

Title:

**LESSONS FROM THE
BLESSED FAMILY AT BETHANY**

Text: John 11:1-57

Subject: *The Sickness, Death, and Resurrection of Lazarus*

Date: Sunday Evening — August 24, 2008

Tape: Z-52a

Readings: *Ron Wood and Bobbie Estes*

Introduction:

On the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, about two miles east of Jerusalem there was once a small village called **Bethany**. Today, it is called **Al-Azariyeh**. The name of the village today reflects the name of that man who was the object and beneficiary of our Lord's most notable miracle. Al-Azariyeh is an Arabic name derived from the name Lazarus, who was raised from the dead at Bethany two thousand years ago.

I want us to go back to Bethany, the scene of that great miracle by which our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated his eternal Deity and omnipotent power as God. I want us to glean from the events of that great and notable day some spiritual lessons for the spiritual instruction and edification of our souls. As we do, I trust that our hearts and minds will be focused upon him who is the Resurrection and the Life, our all-glorious Christ, the Son of God, who raised Lazarus from the dead. The text for my message today is, of course, John chapter eleven.

Proposition: He who raised Lazarus from the dead at Bethany continues to raise sinners from death to life today by the power of his grace.

It is my prayer that some of you who are yet dead in trespasses and in sins will this day be raised to life by the Lord Jesus Christ, that he will, by the power and grace of his Spirit, grant to you eternal life, faith in him, and the forgiveness of sins.

There is such a grand simplicity in this eleventh chapter of John's gospel that it is almost spoiled by human exposition. My preaching from it, might justifiably be compared to a man gilding gold or painting lilies. Yet, the things recorded in these fifty-seven verses are matters full of spiritual instruction. Therefore, they must be expounded. May God the Holy Spirit

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give me wisdom and grace to expound them with clarity for the profit of your souls and the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As I began preparing this message, the more I read this chapter and meditated on it the bigger it got. I found dozens of things in these verses that need to be studied and preached. But I have to limit myself. So I will call your attention to just seven things revealed in this chapter. I have titled my message **LESSONS FROM THE BLESSED FAMILY AT BETHANY**. Hold your Bibles open on your laps and follow me through this delightfully instructive chapter.

SICKNESS

Here is the first lesson taught in this chapter. It is a lesson we need to learn, lay to heart and often remind ourselves of: — **True believers often suffer from sickness and disease in this world** (vv. 1-4)

(John 11:1-4) “Now a certain *man* was sick, *named* Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (2) (It was *that* Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) (3) Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest 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 might be glorified thereby.”

Sickness is not a sign of God’s displeasure or a lack of faith on our part. The fact is, **sickness is sent to us by our heavenly Father for our benefit**. That which is aggravating to our bodies is good for our souls. Sickness tends to draw our affections away from the world to Christ. Sickness sends us to our knees, sends us to our Bibles, and sends us to our Savior. Any thing that accomplishes these things is good!

Sickness reminds us that life in this world, at its best, is but a vapor that is soon gone. Sickness forces us to look to the grave, look past the grave to judgment, and look past the judgment to eternity. Whenever sickness comes, be it nothing more than a cold or something as serious as cancer, let us be patient before the Lord, ever mindful of the fact that...

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- Sickness is the fruit of sin.
- Sickness is the forerunner of death.
- Sickness and health, life and death are alike in the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- For believers, sickness is never unto death.

Illustration: Richard Baxter - “*Almost well!*”

- And our sicknesses, whatever they are, are for the glory of God.

FAITH

Here is the second lesson. — **True faith submits to the will of God.** When Lazarus fell sick, his sisters, Martha and Mary, sent word to the Lord Jesus, their Master and most tender, caring, affectionate Friend, saying, “**Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick**” (v. 3)

They did not ask him to come to Bethany. They did not ask him to heal their brother, though that is what they obviously hoped he would do. They simply left the matter in his hands, confident that he would do what was best.

Like Eli of old, they said, “*It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good.*” We would be wise to follow their example. Our best, ablest, wisest and most considerate Helper is God our Savior. Christ is our best Friend, especially in time of need. The best thing for us to do in trouble is to, like Job, fall on our knees and worship. Like Hezekiah, let us spread our case before him.

