

## Back To Life (Part Two)

The Story of Lazarus

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Jesus already knew that Lazarus needed healing when the news reached Him. He assures His disciples that the sickness would not have death as a final result, however God was permitting it for two reasons. First, is for the furtherance and accomplishment of the Father's purpose and second, for His glorification as well as the glorification of Jesus Himself and who He was.

His delay in going to Bethany must have puzzled His friends, especially when He allowed it to end in death. Yet the distressed sisters, Mary and Martha, were going to grow in spiritual understanding and character just as Jesus Himself learned obedience by the things that He suffered.

Mary and Martha were sure Jesus would come because He loved them. They had to learn that He was not neglecting them but that His purpose in delaying His coming was one of godly love, not human love. Christ's love would benefit everyone, not just one person. His love of one would not come at the expense of others.

It was probably emotionally painful for Jesus to cause Mary and Martha such grief, but He wanted to reveal to them, and to us, that despite our inclination to help our friends, even if it is within our power to intervene, we must be guided by God's Spirit to prioritize His glory and our spiritual welfare rather than gratifying our own feelings. Quite often we try to help someone and wind up interfering with what God is doing in their lives. So we have to be very careful that we are not doing that.

We will review where we left off last time.

**John 11:1-4** Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying,

“Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.” 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.”

There is a lot of information there in those four verses. The disciple whom Jesus loved, John the author of the gospel, is not at all reluctant to record that Jesus loved others as well. Already we have been told that Jesus loved Lazarus.

**John 11:5-6** Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.

So we see here that Jesus also loved Martha and Mary as well. The interesting thing about these statements concerning Christ’s love is that they are given in a context that might cause us to doubt them, that is if we did not know any better.

The problem we have seen lies in the fact that Lazarus was sick, in spite of the fact that Jesus loved him and could heal him. On the surface this seems difficult to accept just as it sometimes difficult to accept sickness or death when they come our way. If Jesus really loves us how can He let this happen?

Now in looking at that problem we saw some answers and saw that sickness and death are not incompatible with Christ’s love. But we have another problem at this point. No sooner are we told that Jesus loved Martha, her sister Mary, and Lazarus, we also find the report in verse 6, “that He stayed two more days in the place that He was.”

This means that Jesus delayed His return to Bethany rather than rushing to help Lazarus or to comfort his sisters. Furthermore, we are to understand that the delay was, in some sense, connected with His love for these friends and flowed from it. So how can this be?

If we were in Christ’s place, we would immediately have returned to Bethany, or at least acknowledge that this is what we should do, at least from

a human standpoint. Yet Jesus does not; He stays where He is. It is only after two days that He finally goes back to Bethany, arriving four full days after Lazarus' funeral.

This requires some explaining, especially if we have ever experienced God's delay in our own personal lives. In answering our prayers and showing us the path we should take or removing a difficulty, does God delay? Yes, He does, but He delays always for a purpose. Here are three facts about why God delays:

- 1) Christ's delays are the delays of love.
- 2) The delayed help always comes at the right time.
- 3) The best help is not delayed.

We are going to go through each of these today.

The first truth here is that Christ's delays are delays of love. If the verse teaches anything, it teaches this because the point is that Jesus stayed where He was for two days *because* He loves them. We can not see the end from the beginning as God can therefore we cannot see how Christ's delay contributes to God's overall plan.

Also in the grief that we sometimes have, we often cannot see clearly. Even though God might have made His plan clear, it is hard to see through eyes filled with tears. The point however is that even though we cannot see how the situation will end or why it has come upon us, we can know that it flows from Christ's love and is controlled by it.

Christ's delays are delays of love therefore His delays must be interpreted in the light of His love and not the other way around. This truth suggests several related points. First, if Christ's delays are the delays of love then they are not the delays of indifference. He does not delay because He does not care, He delays because He does care. We recognize that delays often flow from indifference in human affairs. In fact, Jesus once told a story based on this very principle.

**Luke 18:1-6** Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’ And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’” Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said.

So what did Jesus conclude in this? He concluded in verses 7-8.

