

Lazarus Sick

HN/SS 4/09/05 am

Reading: Isaiah 55, John 11:1-44

Study Text: John 11:1-6

Sing Psalms: 30:1-5, 30:6-12, 23, 46:8-11

Jesus wept (11:35). These two words comprise the shortest verse in the Bible but they also give perhaps the greatest depth of insight into the heart of Jesus Christ. He was fully man. He was perfect man. He loved Lazarus and his sisters deeply.

Lazarus, come forth cried Jesus in a loud voice (11:43). Jesus commanded the dead man to come out of the grave and he did! Such power and authority can only be of God. Jesus declared *I am the resurrection and the life*.

We are entering one of the most marvellous chapters in the Bible as we turn to John chapter 11.

Special Family

Bethany was a village just 5km south of Jerusalem. Here lived Lazarus and his two sisters Martha and Mary. We have heard about the sisters before, but not Lazarus – he is not the Lazarus of the rich man and Lazarus story. Mary and Martha welcomed Jesus when he came to Bethany (Luke 10:38f). They took care of his needs while he in turn shared with them the precious words of life.

This family or Mary at least, became well known for what Mary did for Jesus, as recorded in the next chapter. She anointed him with very expensive perfume and wiped his feet with her hair. John uses this feature to distinguish this Mary from a number of other Mary's mentioned in the gospels.

So a very close bond developed between this family and Jesus. *Jesus loved* (Greek *agape*) *Martha and her sister and Lazarus* (11:5). They accepted his love. They knew his love for they referred to Lazarus as *he whom you love* in the message they sent to Jesus. And they loved Jesus, as shown by Mary's later action. They were hospitable and always treated Jesus as an honoured guest – unlike some others (Simon the Pharisee in Luke 7:44f). We are given an insight into this family and their relationship with Jesus like no other home in the New Testament.

Sisters Prayed

Lazarus fell sick. This chapter begins with this fact and it is repeated a number of times. This man whom Jesus loved, this man who loved Jesus, fell sick. Christians do get sick. Becoming a Christian does not make a person immune to disease and sickness. Moreover his sickness was not because of his sin as far as we know. Rather it was like the case with the man who was born blind in John 9 – *that the works of God should be revealed in him* (9:3). With Lazarus, Jesus said his sickness was *for the glory of God* (11:4).

When Lazarus fell sick his sisters prayed to Jesus – or since Jesus was on the earth they sent a message to him. He had left Jerusalem (10:40) and was staying with his disciples across the Jordan and to the north – probably a journey of at least 3 days.

The sisters address Jesus as *Lord* (Greek *kyrie*). This is a term of respect – today we might say ‘Sir’. In Aramaic it may well have been ‘Rabbi’ meaning teacher or master. Then *behold*—there was a sense of urgency in their message. Yet as we see from what they said next there was no demand in their message. They did not say ‘Lord come quickly and heal our sick brother’. No doubt they hoped he would come quickly and heal Lazarus (11:21) – they knew that Jesus had the power to heal.

He whom you love is sick. Our prayers are often the other way around are they not? The one who loves you is sick! The sisters could have said ‘Lazarus is such a loving brother. He is kind to everyone and is always ready to help – and he loves you too Jesus. You know how we all looked after you when you came to Bethany. Lazarus does not deserve to be suffering like this so please come and heal him’.

Mary and Martha did not approach Jesus in this manner. They humbled themselves – yet also approached with confidence. This confidence however was not based upon their love for Jesus or their own good works. Their confidence was based upon the sure knowledge that Jesus loved them and loved their brother. Can you approach Jesus with that confidence, assured that you are in his covenant love? *Let us therefore come boldly before the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:16). Is this how you pray?

The sisters told Jesus that Lazarus was sick and left the matter in his hands. They knew Jesus could heal him. But maybe it was not his will to heal him. Maybe it was his will to do something even more wonderful. Whatever, they knew that Jesus loved him and would do what was best for him to the glory of God. Remember God can do *exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to his power that works in us* (Ephesians 3:20). *How shall he who loved us and died for us not freely give us all things* (Romans 8:32).

Jesus Stayed

When Jesus heard that he (Lazarus) was sick he stayed two more days in the place where he was (11:6). How could Jesus be so unmoved, so callous, as to make no apparent attempt help this sick friend? If Jesus had really loved Lazarus like the sisters said would he not have left immediately to see him? The ways of God sometimes seem strange to us, but it is not because he cannot or will not help – rather as the Lord says, *My ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts* (Isaiah 55:9).

God had greater plans for Lazarus than simply to heal him of this sickness. He had plans that would have an impact not only on Lazarus and his family, but would impact all his disciples, all the Jews, and all mankind. Jesus knew the sovereign purposes of God, so he stayed.

Firstly, Jesus actually declared *this sickness is not unto death but for the glory of God* (11:4). He did not mean that Lazarus would not die from this sickness but that the final outcome would not be death. Jesus was taking a long term view. He was not just focused upon the here and now. He knew what the will of God was in this sickness that had come upon Lazarus. God the Father would be glorified, and

God the Son would also be glorified through it. The love, power and wisdom of God would be made manifest so that the whole human race might see and proclaim these unique and divine attributes.

We would be wise to look at the troubles that come our way from this divine perspective, asking 'what is the will of God in this matter'. So often we focus only on the immediate. We tell our children that they must press on in their studies so that one day they will be able to get a good job. But we are reluctant to persevere and press on ourselves believing that one day God will bring good out of our 'momentary' troubles. Do we ask ourselves 'what is the Lord teaching me in this time of trouble; how will God be glorified through my sickness?'

Secondly, the delay would strengthen the faith of Mary and Martha. Sure they would suffer longer and they would even enter into grief and mourning. But in the end, their faith, their most precious faith, would be much, much, stronger. If Jesus had come immediately and healed Lazarus their faith would have increased, but how much more so when they saw Jesus raise him from the dead!

And not just the sisters but the disciples of Jesus and other Jews would marvel at the power of God which Jesus displayed. Their faith would have been strengthened, and for others they would come to believe in Jesus.

Thirdly, Jesus was operating according to a divine timetable. Jesus had made this clear on a number of occasions. His very first miracle was prefaced by: *Woman, my hour has not yet come* (2:4). He did not go up to Jerusalem until the time ordained by his Father (7:8). And now he did not go to Bethany where Lazarus lay sick until the right time, the time ordained by his Father. Yes, there is a right time for you to do the Father's will in your life.

Fourthly, Jesus stayed where he was for it was in the purpose of God that he raise Lazarus from the dead. If he had left immediately he would have found Lazarus had been dead only two days. Just like today, there were sceptics back then also ready to cast doubt on anything supernatural. They might say 'Oh he was not really dead-Jesus just resuscitated him'. There is some evidence for a Rabbinic belief that the soul remains around the body for three days after death. After four days there was a stench (11:39). Lazarus was well and truly dead.

Jesus loved this family from Bethany – he loved them deeply. On hearing that Lazarus whom he loved was sick should he have gone immediately and healed him? His sisters would have been most grateful, not to mention Lazarus himself. But in the heavenly council of God, in his great and eternal purposes, something greater and more wonderful was planned by the Lord.

Jesus would perform a mighty work of God and show forth his glory. It would be a work pointing to an even greater work of God when he would raise Jesus from the dead. Jesus said *I am the resurrection and the life, who believes in me, though he may die, yet he shall live.*

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon