

Why God Delays His Help

John 11:1-16

Introduction: If Christ loves us then why does He let us suffer with the trials of this world? Why do we have long term difficulties that God does not deliver us from? Where is the Lord when we are sick or financially pressed? Then there are all the relationship problems that we have...not to mention the decline of our society and all the things we value. And many of them are things we believe God values as well and yet,

When God delays helping us we are tempted to believe things that we would not normally consider. The number one temptation is to believe that we have done something God is angry about and is now punishing us. This is natural because we are always doing things God has told us not to do or think. It gets really disturbing when we cannot figure out what the one thing was that we did that the Lord decided was crossing the line.

The second temptation is to believe that God just doesn't love us anymore. Or at least that He does not love us like He once did.

Christians who do not believe in an all knowing, all powerful and everywhere present God might think God just does not know what they are facing or is powerless to help them with it.

This morning's passage contains some elements of all these temptations along with Christ's explanation of why God delays His response to our needy circumstances.

John 11:1-16 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. ³ So the sisters sent *word* to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." ⁴ But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when He heard that he was sick, He then 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 seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" 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. ¹⁰ "But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹ This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." ¹² The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." ¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. ¹⁴ So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." ¹⁶ Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to *his* fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him."

No one should have to guess what I plan to talk about: This introduction to Christ's greatest miracle explains a lot about the trials of our lives and the Lord's response to them. Is Christ still concerned? Does He still love us? What is His purpose for our difficulties? Everyone who wants to truly entrust their lives to Christ needs to know the truths of these verses.

The People

John 11:1-3 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. ³ So the sisters sent *word* to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany: John introduces the four main players in this event. Lazarus is identified specifically as being from Bethany. Ginny and I have several friends named Bob....you probably do as well. I have to use the last name when I speak to her about one of them for that reason. Lazarus was a common name in Israel. It means "helped by the Lord." An appropriate name for what is about to happen.

The village of Mary and her sister Martha: There was another Bethany further east, but this was the village just on the outskirts of Jerusalem. This is where Jesus slept when in Jerusalem. I would leave the city and make the short walk back to the home of these three dear friends. John clearly expected his readers to identify all the people in this event from his description of where they were from.

It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair: This is one of the most well known stories about the life of Jesus. It is still future in John's narrative, but it was so well known to his readers that it was just another identifier of the people in the story.

Whose brother Lazarus was sick: So the two sisters and their brother are specifically identified by John as the ones to whom these events happened.

So the sisters sent *word* to Him: Jesus would have normally been there with them. This was His home in Judah, but the Pharisees were trying to kill Him and this was not going to happen on their timetable but on Christ's. Jesus had therefore

The Purpose

John 11:4-6 ⁴ But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days *longer* in the place where He was.

When Jesus heard *this*, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God: Jesus did not say that Lazarus would not die. Even after Jesus raised him,

Lazarus still died. We will talk more next week about Jesus' specific promises to us about our death and the death of those who trust fully in Christ. Today I want you to notice God's purpose in delaying or withholding immediate help. It was and still is for the purpose of displaying God's Glory.

What is Glory? Let me read you a passage that might help us. When Isaiah saw his vision of the Lord in His heavenly temple this is what he wrote.....

Isaiah 6:1-3I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. ² Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory."

The Angels were calling out in worship and praise that God is Holy and that means He is one of a kind. There is no being in creation that holds a candle to Him. He has infinite value and in any category you can conceive of. Holiness is not just being sinless. IT is being the supreme example of everything that is known. Supreme goodness, all knowledge, infinite compassion and patience and yes....even perfect, undiluted justice as well. So the angels were calling all this out with these three little words. And as they do they make this observation...."The whole earth is full of His glory."

The Glory of God is the revealing of His infinite worth. He does this in creation.

Psalms 19:1 For the choir director. A Psalm of David. The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

He shared some of that Glory with men. What glory humans have....and it is considerable is due to being made in the image of God.

Genesis 1:27 ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the **image of God** He created him; male and female He created them.

1 Corinthians 11:7 ⁷ For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and **glory of** God;

So that the Son of God may be glorified by it: Jesus has been, for some time at this point, in a running battle with the religious and self-righteous leaders of Israel. This conflict has come to a head with Jesus' assertion that He is the Son of the Eternal God. He is one with the Father and has existed since before time began. Nothing Jesus has done to this point has impressed the religious of His day. The healing of every single person that came to him did not impress them. Power over nature and its laws did not impress them.

John 10:31-33 ³¹ The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. ³² Jesus answered them, "I showed you **many good works** from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" ³³ The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out *to be* God."