**Luke 18:7-8** “And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

So in other words will God bring about justice for His chosen ones who cry out to Him day and night? You know the answer to that, absolutely yes! The story does not mean that God is like the unjust judge of course, its point lies rather in the contrast. But the story does recognize that God sometimes delays in answering a particular prayer, and that in human affairs this is often the product of indifference. It teaches that indifference is never a characteristic of God.

Second, is that if Christ’s delays are delays of love then they are not the product of a preoccupation on Christ’s part. That is, He does not delay His answer because He is too busy to deal with our problem.

There is a story in the Old Testament in which the pagan gods are contrasted with the true God on just this point. It concerns Elijah. Elijah was troubled with the apostasy of Israel in a day where the majority of the people had become worshippers of Baal. So he challenged Ahab the king and the king’s prophets and the prophets of Baal to a contest. The prophets were to prepare an altar upon which a bull was to be sacrificed. Elijah was to do likewise. In each case there was to be an altar, wood, and the sacrifice, but no fire. The true God was to provide the fire.

The 450 prophets of Baal built their altar, made their sacrifice, and then began to call on Baal to send fire. Nothing happened. Finally they threw themselves upon the altar and even cut themselves with knives, still no flame descended. At this point Elijah began to mock them over the supposed preoccupation of their god.

**I Kings 18:27** And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, “Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.”

That was quite the ridicule of the peoples’ god at that time. Baal was unable to respond to his worshippers. At last, after they had given up, Elijah had called upon God, who is never preoccupied, and He responded with a fire that consumed not only the sacrifice but also the wood, the stones, and lapped up the twelve barrels of water that Elijah had caused to be poured upon them.

We learn from such stories that the delays of God are never the delays of indifference or of preoccupation, they are rather delays of love. However to say that Christ’s delays are the delays of love is also to say something positive. His delays have purpose. Love has a purpose. Therefore we are right to seek purposes in God’s delays. We must admit that we do not always know what God’s purposes are, but we had better be searching ourselves as well as other things to find out what His purposes are.

His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts, we cannot see the end from the beginning as He can, but still we can look for purposes and we can suggest, at least in general terms, what some might be. Quite often there is more than one, there are many. It may not only be to help us grow but may be to help others to grow or to call someone to come to Christ.

One of the goals reached by God through His delays is that of molding our errant wills to conform to His perfect will. When God answers us immediately it is often the case that we rush on to formulate our own plans for whatever comes next and we do not spend the time meditating or contemplating on why, or on the purpose.

When God delays, by contrast we are forced to ask, “Am I right in what I am trying to do? Is it God’s will? Does He have more to teach or tell me than I have heard?” An example of such a purpose is seen in God’s dealings with the people of Israel during their days of their desert wanderings. Because God kept them in the wilderness for forty years teaching them obedience until they had become the kind of disciplined, fighting force He was going to use one day to conquer Canaan. That was one purpose among many.

Another of God’s purposes in delays is to strengthen faith. Our faith does not grow much if we always get an immediate response, though we might think that it would. We think that if God would just show me a miracle I would have faith in Him for the rest of my life. How many miracles did the Israelites see—the crossing of the Red Sea and all the miracles through the forty years in the wilderness—yet they still had to keep working on their faith.

Our faith grows when we are forced to wait, trusting that God knows what He is doing and that He will fulfill His promises toward us eventually and in the proper time. Abraham’s faith grew in the same manner.

God had promised Abraham a son through whom he was to have a great posterity, but Abraham grew old, he was nearly 100 years old before his son came. What happened to His faith during these long years? Did it weaken and die? Not at all, on the contrary, the years of delay were the years in which Abraham’s faith grew the most. So much so that at the age of 99 he was willing to have his name changed from Abram, which means “father of many” to Abraham which means “father of a multitude” as a sign of his faith and the promise of God concerning the Son, who even then was not given. Then Isaac was born.

God uses delays to mold our wills and strengthen our faith and sometimes He does it simply to bring honor to His name and to honor Jesus.

**John 11:4** 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.”

God the Father and Jesus Christ are glorious and consequently to honor them is the only proper and desirable thing to do. We must rejoice that God is able to honor Himself through their circumstances and accomplishments in us.

