

Teaching Points

Perhaps the Most Remarkable Miracle Jesus Performed is set up by His Delayed Response.

Lazarus, a dear friend of Jesus, was sick. Jesus has healed many sick people. This was an occasion to let the Master know about His friend. Interestingly, the sisters of Lazarus did not actually ask Jesus to come to Bethany to heal Lazarus. They believed that once Jesus found out, He would do something. By the time Jesus gets to Bethany, which was close by, Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days (v.17).

Discussion Question: Why do you suppose verse 5 tells us that Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus?

Thoughts: Are you ever tempted to think that there is something that can separate you from Christ's love? He we learn that neither Lazarus' sickness nor the testing of their faith is a denial of Jesus' love. John reminds us that Jesus loves them. Take a moment to recognize that people whom Jesus loves are not exempt from getting sick. Getting sick, even a sickness unto death, was not used to make a case that Jesus had no love for Lazarus, but was rather an appeal to the One who can do all things.

Discussion Question: Jesus says in verse 4 that this sickness is "not unto death"—but then we find out that Lazarus did, in fact, die. So, why would Jesus say that?

Thoughts: Jesus knew the end result would be the glory of God, not death. That means that the only right understanding of His answer is that Jesus knew and foresaw all from the beginning. He knew what would happen and purposefully delayed so that God would be glorified in demonstrating His power through His beloved Son. Death would not have the center-stage nor the final word. See how Jesus says in verse 11 that He goes to "wake up" Lazarus.

The Son of God is Glorified in Raising Lazarus from the Dead.

Jesus is certainly glorified by demonstrating His power in raising Lazarus from the dead (we will talk more about that event next session). This is the seventh sign of John's Gospel pointing us to Jesus' unique identity as the Son of God. The comment Jesus makes in verse 4 about being "glorified through" the raising of Lazarus demonstrates His glory in another way. Jesus knew that the events recorded in this chapter would set the religious leaders in an even greater determination to kill Jesus. This meant the end result would be that the Son of God may be glorified in His death and resurrection. Take a peek ahead and read John 12:23-33 for more on the glorification of Jesus and the "hour" and context in which it will take place.

God never gives sickness for sickness' sake. God does not arbitrarily do things. He has a purpose. That purpose is for His glory and for the good of His people. And all that happens according to His own timing. The delay does not demonstrate a lack of care or an aloofness on His part. Quite the opposite. The delay was to bring about the greater miracle and purpose of His coming. Think about it like this: Lazarus had to die in order for Jesus to raise him from the dead. As much as that meant heart-ache for his sisters and friends, it also meant a supreme demonstration of His unique power. This seventh sign is also His greatest sign (His own resurrection falls into a different category). Death is not match for the Lord of life.

Discussion Question: What do you think Jesus means in verses 9-10? What does the "day" and the "night" refer to?

Thoughts: Verse 8 gives the context: The disciples are worried about Jesus dying. Jesus replies that now is the time for Him to finish His work before His time is done. The "day" is the window of opportunity to work because you can see. Jesus is the Light (9:4-5). He creates the opportunity and environment for us to work and glorify God. Without Him, we would have nothing but darkness and night and no opportunity to serve God. Jesus is operating within His Father's time frame and He will accomplish all of His holy will. The "night" is the time when Jesus' earthly ministry comes to a close and before His resurrection. His own earthly works are finished. Then He will send out His disciples to do greater works and we read about them in the Book of Acts.

Prayer Focus

Pray that God will motivate us to walk in the Light and work in that Light. Pray that God will give us greater assurance that He is for His people, even when we are sick or suffering. Pray that we will not doubt the Lord's timing no matter the (seeming) delay in His responses to our needs. Remember, He is not bound by time as we are—and praise Him for that!