holy Spirit reveal to him what awaited him there. But Paul continued with resolve, undeterred from the threats and the dangers that were before him. We read of this in Acts 20:22-24.

²²And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, ²³except that *the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.* ²⁴**But none of these things move me**; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

In the next chapter of Acts we read of Paul's journeying closer to his homeland. Here is Luke's account of his voyage with the apostle Paul:

⁷And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day. ⁸On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. ¹⁰**And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.** ¹¹**When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"**

¹²Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

⁹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. XVII (Baker Book House, 1993), p. 427.

¹⁴So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, “The will of the Lord be done.” (Acts 21:7-14)

There was another occasion when the Lord rebuked a disciple for having the spirit of self-preservation govern his thinking. Jesus informed His disciples that He would be going to Jerusalem to suffer and die, and then on the third day be raised. Peter rebuked Jesus for this thought, “May it never happen!” Then Jesus rebuked Him and set forth a principle of discipleship that should govern every true Christian. Here is the account in Matthew 16:

²¹From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

²²Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!”

²³But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” (Matt. 16:21-23)

And then we read these words that speak to the life of a true disciple of Jesus Christ, that is, a true Christian.

²⁴Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ²⁵For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. ²⁸Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” (Matt. 16:24-28)

Those who live for themselves, for their own desires and interests above all others, who believe that God has not called them to suffer or endure suffering, but to escape it, need to be rebuked just as Jesus rebuked Peter. They need to be sharply warned that they are “not mindful of the things of God, but the things of man.” We are to deny ourselves, that is, we are to put all of our own fears and personal interests as subordinate to the will of God. We are to be willing to lose all for Christ, for in losing all for Him we gain all things that He freely gives His own. Denial of self is essential to what it is to be a Christian. A refusal to deny oneself, refusing to obey the Word of God, characterizes the non-Christian. **Charles Spurgeon** (1834-1892) once wrote this word (which we have cited before):

There must also be a willingness to obey the Lord in all His commandments. It is a shameful thing for a man to profess discipleship and yet refuse to learn his Lord’s will upon certain points, or even dare to decline obedience when that will is known. How can a man be a disciple of Christ when he openly lives in disobedience to Him?

If the professed convert distinctly and deliberately declares that he knows his Lord’s will but does not mean to attend to it, you are not to pamper his presumption, but it is your duty to assure him that he is not saved. Has not the Lord said, “He that taketh not up his cross, and cometh after Me, cannot be My disciple”? Mistakes as to what the Lord’s will are to be tenderly corrected, but anything like willful disobedience is fatal; to tolerate it would be treason to Him that sent us. Jesus must be received as King as well as Priest; and where there is any hesitancy about this, the foundation of godliness is not yet laid.¹⁰

3. And certainly let us not fear death, for just as Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, so all those that sleep in Jesus will also rise.

Here are the words of Ryle:

¹⁰ Charles Spurgeon, **The Soulwinner** (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 38.

Let us remember these things when those whom we love fall asleep in Christ, or when we ourselves receive our notice to quit this world. Let us call to mind in such an hour, that our great Friend takes thought for our bodies as well as for our souls, and that He will not allow one hair of our heads to perish. Let us never forget that the grave is the place where the Lord Himself lay, and that as He rose again triumphant from that cold bed, so also shall all His people. To a mere worldly man death must needs be a terrible thing; but he that has Christian faith, may boldly say, as he lays down his life, "I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest: for it is Thou, Lord, that makest me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:8).

4. Let us strive to be ones whom the Lord has special love, let us be good friends of the Lord Jesus.

All of us who are true Christians are beloved of the Lord. But to some of us He may manifest His love in nature and degree that surpasses others of us. The Lord Jesus Himself gave this promise:

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. (John 14:21)

Friends of God are ones who understand who God is and what God is doing in His world and they are striving to work on His behalf to bring His purposes to pass in this world, and particularly in the loves of His people.

Here is another promise of our God to us.

¹⁴Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ¹⁵And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

"I will dwell in them
And walk among them.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My people."

¹⁷Therefore

"Come out from among them
And be separate, says the Lord.
Do not touch what is unclean,
And I will receive you."

¹⁸"I will be a Father to you,
And you shall be My sons and daughters,
Says the LORD Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:14-18)

May our Lord enable each of us to become all that we are capable of becoming as His disciples. May He manifest Himself wonderfully and experientially to us as we seek Him and as we walk in faith in Him.

May each of us declare as Paul,
"I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded
that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day." (2 Tim. 1:12)