Now we must learn to interpret circumstances by the love of Christ and not Christ's love by the circumstances. Christ's delays are the delays of love therefore they should be interpreted by love. If we do it the other way around, we will be even farther from understanding the circumstances and we may question that love. For instance, we may ask "Why is God taking so long to heal me?"

Now the second truth is that the delayed help always comes at the right time. Do not forget that God's clock is different from ours. In our day there are 12 hours and in God's day it is a thousand years. What seems long to us is to Him just a little while.

**John 16:16-18** "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father." Then some of His disciples said among themselves, "What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" They said therefore, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying."

The impatient disciples were being shortsighted because of their human reasoning which hindered their understanding here. The disciples were anticipating a time of separation from the Lord; however it had come so suddenly they were unprepared mentally to realize it. In the case of Mary and Martha, Jesus had delayed His answer for two days and it had felt like an eternity to them. It seemed like an agonizingly long time to them before they got Lazarus back.

We must be careful not to judge God's actions by our conception of time. We must realize that He always acts immediately and decisively *when the time is right*. We have an illustration of God's mastery of time and circumstances in the deliverance of Peter from prison following his arrest by king Herod.

Herod had killed James, the brother of John, and since this had pleased the leaders of the people, Herod planned to kill Peter also. The church prayed, but while they prayed Peter still remained in prison. He had been in prison before the Passover and Herod intended to kill him after the Passover. So for probably about 7 days, the Christians were praying, during which time God delayed. Each day went by until it was the night before Peter's pending execution. The time was up and that night, not a moment too soon or too late, the angel entered the prison and freed Peter.

Peter's liberation was done deliberately, nothing was hurried. It is true that when the angel appeared, the chains immediately fell off of Peter's hands and the gate swung open, but there was no hurry. Peter was told to put on his sandals, the angel waited while he did so. And then he was told to put on his robe, and after that the angel and Peter simply walked out of the prison. If you and I were in that situation we probably would not take our time, we would probably run out of there. God is never in haste; He never comes too soon or too late.

**Psalm 37:40** And the Lord shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in Him.

The key here is that we have to have faith that God is not only able to do it but that He *will* do it and at the *right* times. God's delay makes the difference the more obvious and joyous when it is granted.

**Proverbs 13:12** Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.

So when we are desiring God's intervention and it is delayed, our hope makes the heart sick because it is not being answered.

We have one more purpose to cover. We have seen that Christ's delays are out of love and we have seen that the delayed help always comes at the right time. Now the third purpose is that the best help is never delayed. The



principle we have been looking at is an important principle but we need to notice that at best it applies to only one half, and not even the most important half, of our prayer and of God's answers.

We ask for something in which God delays His intervention. He delays guidance and healing, the changing of circumstances and so forth, but in the most important things, those that concern spiritual help, growth, salvation, and blessing there is no delay. Rather in these the help comes instantly.

The story of Lazarus is an example of God's delay for two more days. However in contrast, God's immediate intervention with no delays was described as God's approach in the Millennium.

**Isaiah 65:24** "It shall come to pass that before they [these are people in the Millennium] call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear."

If you are praying for spiritual help, insight, forgiveness, or a deeper relationship to God then you can be sure that God hears you and that He is moving even now to meet your needs.

Turn to Matthew 14. Here Peter again becomes our example. You remember the scene where Peter saw Jesus walking toward him over the water, approaching the boat in which Peter was riding. Peter was sometimes cowardly, but he was also sometimes brave. When he saw Jesus, he reasoned that if Jesus could walk on the water, then by the power of Jesus and the Holy Spirit Peter could walk on the water also.

**Matthew 14:28-32** And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

So Peter began to look at the waves rather than Jesus, and we do the same thing in our lives. He began to lose faith and he became afraid and began to sink. Immediately, no time for delays, help was needed, and help came instantly.

There are three great lessons here. First, is that if God delays it is because He has a purpose in His delays. The second, is that when we need help immediately, He is there and helps instantly. And the third point is that in that help we always find what we need most.

Life is short, time is valuable. How we spend our time is important and these thoughts lie behind the verses we will read. Jesus had delayed for two days after learning from Mary and Martha that their brother was sick.

**John 11:7-10** Then after this He said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” The disciples said to Him, “Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?” 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. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.”

