Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Sickness for the Glory of God
Scripture: John 11:1-16
Code: 1531

We continue our study of John's gospel, a rich study of the person of Jesus Christ. We have learned many things and we come today to what is a transition period in the life of Christ and also in the text of this gospel. These 16 verses that we shall consider this morning form for us the preparation for the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. The title of the message is "Sickness for the glory of God." And the reason I chose that title is because of verse 4 where Christ said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God that the Son of God might be glorified by it."

Now we remember back some weeks that we talked about the glory of God. And the fact that the glory of God is really the reason for everything in the universe. Everything that was created was created to bring God glory. And any rebel in the universe that refuses to give Him glory, such as fallen angels or fallen men, are thereby removed from His presence forever into a bottomless pit called hell. God desires glory. God desires that He receive the glory. And the purpose of the raising of Lazarus was not so much for the life of Lazarus, nor for the love of Mary and Martha as it was for the glory of God and Jesus Christ. For it is the most astounding of all the miracles that Jesus has performed up to this point. And it is the greatest manifestation of His glory yet seen. And that indeed is the very purpose for it that God and Christ might receive the glory. And that means that men might recognize Christ as God and God as the God that He is.

Now, as we come to chapter 11, the full open public ministry of Jesus is over. It ended with the hatred of chapter 10. It ended as the Jews attempted to stone Him in verse 31 of chapter 10. And then in verse 39, attempted to take Him to murder Him by going through the processes. And Christ escaped and went beyond the Jordan, verse 40tells us. His public ministry is over. He now moves into the seclusion of His own circle. He now begins to minister to His own disciples and those who loved Him. The world has had its chance. Israel has had her day of opportunity and the sun has set and night has come.

As we begin chapter 11, we stand in the shadow of the cross. The little time that He was in the area beyond Jordan recorded in verse 40 of chapter 10 comes to an end and He moves back into the area of Jerusalem/Judea and into the shadow of the cross which is just really a few days away.

But in these last few days before His death, the scene changes from the hatred and the rejection. And as we come to chapter 11, there is an unmistakable and blessed witness to the glory of Jesus Christ. And I like to call this miracle the defiant miracle because it almost seems as if God is saying, "Okay,

world, so you didn't want Him, so you hated Him, so you rejected Him, that doesn't deter Me from My purpose to glorify Him." And almost in open defiance to the rejection of chapter 10 is the blazing glory of the miracle of chapter 11. All of the hatred and all of the hostility and all of the anger and all of the rejection of Israel could not dim the glory of Jesus Christ one wit. And you almost get the feeling that that's what God is trying to say in chapter 11 as He brings to pass this most mighty manifestation of divine power through Christ.

Then chapter 11 and 12 is kind of a transition into chapter 13. And from 13 to 21 is the passion of Christ, the events around His cross. So, 11 and 12 is a little transition into the passion when Christ was crucified.

And it's really a tremendous truth. How fitting it is that after the total rejection that Christ had experienced, we see His total glory blazing in defiance in rejection. Now we've seen all through John's gospel that everything Satan tried to do failed in terms of dimming the light of Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that the light was in the world and the world loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. But then back in the first chapter, John recorded for us the fact that even though the world didn't like the light, the world could not put it out. Satan didn't like it, he couldn't stop it. And he still can't. Jesus said in Matthew, "I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." And nothing could dim the blazing glory of Jesus Christ.

Even though He met with incessant opposition and undying hate, His glory was still obvious. And after all the raging, you fall into the glory of chapter 11. And no more miracle...no other miracle that we have seen has been more detailed or more dramatic than this one. And it's a beautiful thing from the standpoint of the Father's attitude. You almost get the impression in studying this chapter that the Father is so jealous of the glory of the Son that He makes this miracle happen in the face of the world so that He can vindicate Jesus' honor and glory even in view of the hatred of the world. It's a defiant thing. The Father is jealous of the Son's glory. He is so jealous of His glory that lovingly He guards the honor of the Son. And anybody anytime any place who refuses to honor the Son is removed from the presenceof God forever to a place called hell. God jealously guards the glory of the Son.

And that leaves a solemn thought in my mind. For the man who refuses to give honor or glory to the Son, he falls into the hands of a living God. And the writer of Hebrews said, "It is a fearful thing...." The end is near, the cross is just around the corner. And in view of that and all the hatred and rejection, Christ performs a miracle in defiance of all the hate and vindicates His glory.

Now there already have been six miracles in John's gospel. Turning water to wine, healing of the nobleman's son, restoring the impotent man, multiplying the loaves and the fishes, walking on the water and curing the man born blind...six miracles. Now here comes number seven. And if God uses numbers and seven is the perfect number, then this is the climactic miracle...and indeed it is. A climax as He raises Lazarus right out of the dead. Tremendous power.

You say, "Well, what's so climactic about this? He did it twice other places." That's true. Mark tells us He raised Jairus's daughter from the dead. And Luke tells us He raised the son of the widow who lived in Nain. But both of those resurrections were immediately after death...immediately. In the case of Lazarus, the miracle is even more monumental because Lazarus had already been in the grave four days and his body stinketh, the Bible says, rot, corruption and decay had already set in. The processes of decomposition were already existing and it is in that situation that Jesus Christ creates new life. That is the stupendous miracle of chapter 11.

Now as I said, the miracle is to reveal the glory of God. And it does it in three ways. Three ways this miracle gives glory to God. It's a miracle for the glory of God. That's what the miracles were for. They were always for that purpose. Back in chapter 9, the blind man who was made to see, the disciples said, "Well, who made him blind? His mother's sin, his father's sin, did he sin, what's the deal?" Jesus said no, he's blind that God's works might be made manifest. In other words, the miracle was to declare theglory of God.

Now, there are three things in this miracle that give glory to God. Number one, it brings glory to God because it points to the deity of Christ. Only God can give life. Jesus had been claiming to be God and now He gives life. And that vindicates His deity. Jesus had said, "I am the bread of life," and then He multiplied bread and f ed a multitude. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world," and then He gave light to sightless eyes and sightless souls. In this chapter, Jesus says, 'I am the resurrection and the life," and then He gives life to somebody who is dead. This miracle gives glory to God because it vindicates all the claims of Jesus Christ to be deity, He is not a man, He is not like God, He is not a little subgod, He is God of very Gods.

Second thing that causes this miracle to give glory to God, not only it vindicates Christ's claims but secondly, it confirmed the faith of the disciples. A little while later we'll see how Jesus said I'm glad Lazarus died. You say, "Well, that's kind of a heartless comment." No, because He knew that in the resurrection of Lazarus, the disciples' faith would just take a giant leap forward cause they would see the expression of His power and their faith would be strengthened. So, it brings glory to God because of the strengthening of the disciples' faith.

Third reason it brings glory to God was because it led directly to the cross. You say, "Well, how could the cross bring glory to God?" Listen, the cross was the greatest glorifying event in the life of Christ. Over in chapter 12 verse 23, Jesus said, "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be ... what? ... glorified." Listen, when they put Him on a cross, the world thought that was the end and that was the glorification of Jesus Christ bearing the sins of the world.

And so, the miracle brings glory to God by pointing to the deity of Christ, by strengthening the faith of the disciples, making them more effective witnesses, and by leading directly to the cross which was

the great climax of the life of Christ.

Now the chapter falls into four parts. So that you'll understand it: the preparation for the miracle, verses 1 to 16; the arrival of Jesus, 17 to 37; the miracle itself, 38 to 44; and the results, 45 to 57 ... preparation, arrival, miracle and results. This morning we're going to talk about the preparation. And these are just kind of details, a little data at the beginning to get our selves in gear for what He's going to do. And there's some tremendous truths here.

But I want you to see the preparation and in order to prepare us, there arethree sets of characters. And that's the outline. If you have your bulletin, you probably have a little outline you might want to follow along. There are three key sets of characters in this preparation period: getting ready for the miracle which really doesn't occur until over at verse ... well, 38 to 44, all in through there, particularly verse 43. But in preparation for the miracle, we meet the three sets of characters.

Number one, the critical man. Number two, the concerned sisters. And number three, the cringing disciples. And then there's a fourth character here, the confident Christ. Now that's not on your outline but that's woven all through all three of them...the critical man, the concerned sisters, the cringing disciples and woven into the whole story is the confident Christ. Everybody else is all in an uproar about what's going on and Jesus is like a rock of confidence, "Relax, people, I have it in control."

All right, first of all, let's look at the critical man. And he's critical in more than one way. First of all, we meet his critical illness, verse 1, "Now a certain man was sick named Lazarus ofBethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha." Now you'll notice that the first phrase is "a certain man was sick." The sickness is the first thing because that's what the whole story's about. It's about the glory of God and how God got glory because a man got sick and died. It's not the story of Lazarus, it's the story of Jesus and resurrection power. Lazarus just happens to be the guy. So the emphasis in the verse is the sickness of Lazarus, not Lazarus. It doesn't say, "And there was a wonderful man named Lazarus who was sick," it says, "There was a man who was sick," he just happened to be Lazarus.

Lazarus is an interesting name. It comes from the old Hebrew name Eleazar. And Eleazar means "one whom God helps. A fitting name for Lazarus. He got as much help as you can possibly get: resurrection from the dead.

Now he's not the same Lazarus as the one in Luke 16 who was a beggar, just the same name, very common name.

Now you'll notice that he was in Bethany. That's just so we know which Lazarus it is, give us a little identification tag there, gives his address. He lived in Bethany, you know the one there. And Bethany doesn't help us a whole lot either cause there were two Bethanys. One Bethany was a couple of miles from Jerusalem, the other one was also called Bethabara and it was up beyondJordan. In fact, it's

very likely the place where Jesus has been up there in verse 40 of chapter 10, where he is when the message comes to Him because Bethabara was another name for Bethany where John baptized. So you have two.

So, Lazarus doesn't help us so he adds Bethany. And then to clarify Bethany, which Bethany? You know, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. So now we know where it is. It's in the Bethany where Mary and Martha live that this Lazarus lives. And that's the Bethany that's just less than two miles from Jerusalem. That little village insignificant was about to be the stage for a display of blazing glory. The greatest miraculous attestation to the deity of Jesus Christ that had yet been done was going to take place in the little town, little village of Bethany.

Now, interesting thought that Mary is mentioned before Martha. Always the oldest was mentioned first, but not in this case because Mary was the most wellknown and that's explained in verse 2. "It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick." Now this is the Mary who anointed Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair. What a humble condescension on her part. And what love she had for Jesus.

Now John alludes to that here in verse 2, although he doesn't explain it until chapter 12. And we'll get into the whole thing in chapter 12, the first 11 verses describe that whole anointing. But John just alludes to it here. You say, "Well, why would he allude to something he hadn't told them about?" Well, because John wrote his gospel years after Matthew, Mark and Luke had already been written and this is also recorded in the other gospels. So the readers were familiar with the story of Mary anointing Jesus and they would know which Mary it was. Now later on he explains his own view of it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But here he simply designates the family, Mary and Martha, two sisters who lived in Bethany, had a nice home there where Jesus spent many hours, where He loved to go to get away from the hatred of Jerusalem. And these were dear friends to Jesus. He had ... as close to a home as He ever had, He had at Bethany. That's the closest He ever had for ... to a home. And He learned to love them in a deep and genuine way, as we shall see. And they loved Him the same way. And He could go there to rest from the terrible pressure of all that He faced in Jerusalem.