In the hurry and excitement of trouble and the annoyance and pain of sickness, always remember that none can help like him who “*took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses*” (Matt. 8:17). None is so kind, gracious, and caring as our Redeemer who is touched with the feeling of our infirmity.

Faith submits to the will of God. **Yet, we must never imagine that perfect faith will be found in any sinner in this world.** I will not take you through the chapter at this time and point out the faults of these women. Though

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they were true believers, though they were choice companions of our Savior, there was much weakness and unbelief in them. Both Martha and Mary seem to have misjudged the Master's delay in coming to Bethany and his intentions toward them and Lazarus. Even when he was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, when he commanded them to take away the stone from his tomb, Martha argued with her Lord (v. 39).

(John 11:39) “Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days.”

It is very easy to talk about faith when we are healthy and strong, and have money in the bank. But it is hard to practice faith when we are sick, and weak, and broke. When all is darkness, when neither the sun, nor the moon, nor stars appear, it is not easy to be confident. The fact is, — **the strongest believer's faith is very fragile and apt to break in times of great trial.**

Still there is another thing revealed in this chapter about faith. **Our Lord tells us plainly that, if we would believe, we would see the glory of God.**

(John 11:40) “Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?”

- In The Gospel
- In Creation
- In Providence
- In The Salvation Of Sinners

THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Here is the third lesson set before us in this chapter. — **The Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Savior, loves all his elect alike.** We read in verse 5, “*Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.*”

Here are three chosen sinners. All were saved by the grace of God. All were alike the objects of electing love, redeeming blood, and saving grace. But they were not all alike. Martha appears to have been a bit too pushy and

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domineering. Mary appears to have been very spiritual, though perhaps somewhat negligent of earthly responsibilities. Of Lazarus we are told nothing, except that the Lord Jesus raised him from the dead. Yet, we are told plainly that the Lord Jesus loved all three. He loved them all alike He loved them all for the same reason. He loved them all to the same degree.

You see, **our Savior's love for us is free, sovereign, everlasting and unchanging.** It does not depend upon us, what we are, what we do, or what we fail to do in any way.

We must not undervalue others because they are different from us. Flowers in a garden are all different. But it is their difference that makes their contribution to the garden necessary and beautiful. Your children are all different from one another; but loving parents do not care less for one child and more for another because they are different.

Even so, in the Kingdom of God, among his true children there are differing degrees of grace, faith and maturity. But the least, the weakest and the most feeble of the Lord's disciples are no less the objects of his love than the greatest, strongest, and most steadfast.

Along this same line, look at verses 30-36

(John 11:30-36) “Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him. (31) The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there. (32) Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. (33) When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, (34) And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. (35) Jesus wept. (36) Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!”

Those who show kindness to others usually find great blessedness for themselves in doing so. — The little house in Bethany was filled with

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mourners when the Lord Jesus arrived. These mourners probably knew very little about these women and their faith in Christ. But they felt the pain of their neighbors and came in their time of bereavement to do what they could o comfort Martha and Mary. As a result of their kindness, they reaped a rare, rich, unexpected blessing. They were allowed to be eyewitnesses to the greatest miracle performed by our Lord during his earthly ministry. They saw Lazarus raised from the dead. For many of them the raising of Lazarus led to a resurrection in their souls (v. 45). That was he day of their spiritual birth.

(John 11:45) “Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.”

These things are written for our learning. There is no healthier employment in the world than to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, to weep with those that weep, to try to bear one another’s burdens and lighten one another’s loads.

One great secret to being happy is to make others happy. The wise man, writing by inspiration, said, — “*It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting...The heart of the wise man is in the house of mourning*” (Eccles. 7:2,4). **The surest way to make yourself miserable is to live for yourself!**

These women shared Martha’s and Mary’s grief and they shared their joy, too. How much more should we who are the Lord’s disciples already care for one another in time of need!