That was probably baffling to the disciples not realizing that the light of the day was Christ. In approaching these verses we must remember that they occur in a gospel that shows an unusual interest in time.

We first notice this in the opening chapters of the gospel of John. There John presents the first great opening week of Christ's ministry noting in a series of seven significant days:

- 1) How John the Baptist first denied that he himself was the Messiah.
- 2) How he pointed to Jesus.
- 3) How the first disciples followed Christ.
- 4) How those disciples brought others.

5) How Jesus traveled to Galilee.

6) How Jesus turned water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana.

7) How Jesus manifested His glory.

This week ends with the significant statement in John 2.

**John 2:11** This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

The same attention to time is seen in other ways also. For instance John pays attention to time references by which the events of Christ's ministry are marked. In John 2:13 we find him dating Christ's first return to Jerusalem as occurring at "the time of the Passover of the Jews." Again in John 5:1, Jesus goes back to Jerusalem a second time, having in the meantime left it "at the feast of the Jews."

In John 6:4, when Jesus multiplies the loaves of bread in Galilee "the Jewish Passover feast was near." In John 7:2, Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. John 10:22, we are told of "the feast of Dedication." In John 12:1, we are told of the events of the last weeks of Christ's life take place at "the final Passover."

And one of John's most important words in his gospel, is "time," sometimes translated "hour." It is used in connection with Christ's death and resurrection. Early in the gospel we find expressions like these "My time had not yet come," or "His hour has not yet come." Later, on the verge of the crucifixion, John records:

**John 12:23** But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified."

**John 13:1** Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

**John 16:32** Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.”

**John 17:1** Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.”

So we see here that John pays attention to the timing of the events of Christ’s ministry because they are vitally significant to Gods’ plan and therefore marks those time references. And what do we do when we count to Pentecost? We mark time, do we not?

Who controls time? Expressed in this way questions about time become a test of our trust in God. This is significant because this is the way that the subject is introduced by Jesus in John 11. To see this, we need to notice that when Jesus announced His decision to go to Bethany to help Lazarus, He announced it by inviting the disciples to go with Him to Judea. Apart from the context this was a strange thing to say. We might have expected Him to say, “Let’s go to Bethany and help Lazarus,” but He did not say that.

In saying, “Let’s go to Judea,” He was deliberately choosing a word that remind the disciples of what awaited them in the metropolitan area of the capitol. This is where Jesus’ enemies lived and it was here that He had almost been stoned.

Obviously by expressing that matter in this way, Jesus was testing His disciples to see whether they trusted God with the ordering of their lives and whether they were willing to spend whatever time might be given to them in Christ's service, and so He chose the last place on earth they would want to go, which was Judea.

The disciples seemed willing, because it states that in verse 16.

**John 11:16** Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”

But whether they were willing or not, at least they recognized the danger and in verse 8 the disciples said to Him,

**John 11:8** The disciples said to Him, “Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?”

Obviously it is in times of danger that we most need to trust God. If we were to hear a voice, for example, come from God and say, “Quick, get up and go to the place of safety,” many would not go because they do not trust God enough. Do we really have the faith to follow Christ to some place that might be the worst place on earth from our human perspective?

So Jesus began to teach them about time and He did so first by asking a question:

**John 11:9** 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.”

This question was intended to make them think and to make us think. Having sufficient time suggests three truths. First, God gives each of us a certain amount of time and nothing can shorten it. The days of our lives will not finish before it ends. This applied to Jesus of course. Notice what He said on an earlier occasion when He was warned about the hostility of King Herod.

**Luke 13:32** And He said to them, “Go, tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.’ [or, ”I will reach my goal.”]

So Jesus’ life was not going to be cut short by His enemies one minute before the time appointed by the Father, and as Christians, neither is ours. He has given us a certain number of days and we will not die before they are up. That is not to say that we do not have free will, we do have free will to do right or wrong and we are judged for the things we do right or wrong.

The conclusion from this is that we need not fear what people can do to us. Put another way, if the prolonging of our days is in our own hands, then we must be extremely careful in all that we do. We must be overly cautious.

For instance, are you sure you want to take that summer trip by car if it is totally in your hands without God's help? Many people die on the roadways, you might be safer staying home. Be sure not to anger anyone, because that person may be the kind that kills people, and be careful not to stand for anything because it may be offensive to others to the point where they may hurt you or kill you.

