



John 11:1-16
Why Does Jesus Tarry?

- NKJ John 11:1 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.
- 2 It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.
- 3 Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."
- 4 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."
- 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.
- 6 So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days 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, lately the Jews sought 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 one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."
- 11 These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up."
- 12 Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well."
- 13 However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep.
- 14 Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead.
- 15 "And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him."
- 16 Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

Why does Jesus Tarry? Incidentally kids, tarry is one of those words you'll need for the SAT someday, it means to delay, to linger, to wait, to stay where you are. Now there are two senses in which we can ask that question.

The first is in terms of His return, Jesus promised that He would return at the end of this age, and yet his ascension was almost 2000 years ago now. Why is he tarrying? In every age since the Apostolic church the Christians have cried out in prayer, "***Come quickly Lord Jesus***" and they have all thought, He must come back very soon, because surely it cannot get worse than this! We read that even in heaven there is eagerness for Christ to return, the souls of the martyrs in heaven cry out in Rev. 6:10 "***How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?***" And yet despite all of those prayers, Jesus has not yet returned to judge the earth.

The second sense in which Christians ask "Why Does Jesus Tarry?" is probably even more common the first, it is in reference to unanswered prayer. How many times in a day do Christians worldwide wonder why Christ has not yet answered their petition? I would be very surprised indeed, if any of you

have not at least once in your life asked that question. In fact if you haven't, the reason is probably because you don't pray.

In this remarkable chapter of John, which I will freely admit is one of my favorite, we have an answer to both senses of the question "why does Jesus tarry?", but most particularly the second sense – why Jesus sometimes delays in answering prayer.

Now as you will probably remember Jesus has left Jerusalem and Judea and has gone to a region called Batanea which was under the rule of Phillip the Tetrarch. He is now temporarily beyond the jurisdiction of the Jewish rulers who were seeking to arrest Him. While He is there he receives a message from his friends the sisters Martha and Mary, whose house in Bethany he sometimes stayed and taught at. You will probably remember that time in Luke 10 that he was teaching in their home and Martha got upset because she was preparing and serving food, while Mary sat at his feet and listened to His teaching. Their message says that their brother Lazarus, that's the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name Eleazar, is sick.

Now the Sisters who believe and trust in Jesus have done the right thing, they've sent him a petition and used the simplest terms - They only said, "**Lord, he whom You love is sick,**" and left the matter there, in the full belief that He would do what was best.

Now Jesus responds, probably to the messenger that they had sent, "***This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.***" Now that's encouraging isn't it? At first blush, one might think Jesus was saying "don't worry, he won't die." He however was talking about the ultimate outcome.

But regardless, with all that we read in verses 1-5, verse 6 doesn't seem to make sense does it? I mean Verse **5** says that Jesus **loved** Martha, and her sister and Lazarus, and so you expect to read in the next verse, "***therefore Jesus made great haste to Bethany, and He entered into the house, and seeing Lazarus sick and near unto death He healed him, and all marveled.***"

That's what I think we would naturally expect, and if Jesus was the savior *men wanted*, that is what he would do. But He's not the Savior *men wanted* is He? That's why he wouldn't become the king when they wanted Him to, that's why he wouldn't keep making bread for them when they wanted Him to. He's not the savior **men wanted**, He is the savior **men needed**. So in verse 6 we read that ***because He loved them***, instead of rushing to Bethany, he stayed put for two more days, and we read in verse 17 that by the time he arrived in Bethany which was quite some distance away from Batanea, Lazarus had been dead for 4 days.

Let's consider what Jesus *could* have done.

He Could Have Prevented it From Happening: The Lord Jesus, who had power over all diseases, could no doubt have prevented this illness, if He had thought that was best. But He did not do so. He allowed Lazarus to become very sick like any other man.

He Could Have Healed Lazarus as Soon as the Messenger Brought Him Word: We need to remember that Jesus had healed several people like the centurion's servant, from afar with just a word. We read in Matthew 8:13 "Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour." Jesus could have simply told the messenger "***go your way, Lazarus is well***", "

But he didn't do either of those things, instead he waits for 2 days and then tells the disciples that Lazarus has fallen asleep, and that He is going now to wake him up. They don't understand, and so Jesus has to plainly tell them, Lazarus is dead, now it is time to go to him.

Why did He do that? Why did He delay his coming to Bethany until Lazarus was incontrovertibly dead? I mean that delay necessarily involved the suffering of Lazarus, the anxiety of his sisters, and then their terrible grief when he died.

