

IT IS FOR GOD'S GLORY

John 11:1-16

Key Verse: 11:4

“When he heard this, Jesus said, ‘This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.’”

In today’s passage Jesus goes to Bethany, near Jerusalem. It is to raise his friend Lazarus from the dead. But ultimately, it is to reveal God’s glory and his own identity as the Son of God. Jesus teaches us how to see things from God’s point of view. Jesus also teaches us how to live for the glory of God.

First, Mary, Martha and Lazarus (1-3).

In verses 1-3, John introduces the family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. This family lived in Bethany and they had a close relationship with Jesus. Jesus knew each of them personally. Mary seems to have been a youngest daughter in the family. She knew very well how to receive love from Jesus. When Jesus came to their house, she would sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to him attentively with her eyes wide open. She loved most to receive the word of life from Jesus. Afterward, she probably acted like Maria in “The Sound of Music” who danced through the hills while singing to no one in particular. Once, she came to Jesus with her most precious treasure: a jar of perfume of the highest quality. She poured this on Jesus in an extravagant expression of affection for her Lord. Then she wiped his feet with her hair. She loved Jesus and she knew that Jesus loved her.

Martha was hardworking and diligent (Lk 10:38-41). She served others wholeheartedly. It was Martha who saw to the needs of Jesus and his hungry disciples whenever they visited. Feeding Jesus’ disciples seemed to require a fully staffed restaurant. But somehow Martha managed to handle this task regularly. She even stitched up their clothes and reminded them to send letters to their loved ones. Because Martha worked so hard, she sometimes got upset at Mary who seemed lazy and indifferent to her real world struggle. Once Martha even rebuked Jesus to stop Bible study with Mary and make her work together in serving. But Jesus gently rebuked Martha that Bible study was best, and Martha accepted it. Perhaps Jesus was the only one could speak to Martha in that way.

These two sisters lived together in the small community of Bethany with their brother Lazarus. We don’t know much about Lazarus except that he was sick. Probably he was somewhat weak as the only son among two sisters. But in the Jewish culture they lived in he was the leader of the family. He was everything to his sisters. When he became sick, they were very sorry. They tried everything they could, but he did not get better, he got worse. Now, he was near death. Mary and Martha felt that they were losing everything. They hugged each other and cried. Finally they sent word to Jesus, saying, “Lord, the one you love is sick.” They believed that Jesus could heal him. They were confident in Jesus’ love and they expected him to come soon.

Second, “it is for God’s glory” (4).

When Jesus heard the message sent by the sisters, he said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory, so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” Jesus immediately sensed the seriousness of the sickness. Jesus knew it was life-threatening. But Jesus did not say, “I understand. I will be there right away.” Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death.” Jesus saw this event as a struggle with the power of death. And Jesus declared victory from the beginning. Moreover, Jesus saw this event from God’s point of view. It was not a sorrowful tragedy. It was the beginning of God’s work. It would reveal God’s glory and the glory of the Son.

Here we learn from Jesus to see things from God’s point of view. In the previous passage Jesus said, “I and the Father are one.” Jesus always had God in his heart. Jesus always had God’s purpose in his mind. So he could find God’s good purpose in Lazarus’ sickness. It would be used for God’s great world salvation work. Those who live under the power of sin and death cannot see God’s glory. But those who have God in their hearts can see God’s glory revealed in even the most troubling circumstances.

Someone may say, “Well, Jesus is God so he can see the glory of God, but I am not Jesus so I cannot see the glory of God.” This is nothing but a cover up for godlessness. Refusal to glorify God is the beginning of sin. Romans 1:21

says, "For although they knew God they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." When people refuse to glorify God, they become spiritually blind. They can see only sin and death and become fatalistic and miserable. There is a young man who is the only son of a widowed mother. He is everything to his mother. In fact, he became like God to his mother. He received so much love and serving that he was completely spoiled. He became proud and spiritually blind. He does not know how to respect God or God's people. His problem is his only son's sickness that drives him to steal God's glory. He must deeply acknowledge this and repent before God.