You get my point here. If God is not the one in control, then we are the ones in control and then we will be very fearful of all decisions made.

On the other hand, if God orders the duration of your days and if nothing can cut them short, then you can be bold and serve Him as Jesus did. Jesus knew that there was God-appointed work to be done and that He would have sufficient time to do it.

The second truth about sufficient time is that if God gives us each a certain amount of time and if nothing can shorten it, then there is time enough for everything that needs to be done. That is the last thing that human reasoning can believe. The conclusion to be drawn from this truth is that we do not need to be frantic. We are a fairly frantic people, work seems pressing, necessities crowd in on us, time seems to be slipping away. This is a picture we have painted for ourselves, it is not of God.

The principle of sufficient time is one by which we may establish priorities in our lives. If you are in God's church and if you seem to have twenty hours of work to do in just sixteen hours, then obviously four hours of that work is not given to you by God. and you should not do it. You need to ask yourself, what are the dispensable items? Maybe you do not need that second job, maybe God simply does not want you to have an extra income at the expense of your children's proper care. Or you will not want to cut out your personal time of Bible study, prayer, worship, and fellowship with Christian friends.

There are items you can cut out. You can stop wasting time. If we are frantic, it is our own fault, and we need to look at our priorities and prioritize our life a little better. We have the sufficient time for all that God has given us to do. It is a matter of prioritizing.

The third truth suggested by Christ's question is that even though we have sufficient time to do all that God has given us to do, nevertheless we have only that amount of time and it should not be wasted. Are there twelve hours to the day? Yes, but there are not thirteen. So we cannot afford to waste time.

All people start by being condemned, a position from which we escape only by turning in faith to Jesus Christ.

**John 3:16-18** “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

Now turn to Ephesians 5. This verse makes a true point about time. Time is precious! Nothing can lengthen it, so it must be used wisely. Christ must make the most of every opportunity because the evil of the world's days are coming to the end of this age.

**Ephesians 5:15-17** See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

So Christians must actively take advantage of the opportunity to do good. Wisdom is especially needed in an evil age where the pathway to holiness is not always immediately clear until one reflects on God's Word and discerns His will. The wisdom from above enables the faithful to live by the right priorities. If you are close to God you will have the right priorities, if you are not close to God then you will not have the right priorities.

Now this also applies to the way and how much we spend time with people in the world.

**Colossians 4:5** Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.

If we could think this way consistently, any one of these truths would effect a transformation of our lives. We would see many things we do dropping out. We would find many items of higher priority taking their place and there would be less time wasted.

Now let us go back to John 11. Having asked this question and having stimulated the thoughts of the disciples along the lines of having sufficient time, Jesus wrapped up His teaching by elaborating briefly on the question and drawing some conclusions. We need to do the same.

**John 11:9-10** 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. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.”

This is true on two levels, and Jesus intended both. On the physical level, it refers to the visible light of the sun. In Jesus’ day there were no streetlights to illuminate the cities, there was little artificial light of any kind, just the dim light of lanterns and candles. So when the day ended, a person’s work had to be done. To be away after nightfall was to stumble and risk injury. On this level the words encouraged a person to use time wisely.

On the other hand, there is also a spiritual meaning that can hardly escape any perceptive reader of John’s gospel. Here Jesus speaks of “the light of this world.” But who can read the phrase without at once thinking of Jesus Himself? He is the light of this world and this was one of the designations He gave Himself.



**John 8:12** Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

Then in John 9 we read:

**John 9:5** “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

So we see that qualifier there, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” He is the light in whose light a person may walk and not stumble. He is the One without whom we are in darkness. In making these observations, Jesus clearly wanted to raise our thoughts from a physical level, which is important and valid itself, to a more spiritual level and to cause us to ask, “Am I in the darkness? Or do I walk with Christ who is the light of life?”

**Proverbs 4:18** But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.

Even a Christian will stumble if he allows his relationship with Christ to weaken. He will stumble but not fall. The Bible speaks of God’s power to prevent stumbling. God’s Spirit dwelling in us gives us the spiritual ability to resist the things that may drag us down and cause us to fail.