Our Lord Jesus Christ shows us that loving someone is being touched by that which touches them, moved by that which moves them, and grieved by that which grieves them. Our Savior knew what he as about to do. Yet, he groaned because Martha and Mary were groaning. He wept because they wept. He was touched and moved by that which touched and moved these two women whom he dearly loved. May God give us grace to be like our Master!

PROVIDENCE

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Here is the fourth lesson set before us in this chapter by the Spirit of God.
— **God's time is always the right time** (vv. 6, 11-17)

(John 11:6) “When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.”

(John 11:11-17) “These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. (12) Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. (13) Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. (14) Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. (15) And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. (16) Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him. (17) Then when Jesus came, he found that he had *lain* in the grave four days already.”

Our Lord always knows when best to intervene, when best to work, and how. When he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two days. He knew Lazarus was dying. Yet, he stayed right where he was. For the sake of his church, for the good of his friends, for the salvation of his chosen, and for the glory of God, he stayed where he was until he knew that it was time for him to appear and act. Our Lord always intervenes at the right time.

It was in the fulness of time that Christ came to redeem and save his people. — Lazarus was dead for four days before Christ came to raise him from the dead. You know that, according to Peter, one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. By that calculation, there is a picture of our redemption here. Only four days passed (four thousand years) between our sin and death by the fall of Adam in the Garden and Christ's coming to save us from our sins, “*when the fulness of time was come!*”

In all the affairs of our lives, we need to realize that God's time is the best time for everything.

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“Nothing so helps us to bear patiently the trials of life as an abiding conviction of the perfect wisdom by which everything around us is managed.”

— J. C. Ryle

Everything that happens to us is well done, done in the best manner, by the right instrument, and at the right time. We are all naturally impatient when trials come. We want things done now. We cry out like Moses did when Miriam was stricken with leprosy, “*Heal her now, Lord*” (Num. 12:13). We ought to wait. **Our God is too wise to err, too good to do wrong and too strong to fail.** Our times are in his hands. It is our greatest wisdom and faith to patiently wait for him to do what he will, when he will.

- When we are sick, he knows the best time to heal us, and the best way!
- When we are in trouble, he knows the best time to deliver us, and way.
- When we need help, he knows the best time to help, and the best way.

DEATH

Here is our fifth lesson. — **Because Christ is the Resurrection and the Life and we live in him God’s elect shall never die** (vv. 11-14, 25-26).

(John 11:11-14) “These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. (12) Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. (13) Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. (14) Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.”

(John 11:25-26) “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: (26) And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”

Without question, we must all die in a physical sense. These bodies of clay must return to the dust. And you who are without Christ must die the second death, which is everlasting separation from God in hell. But believers do not die. When our bodies cease to function, when our earthly tabernacle is dissolved, when these houses of clay crumble, we shall be

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forever with the Lord in life. Those who have experienced the first resurrection, the new birth, shall never taste the second death (Rev. 20:6). For the believer, death is no more than the sleeping of the body for a while. Yet, while the body sleeps, while we shall be absent from the body, we shall be present with the Lord. This is exactly what our Lord Jesus told Martha in verses twenty-five and twenty-six.

“I am the Resurrection and the Life.” — Christ is our Life. We have life from him and we live in him by virtue of his Resurrection as our Substitute and Savior. He is our Resurrection.

- We were raised from the dead with him representatively.
- We have been raised from the dead in him spiritually in the new birth.
- We shall be raised from the dead literally by his power at the second coming.

“He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” — Though you are by nature a sinner, dead in trespasses and in sins by nature, if you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall live forever. You have everlasting life.

“Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die! Believest thou this?” — Believers shall never die! God’s elect are immune to death! For the believer death is a graduation, an elevation, a freedom, a liberty, an entrance into a life he longs for and expects. **Then, and not until then...**

- Our Most Earnest Prayers will be Answered.
- Our Highest, Noblest Ambitions will be Realized.
- Our Trials, Temptations, and Sorrows will be Over.

SALVATION (vv. 39-44)

Here is the sixth lesson given to us in this chapter. — **The salvation of a sinner is accomplished by the life-giving, resurrection power of the Son of God.**

(John 11:39-44) “Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days. (40) Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest

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see the glory of God? (41) Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up *his* eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. (42) And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said *it*, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. (43) And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. (44) And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.”