There are so many troubled people in America today. There are so many distressed people in America today. It is because of the sin of self-glory seeking. Romans 2:8-9 says, "But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil." The good news is that God accepts those who repent. When we sincerely repent our sin of self-glory seeking, God forgives our sin and cleanses us with the blood of Jesus. God gives us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ, and Christ alone. The Holy Spirit enables us to serve God with a right motive in holiness and righteousness. We have planned eleven Easter Bible Conferences in the Chicago area UBF chapters next week. Many messengers and testimony sharers are preparing for this. They must have in their hearts, "It is for God's glory." They must reveal Christ through their messages and testimonies. For this they need the Holy Spirit. May God grant them the Holy Spirit.

Third, "Jesus loved them, yet he stayed two more days" (5-6).

Look at verses 5-6. "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days." Verse 5 clearly says that Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Jesus was like a father to the family. To a father, when his child is sick, his only thought is to heal him. Surely, Jesus wanted to heal Lazarus. Jesus knew Mary and Martha's anguish of heart as they watched Lazarus die. To any man, bearing a grieving woman is very difficult. Bearing two grieving women is more difficult. Most men will do anything to comfort a grieving woman even for a few minutes. But Jesus was different. Jesus stayed where he was, causing great pain for the family. It was for God's glory. Jesus' love did not just make others feel good. It led them to glorify God. It also solved the problem from the root.

To the family, Lazarus was the symbol of their security. But sick Lazarus could not be a source of everlasting security. They needed to know who Jesus really was. Jesus is the Son of God who gives life and raises the dead. They needed to see God in Jesus. That is why Jesus let them experience suffering. Jesus' love led them to know God, find eternal life, and live for his glory.

Many people think of love as a sensual romantic feeling. This is the kind of love described in pop songs. According to one survey the most frequently played pop song in the past forty years is, "You've lost that loving' feeling," by the Righteous Brothers. This kind of love is as hot as fire one moment and as cold as ice the next. It is also selfish and damages others in the end. A Biblical example is Amnon, the son of David, mentioned in 2 Samuel 13. Amnon fell in love with Tamar. It was erotic passion and he was out of control. He violated Tamar. After that, he began to hate her. In fact he hated her more than he had loved her and threw her away like garbage. One of the great mistakes a human being can make is to fall into sensual romantic feelings.

God's love is different than sin-stained human feelings. God's love is holy. God's love is everlasting. People who have God's love for others seek first to glorify God and next the good of others' souls. God's love is revealed clearly through Jesus' death on the cross. God bore great pain to watch his precious Son Jesus be crucified by evil men. But it was the only way that God could maintain his justice and save mankind from sin. God's love seeks to restore God's righteous rule in creation order and to bring about man's eternal salvation.

We must love others with God's love. God's love disciplines; it does not spoil. God's love rebukes sin; it does not compromise. God's love encourages one to fulfill his mission for God's glory, bearing much pain. It was 1997. It was the scene of the International Summer Bible Conference at MSU. There was a young man who prepared to dance for the glory of God to "Schubert's Serenade." But just before he was to perform, he hurt his leg and felt he could not dance. Then his shepherd told him, "Dance for the glory of God. Even if you have a broken leg, dance with a broken leg for the glory of God." The young man did so. He experienced the overflowing joy of pleasing God through suffering. Later he accepted Jesus' word, "I am the Way," with absolute faith. Now he serves God in ever-

growing holiness. In order to practice divine love, Jesus overcame his own human feelings and allowed his sheep to suffer. It was for God's glory. We must learn to love others for the glory of God, and the glory of God alone. The best way to love others for the glory of God is to share the word of God with repentance and faith.

Fourth, Jesus teaches faith to his disciples (7-16).