**Jude 24** Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

Jesus will be joyful, especially when we are resurrected and enter into the Kingdom of God as Spirit beings.

Now let us go back to the story of Lazarus. As Jesus leaves for Bethany, He gives those around Him a softened description of death to indicate that it is temporary. His disciples think that He refers to natural sleep and that Lazarus could recover from his sickness. Let us move forward a little bit to verse 11.

**John 11:11-13** These things He said, and after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.” Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.” However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep.

We must learn to see death from God’s perspective. Christ has power over life and death. Intellectually we have no doubt of that, but do we really believe it faithfully? In this case, He was willing to resurrect Lazarus from death to physical life. He used Lazarus’ death to perform a miracle that would glorify God and identify God as the Messiah, the Savior of mankind.

God revealed the resurrection of the dead long before Jesus’ earthly ministry. Job shows that he knew the answer to his own rhetorical question in Job 14.

**Job 14:14** If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes.

So Job was well aware that there was a resurrection coming when he died. That was revealed to him personally by God. When a person dies he will be resurrected at the appropriate time. Jesus prophesies in John 5,

**John 5:28-29** “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

The lesson of this breathtaking miracle is that Christ is the regenerator of the dead, spiritually and physically, and He is able to regenerate the hearts and minds of those who are spiritually dead in their sins, if they repent of their sins and overcome them.

Today there is an openness about death. In the past it was not spoken of, now it is and with increasing openness. This brings us to an interesting question, because if we are finding out what the doctors, nurses, and columnists think of death today, certainly we also find ourselves wanting to ask, “What did Jesus think about death?” He was in contact with death, even His own death which He saw coming, and also the death of others. How did He regard it? Did He accept death, or did He long for a stay of execution?

What Jesus thought on the subject is important because He had knowledge that we do not have and His views should illuminate our own. Christ’s answer to the question was two-fold. It depended on whether the death in view was the death of an unbeliever or a believer. If it was the death of an unbeliever, Jesus was not encouraging in this area at all. He warned people about dying in this state. To die without faith in Himself as the Savior was ultimately to die permanently. We will read Matthew 25.

**Matthew 25:41** “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’

**Matthew 25:46** “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

The explanation of Christ’s sternness at this point is not hard to find because in the teaching of the Bible death is separation and the death of an unbeliever is a separation of the human spirit from God. Since God is light, this separation which an unbeliever experiences, means he lives in spiritual darkness.

On the other hand, Jesus was most encouraging about the death of believers. He was most encouraging on this aspect of the question as He was discouraging on the other.

**John 14:2** “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”

In John 11 He called death “sleep” and said that He was glad that it had happened to His friend Lazarus.

**John 11:11-15** These things He said, and after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.” Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.” However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.”

What a stunning expression this is. “Lazarus is dead. And I am glad, . . . .” That can be taken as an insult. We might understand it better if Jesus had said “Lazarus is sleeping physically and I am glad,” because He would then have thought as the disciples had thought when they apparently misunderstood Christ's meaning.

We would have thought that sleep is a good thing and that Lazarus might therefore recover, just as the disciples did, but this is not what Christ said. He said that “Lazarus is dead. And I am glad, . . . .” so we find ourselves asking how can Jesus be glad, how can death be a cause for rejoicing? Remember, we are looking at this from Christ's viewpoint of death.

There are several answers to this question and they are all in the passage. Jesus was glad at Lazarus' death because Lazarus was a believer and he understood what the death of a believer was and it was not something to fear. In these verses he terms it a “sleep,” which it is, and it implies that not only is it not to be feared but rather that it is to be regarded as something beneficial. We understand this better when we begin to reflect on sleep itself and the good that comes from it. Notice first that normal sleep is harmless, so also is death for the believer. David knew this.

**Psalms 23:4** Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

Paul also wrote in I Corinthians 15,

**I Corinthians 15:56-57** The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore the death of a believer is harmless. It is not that death itself is harmless, but rather that Christ has tasted death fully in place of those who believe in Him. He was struck for us in order that we might hide in Him as the storms of death pass by.