Here, in broad daylight, before many hostile witnesses, a man who had been dead for four days was raised to life again in a moment!

Here was public proof that our Lord Jesus Christ has absolute power over the material world. A corpse already corrupt and rotting, was made alive in an instant.

Here was public proof that our Lord Jesus Christ has absolute power over the spirit world. A soul that had left this tabernacle of clay was called back from heaven to earth to live a while longer in mortality.

Yet, great and glorious as these things are, I am certain that these things are recorded here primarily to teach us spiritual lessons about salvation and the way it is accomplished.

Lazarus was dead. — That is the spiritual condition of us all by nature. We are all born in a state of spiritual death. That means that we are totally incapable of doing anything to change our condition. If salvation comes, it must come from outside us!

Lazarus was decaying. — Time will not permit me to elaborate on this, but you who are without Christ, though you are dead, you are not in a state of indifference. Just as the dead corpse decays in the earth, so your spiritually dead hearts, and souls, and minds are in a state of unceasing decay. I dare say, I do not need to prove that statement to a single person here.

- Things that you once never dreamed you would think, now occupy your mind constantly.

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- Things you thought you could never do, you now practice without thought.
- If the thoughts of your mind were open to public view, you would be ashamed, if not terrified, to show your face in public.

Lazarus was delivered. — I must move though this far too quickly; but stay with me just a little longer.

First, our Savior spoke to the people at the tomb. — He said, in verse thirty-nine, “**Take ye away the stone.**” Why? If he could raise the dead, he could easily roll away the stone. But he is demonstrating the fact that though God always acts sovereignly in the salvation of sinners, he never by passes the use of means. We cannot raise the dead; but we can take away the stones. Therefore we are responsible to take away the stones!

Next, our Savior spoke to God the Father (vv. 41-42).

(John 11:41-42) “Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up *his* eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. (42) And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said *it*, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.”

I take that to be a picture of our Savior’s intercession for chosen sinners in heaven.

Then, the Lord Jesus spoke directly to Lazarus (v. 43).

(John 11:43) “And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.”

- A Personal Call!
- A Particular Call!
- A Powerful Call!

After Lazarus was risen, our Savior spoke to the people again.

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(John 11:44) “And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, **Loose him, and let him go.**”

Here is the mission of God’s church in this world. First, we are to **remove the stones** which hinder men from coming to Christ. We do that by preaching the gospel of God’s free grace in him. Then, when sinners are saved by the grace of God, it is our job to **loose them** from the grave clothes of death. We do that by exactly the same means, by preaching the gospel of God’s free grace in Christ.

- The Grave Clothes of Legalism!
- The Grave Clothes of Self-Righteousness!
- The Grave Clothes of Free-Willism!
- The Grave Clothes of Ritualism!

SUBSTITUTION

All of this would really be meaningless if I failed to show you the last thing revealed in this chapter, because the salvation of our souls is an utter impossibility without the sin-atonement, substitutionary sacrifice and death of the Lord Jesus Christ in the place of his people. So I want to show you something about substitution too (vv. 49-52).

(John 11:49-52) “And one of them, *named* Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, (50) Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. (51) And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; (52) And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.”

Here is the seventh lesson given in this chapter by the Spirit of God. — **The only way sinful men and women can be saved from the wrath of God is by the substitutionary sacrifice of that Man who is God in our place.**

Though he had absolutely no idea what he was saying, Caiaphas the high priest spoke by the Spirit of God as a prophet. He made two statements, said

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two things that very few preachers, let alone anyone else in this world, ever come to know. But these two things are vital to the gospel. Apart from these two things there is no gospel. Are you listening?

Justice must be satisfied — “*Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not*” (v. 50).

The Lord Jesus has fully satisfied the justice of God for his elect by his death upon the cursed tree (vv. 51-52).

(John 11:51-52) “And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; (52) And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.”

Application: *Barnard at Old Faithful!*

Amen.

¹ Covenant of Grace Baptist Church, North Wilkesboro, NC (FRI 08/22/08)