Well Jesus does not delay because He does not care, Jesus loved them, that's a theme that is going to be repeated in this text again and again. In fact those who see Him weeping at Lazarus' tomb will remark: ***"See how He loved him!"***

He does not delay because He is too busy, while no doubt he was active in ministry there, there is no hint of that.

He does not delay because He is scared of going back to Jerusalem – the disciples certainly are, they remember that the last time they were at the Temple, the Jews had tried to stone Christ. Thomas is willing to go back out of obedience, but of course in true Thomas fashion he doubts they will survive. ***"Let us also go, that we may die with Him."*** But Jesus answers their fears with an analogy in verse 9 & 10 saying essentially that they need not fear failure because it is still day and that there is still time for Him, the true light of the World, to complete the work that He was sent to do. To be with Christ is always to be in His light and able to do the work that the Father has appointed, but to be outside of Christ is as Christ says, to be in darkness, where men inevitably stumble and fall.

He delays His return on purpose. It was not easy for Him to do so, but He does, and He is glad to do so for our sake, so that in the raising of Lazarus, the father might be glorified, that the Son might be glorified, and that they and we might believe. Have you ever thought on how many thousands since then have come to faith on reading the words of this precious chapter, and believing?

Now this is not the answer to their petition that the sisters were looking for, certainly they did not want their brother to die. And yet Jesus knew what they needed, He knew the end from the beginning, and He knew that when all was said and done and He had raised Lazarus from the dead. That the sisters and Lazarus would have no cause to complain, but rather would rejoice knowing that they served a master who does all things well and that precisely because He is doing them according to His grand and perfect plans. Christians may not enjoy every step along the way that the Lord leads them, but when they reach heaven, everyone of them will be able to look back and say, ***He knew the way I needed to go, even when I did not, and I thank Him that He gave me the faith to walk and the strength I needed to complete the journey.***

So in application, Christians I'm going to urge you to do something very hard, which is to thank the Lord even for His delays, and to trust that He knows what He is doing. Yes you can thank Him for delaying, from our perspective, His return. Yes, He has tarried for these 2000 years, he may tarry for longer still, but what glorious things He has accomplished and is yet accomplishing in that time, how many millions have been added to the heavenly company in that time? And are we really going to begrudge the Lord wanting heaven to be filled with ***"a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues"***

And we can even thank Him for His delays in answering our prayers, it is easy for anyone with an ounce of maturity to see how ill-served, spoiled, and immature we would be if He answered all of our petitions immediately. But have you considered the other benefits?

His delays test our faith, they put us in the crucible. How many false faiths have been burned up like so much chaff in those times? I remember reading the incredibly sad story of how Ted Turner said he lost the faith of his childhood because he prayed an hour a day for five years asking the Lord to cure his terminally ill sister, 1800 hours of prayer, and God didn't cure her. But brothers and sisters, both in the word and in history, there have been many and women who have repeated that experience multiple times.

His delays that test our faith, and burn up the false faith can only strengthen the genuine article. Samuel Rutherford who was so greatly used of God and whose life and letters to this day offer such tender solace to those who have suffered loss himself suffered the loss of his wife after a 13 month illness, both their children died soon afterwards. His life was one of hardship, of exile, of being banished from his pulpit, and removed from his professorship and all because of His love of Christ and the Reformed faith. And yet his faith was strengthened by those experiences, he was better able to server and minister to others with that genuine fellow-feeling that only one who has suffered the same kind of things can truly feel. Did not Christ have to suffer that it might be said of Him: *“15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”*

And if we are to be conformed to His image shall we not take up our cross and suffer as well?

Remember also that God's clock is not *our* clock, **Christ knows best at what time to do anything for His people**

His delays strengthen our faith, they teach us to rely upon Him.
His delays force us to conform us to *His Will*.

Lastly for those of you who are struggling with sickness this day I know that it is sometimes easier to say these things than to be in the midst of that trial remember: *“Sickness, in the very nature of things, can never be anything but trying to flesh and blood. Our bodies and souls are strangely linked together, and that which vexes and weakens the body can hardly fail to vex the mind and soul. But sickness, we must always remember, is no sign that God is displeased with us; no, more, it is generally sent for the good of our souls. It tends to draw our affections away from this world, and to direct them to things above. It sends us to our Bibles, and teaches us to pray better. It helps to prove our faith and patience, and shows us the real value of our hope in Christ. It reminds us that we are not to live always, and tunes and trains our hearts for our great change. Then let us be patient and cheerful when we are laid aside by illness. Let us believe that the Lord Jesus loves us when we are sick no less than when we are well.”* – JC Ryle

2 Cor. 12:7 *And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.*

8 *Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.*

9 *And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

10 *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*