Secondly notice that sleep is restful. It is a relief of the work of the day. Ecclesiastes 5 notes:

**Ecclesiastes 5:12** The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.

The disciples said of Lazarus,

**John 11:12** Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.”

Thus in Revelation 14 we read:

**Revelation 14:13** Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.”

Nevertheless God’s Kingdom will be filled with activity because God is active Himself. He is the Creator after all, and we will be like Him. God’s Kingdom will not be restful in the sense that there will be no work to do, but it will be restful in the sense that what we do will be done without drudgery. We will enjoy the work we have to do in the Kingdom. It will be without the strain, labor, and the sorrow that work involves in this life because of sin’s curses.

There is one more thing about the resemblance between death and sleep. Sleep is temporary. We sleep to rise again, in the same way death is temporary. We die but we do so in order to rise to a world prepared for us by our heavenly Father. Also on the spiritual level, death is so temporary that it can hardly be described by time words at all. How long is death? It has no duration to the person who is dead. Instead it is a passage from this world to the next, in a sense it is a doorway.

**II Corinthians 5:8** We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Since this is what death is it is any wonder that Jesus could say “Lazarus is dead and I am glad, . . .”?

There is a second reason Jesus could say that He was glad. It was because He knew that He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead and this is what He implies in the same verse that speaks of Lazarus sleeping.

**John 11:11** These things He said, and after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.”

It is interesting that during Jesus’ earthly ministry there is no indication anywhere in Scripture that Jesus ever met a dead person and failed to raise him. On one occasion when He was passing the little village in Galilee, He met a funeral procession coming out of the city, a man had died, the only son of a widow. Jesus touched the man and restored him to life. On another occasion Jesus raised the dying 12-year-old only daughter of Jairus, ruler of the synagogue.

Did Christ ever come across a death or illness of any kind without intervening? We cannot be absolutely sure because His whole life was not recorded, but from the Scriptures it shows that He always intervened.

**John 21:25** And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.

So Jesus can raise the dead, but only He and His Father can do it, no one else can. If a person is sick, but not yet dead, there is a place for physicians and other caregivers, natural remedies and some medicines, coupled with the skill of the doctors or caregivers such as chiropractors, neuropaths, homeopaths, and so on, combined with the natural rejuvenating, regenerating power of the human body can do wonders. But if the person is dead, then doctors and other caregivers are useless. Only Jesus and the Father can call forth life in resurrection.

Sadly, not everyone knows Christ's voice.

**John 8:43** "Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word."

He said that only those who had been given to Him by the Father, only His sheep and only His followers could respond. And that is why the banner of the Church of the Great God is John 10:27, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."

Jesus was glad that Lazarus had died for a third reason. Because He knew that He would raise Lazarus. He was glad because He knew that the resurrection would result in the strengthening of the faith of many.

**John 11:15** "And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him."

The faith of the disciples was to strengthen, the faith of Martha and Mary was to be strengthened, even many who did not have faith were to come to it because of this dramatic resurrection. Of course, all the miracles recorded in the Bible are true. These are recorded than others because these miracles are superb illustrations of salvation. Thus the impotent man is a reflection of us before we are restored spiritually. We are helpless, unable to move, unable to take the first step toward Jesus Christ.

The man born blind is another example. He was unable to see Jesus. If Jesus had told the man to seek Him and that He would then help him, the man could not have done it on his own, yet Jesus healed him. In the same way the

story of Lazarus is included to show what it means to be dead in trespasses and sins and why it is necessary that the voice of Christ called out to revive us from this spiritual slumber. We will not awaken spiritually unless God calls us and when He does, we do awaken.

The apostle Paul wanted to awaken people because of his transformed life. He expresses the hope that he might, through the power of Christ's resurrection, himself attain the resurrection.

**Philippians 3:10-11** that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

The phrase did not suggest that Paul was uncertain about the ultimate outcome of his salvation, as though he might one day discover that he was lost. But he does not mean that, as he shows in Romans 8.

**Romans 8:38-39** For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What Paul meant was that he wanted to attain the resurrection now, that is, to live as a spirit being, which every one of God's people want as well. He wanted to rise with the saints, to enter with them to the eternal inheritance. Although the death of a loved one is extraordinarily sad, we can be glad for him/her knowing that he awaits his resurrection and is at peace.