After two days passed, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." It was not the news they wanted to hear. Look at verse 8. "'But Rabbi,' they said, 'a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?'" To the disciples, the memory of the religious leaders standing around Jesus with stones in their hands and murder on their faces was all too vivid. They thought Jesus should lay low for a while and stay away from Jerusalem, perhaps for ten or fifteen years. When Jesus said with determination, "Let us go back to Judea," they should have said, "Yes sir, Master." Instead, they were shocked. The problem was fear in their hearts. Fear made them rebellious.

Fear has always been a problem for mankind. Fear makes people cowardly and ungodly. Someone has counted 530 phobias. Included are cyberphobia, that is the fear of computers or working on computers, and decidophobia, that is the fear of making decisions, and ebephobia, that is fear of teenagers, gamophobia, that is fear of marriage, gynephobia, that is fear of women, hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia, that is fear of long words, petheraphobia, that is, fear of mother-in-law, and phobophobia, that is, fear of phobias. We probably know more about fear today than at any time in the past. But it has not helped us to overcome fear. Ultimately, fear is rooted in the power of death. The devil uses the power of death to terrify people and make them his prisoners (Heb 2:15). It was the devil whispering in the ears of the disciples that worked up the fear that was in their hearts.

How did Jesus deal with his disciples? Look at verses 9-10. "Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light.'" Twelve hours of daylight refers to the portion of time God has given for man to work. Allegorically, it refers to man's span of life. Jesus knew he was on God's time schedule. God had a definite mission for Jesus. Until that mission was completed Jesus could not die. With this faith, Jesus had boldly entered the synagogue time and again and confronted the religious leaders. They wanted to kill Jesus, but Jesus knew it was impossible for them to do so before God's time came. Jesus wanted his disciples to have the same faith. Their lives were in the hand of God. They had a definite mission and purpose in God. By faith they could do the work of God boldly until they finished their mission. The disciples should have seen Jesus' example. They also should have listened to Jesus' words. Jesus is the light of the world. When we follow Jesus we never walk in darkness and we have nothing to fear.

Jesus went on to tell his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." This reveals Jesus' view of death. To Jesus, death is like a sweet sleep. How nice it is to sleep well after a day of hard work. Likewise, when our mission is completed in this world, we will lay down to sleep in everlasting rest with our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we do not need to be afraid of death.

The disciples did not understand what Jesus was talking about. They said, "Lord if he sleeps he will get better." So Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe." Jesus' greater purpose in allowing Lazarus to die was to plant resurrection faith in his disciples. Soon Jesus would die on the cross as a ransom for sinners. Jesus would rise again and go to the Father in heaven. It would be up to his disciples to carry on the gospel ministry. If they were slaves to fear they could do nothing. It was most urgent for them to learn resurrection faith. Once they had resurrection faith, they could go throughout the whole world and preach the gospel boldly. God's glory would be revealed and creation order would be restored through them. Slaves of fear cannot glorify God. But bold resurrection witnesses can glorify God. We must know that what Jesus wants most for each of us is to learn resurrection faith. The problems and difficulties that exist in our lives have a godly purpose. There is no tragedy in Jesus. Everything is an opportunity to learn resurrection faith and give glory to God.

Jesus concluded, "But let us go to him." For the disciples to have resurrection faith, they had to take Jesus at his word, overcome their fear and go back to Jerusalem. Though Jesus said, "Let us go," no one was moving. Then Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Thomas did not really understand Jesus. Thomas thought he was going to die with Jesus in Jerusalem. Still, he was ready to follow Jesus. His loyalty is remarkable. But without resurrection faith he was useless.

God made man to live for the glory of God. God wants to receive glory through us by making North America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But if we live by the sinful nature we are useless to God. We must repent and receive the Holy Spirit. Then we can glorify God. If we have many kinds of phobias we are useless to God. We must learn resurrection faith until we can carry out God's prayer topic to pioneer all North American college campuses. It is for God's glory.