So when Jesus said that Lazarus' sickness was **so that the Son of God may be glorified by it**, He is saying that He intends for this event to fully reveal and prove that He is the Christ the Son of the Living God. the Glory of The Son of God will be an irrefutable display that Christ possess all the perfections and power of God.

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus: Remember how I told you earlier that when we are in our trials we often doubt the love of God for us? And this is because, as humans our eyes are on what we are enduring. We would alleviate this trial for someone we loved. BUT as humans we are not able to see or even imagine the ultimate good that comes through difficulties. To know Christ and experience His care is of inestimable worth. Life is one uncertainty after another, but Christ is sure and solid and unchanging. Paul had many trials that all served this ultimate purpose. He saw Christ more fully and more splendidly and His eternal glory eclipsed all the temporary glory of this life.

Philippians 3:8-9 ⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, ⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,

God assures us that trials are no sign that God does not love us. They are a sign that He is going to show Himself to us more fully. Trials are painful, but they lead to Christ being revealed more fully to us. But in order to do this in this Jesus was going to have to delay acting.

John 11:6 ⁶ So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days *longer* in the place where He was.

The Plan

John 11:7-16 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 seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" 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. ¹⁰ "But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹ This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." ¹² The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." ¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. ¹⁴ So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." ¹⁶ Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to *his* fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him."

Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?": The reason they are in this remote part of the wilderness east of

Jerusalem is because the Jews are trying to kill Him. If there was not a death contract out on Him He would have been in Bethany with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. His disciples are very concerned for His safety and their own.

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 is where Jesus begins to explain what the Glory of the Son is. He uses an analogy. If you want to travel in a country with no public transportation and no lights you need to do it during the daylight hours. Those are the "12 hours in the day." In Israel they divided the daylight into 12 segments called hours. They did not have time pieces so Jesus is referring to the light portion of the day. That is when you walk....if not you will stumble.

"But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.": If you walk at night you will stumble because you do not have light in yourselves. The meaning here is not cryptic. If you want to walk "live" as it were without stumbling you need to do so in the light. You do not have light apart from Christ who is the light of the world. You....by yourself.....will stumble and fall because the world apart from Jesus is dark.

After that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep.": This is a euphemism for death, but it also could be taken to mean literal sleep which is what His disciples did.

The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.": "Lord, this is really good news. Now we do not need to go back to the exact place where the Jews will be looking for you so that they can kill you."

John 11:13-14 ¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. ¹⁴ So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead,

There are no phones. The only way to get Him a message was to send someone. There is no record that anyone else told Him anything other than what the original messengers told Him. Lazarus is sick....but being the all knowing and all present God of the universe He knew that Lazarus had died. The revelation of His Glory is starting long before they even arrive before the tomb in Bethany.....BUT.... What He says next is startling even shocking.

And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him.": He expresses joy and gladness that He was not there in Bethany to heal His friend. Jesus was concerned about them all. He was glad for their sakes, because what He would do not would increase and strengthen their trust in Him. They trusted Him a lot. They had seen Him heal the sick and walk on water and make wine from water and food from nothing. But their trust in Him needed to take a very large step forward to extend beyond death and the grave.

Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him.": At this point the disciples, who do trust Him, decide to follow Him to His death in Jerusalem. When it came right down to it they lost

their nerve, but Thomas, the doubter was willing to go and did go with Christ back to Bethany, even though he thought he would probably die there.

CONCLUSION: Why didn't Jesus stay there in Bethany? He knew Lazarus was going to get sick and die..didn't he? Of course He did. On the surface of things He left because the Jews were plotting to kill Him, but He is also all-powerful and they were never able to kill Him until the appointed week, day and hour. He did not stay because He wanted them to be alone when this happened. What we will see take place next week could not have happened had Jesus stayed in Bethany.

Again we see that God orchestrates the affairs of men and their trials. Christ has purposes that are hidden behind the mask of the future. His purposes are nevertheless stated here. He wants to bring the people that He so dearly loves into a deeper trust in Him. He wants them to not only trust them with their lives but also with their deaths.

This is vital information. God is not ignorant of our trials. He knows where we are and what is happening to us. Jesus knew all these things about Lazarus. His delay was intended to and did in fact reveal that Jesus is the God of Creation. The one who holds even the power of death in His voice. All His works in our lives are to perfect us....everyone!

Philippians 1:3-11 ⁶ *For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.....* ⁹ *And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment,* ¹⁰ *so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;* ¹¹ *having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

Let us commit to trusting God more fully in our trials. He is at work for His own glory in our lives with the blessed result that we will know Him more fully and have an immovable faith and trust in Him.