

**John 11:1-16**

1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3 So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 4 But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." 5 Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6 after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. 10 But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." 11 After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." 12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." 13 Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16 Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (NRSV).

The death and rising of Lazarus is a very important sign and significant event that prepares us for the passion narrative. It directly foreshadows Jesus' own death and resurrection. It indicates what will happen to Jesus as he goes to Judea in order to die and be raised. It reveals God's glory as Jesus let Lazarus die so people could see with their own eyes the reality of resurrection. It is verification of the proof of Jesus' argument from the last festival. The work of Jesus is on God's time and Jesus knows exactly when to travel back to Judea.

The death and resurrection of Lazarus is very important in John. Jesus is headed to the cross. He was rejected by the religious leaders during the festival of the Dedication (Hanukkah) where they tried to stone him for blasphemy because he boldly stated that he and God are one. Instead of recognizing the truth, they refused to believe Jesus due to their embedded doctrine. They refused to believe the obvious even though the proof of his divinity is verified by his acts of goodness. The religious leaders tried to arrest him again but he escaped and crossed over the Jordan to a safe place where John the Baptist was baptizing earlier.

I find it interesting that Jesus went back to his baptism during the time between the festivals of Hanukkah and Passover. The power of the people that plot to kill him weakens away from Jerusalem. That's because the problem that Jesus has is not demons or the forces of evil but the people in the temple. I hope that concept has the space it needs to sink in. The problem Jesus has is with the people in the temple that claim to be right with God but neglect God's love. Jesus brings us the love of God. He knows he is headed to the cross, he knows people do not understand the true extent of God's love. He goes back to his baptism. He goes back to his roots of faith. He finds his sanctuary where he was baptized. It is outside the power grip of religious leaders some 30-40 miles away, which is a two day journey on foot that he finds the sanctuary that is missing from the

temple. The people there know the testimony of John the Baptist to be true. Therefore, many people there believed in Jesus.

The Scripture names three friends of Jesus. As a human being, he is a lot like us, he has friend too. The ones named would be the closest. Three siblings named Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, live in Bethany. This is about two miles from Jerusalem. It is very close to Jerusalem which is dangerous for Jesus. Those people over there want to kill him. This is where Jesus stayed throughout Passion Week. There is a valuable lesson in here on what we are to be as Christians. His friends provided a place of refuge during the storm. His friends are his sanctuary. When the church has been taken over by judges God's sanctuary is in the hands of friends. When Lazarus fell sick his sisters sent word to come to the rescue. There is an obligation of close friendship that expects a quick response.

Jesus explained this illness of Lazarus is different. It is special. This illness is for God's glory. At the last festival the religious leaders demanded proof; at this festival he gives proof that he is the giver of life. With this illness the Son of God is glorified. Back in chapter nine Jesus healed a man that was blind since birth and the disciples want to know who sinned for the man to be blind, him or his parents. Jesus told them that it was neither one, it was so that God's work would be revealed in him. Well, the same thing is happening here with Lazarus it is for God's love and grace to be revealed. I hope you can understand what is happening. Jesus knows that to leave the area of safety to head to Jerusalem is dangerous. He knows he must face his own death and resurrection.

Jesus stayed two days longer because he knew what was going to happen. Apparently he knew Lazarus was dead before he actually received the news. The Bible is clear Jesus is determined to go back to Jerusalem. The disciples protest because the religious leaders tried to stone him to death. Jesus pretty much tells them that they don't know what is going on. He tells them that Lazarus has fallen asleep and he is going to go wake him up. The Scripture reveals the disciples just don't get it.

Imagine being Jesus. The religious leaders want to kill him. The disciples don't understand him or God's love. The people do not get who he is or what he is all about. Jesus makes it clear the purpose of Lazarus' death. Now we will go to him so that you have a chance to believe. That chance to believe is what is needed. After all they have been through; after all of the lessons, after all of the eye witness accounts of the miracles, after all of the good works Jesus has done, he still needs a chance for the people to get it. After seeing the proof, hopefully they will understand the love of God. Despite the danger of hostility, Jesus must act promptly because he knows his time has come.

The illness of Lazarus is not about death; Jesus will give him life. It is the gift of life that reveals the glory of God. For God's glory Jesus is manifest. God's glory is the love of God is revealed. God's glory is a theme of the gospels. Jesus rebuked people that were focused on their own self glory. The illness of Lazarus was for God's glory. The irony is that this illness that does not end in the death of Lazarus, ends in the death of Jesus where we all get to see the extent of divine love. Earlier, Jesus taught the greatest love is to die on behalf of friends. Jesus is the good shepherd that is willing to lay down his own life for the sake of the flock. The greatest love of all is what Jesus gave. The greatest love is what God gave. As the day light hours are limited, so is the time frame for Jesus to complete his divine mission. Nothing at all will distract him or sidetrack him from this mission. It is far too important. He does not focus on the death; his focus is on the outcome.