And now, one of His beloved friends is sick, Lazarus. So we meet the critical man. Critically ill, but more than that, he is also critical because he's going to manifest the glory of God. He is critical because he's going to strengthen the testimony of doubting disciples. He is critical because he is going to provide the object for a miracle that leads to the cross. He's critical in all different ways. Lazarus the critical man.

Second set of characters, not only the critical man, the concerned sisters. And they were concerned**,** verse 3: "Therefore his sisters said unto Him," that is to Jesus, "saying, Lord behold he whom Thou lovest is sick." Now there's so much in that verse, we could preach on that verse for ... forever. That's a loaded verse. But let me give you what's going on.

Backing up to Bethany, Lazarus is dying. The word "sick" here implies the kind of sickness that's very serious. Death begins to threaten and they immediately think of Jesus. Why, why Jesus actually healed strangers, certainly ... certainly if only Jesus was here, He'd come to the aid of one whom He loved. I mean, He would heal those in the multitude whom He did not have any personal relationship with, certainly in knowledge of Lazarus' illness Jesus would be here to heal him.

And then there was the sorrow because the wicked plotting of the Jews had caused Jesus to have to escape for His life and Jesus was nowhere around. And what were they going to do? Well, through some method, they got a message to Jesus because they knew they had to have Him there. They wanted Him there. Over in verse 21, Martha says, "Lord, if You had been here my brother hadn't died." over in verse 32 Mary said the same thing, "Lord, if You had been here my brother hadn't died." They wanted Him there. They knew His power. They knew who He was. They knew what He could do.

And somehow in that frame of mind they got a message to Jesus. And the message is absolutely beautiful. It is just loaded with truth. Listen to it, verse 3, "Lord, behold he whom Thou lovest is sick." And you can almost catch the flavor. The word "behold" could be translated "listen." Lord, listen, the one whom You love is sick. It's a tender, humble, beautiful, simple message. There is no medical diagnosis there. Lord, Lazarus has compound whatever of the whatever. It doesn't say that at all. It doesn't say Lord, here's the problem, now we've ... You've got to do something, Lord. No, it doesn't even ask Him to do a thing. Did you look at it again? It doesn't even ask the Lord to do anything. It just says, "Lord, listen, the one You love is sick." That's all. It doesn't tell Him what to do. It's a surrender of lave. It just says, "Lord, here's a need," and that's all it says. It doesn't even say his name is Lazarus. But the Lord knew who He loved. No problem there.

It has a lovely humility. I like it because there aren't any instructions in it. You like that? How do you talk to God? "God, oh I have a need, now let me tell You how to work it out." See. "God, if You'll just do this and do this and make him do this or make her do that, that's..." You don't need to do that. "Lord, here's a need." Give it to Him, that's it. That's all it takes. You don't have to say, "God, here's my need now let's work on the solution." No. They didn't do that. They just said, "Here's a need, Lord." That is the surrender of love. Here's my need, there it is. Lord, I'm just going to leave it with You. That's it. That's really good.

Then there's another thought in this verse that just really jumped off the page and hit me. And that is this, "Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick." That is good. That is so good. They don't say, "Lord, You know that guy that really loves You, he's sick." That's bribery. He says, "Lord, You know the one You love, he's sick." You see how much more motivating that is?

Listen, friend, if your love for Jesus activated His blessing on your behalf, whew... If Christ operated in my life on the basis of my love for Him, I would be in sad shape because my love is inconsistent, my love is earthbound, my love is very often selfcentered and my love is sometimes not even within my grasp. No, listen, Jesus is not activated in your behalf because you love Him, He's activated in your behalf because what? He loves you. Isn't that good? And you see**,** that means that no matter what my problems, no matter how, you know, really bad I'm involved in something that's out of His will, it doesn't change His operating in my life because He does not operate on the basis of my lave for Him. He operates on the basis of His lave for me and no matter what I am He loves me.

Now that's no excuse to trade on His love, but it's a comfort to know, isn't it? I mean, listen, I am so glad that God does not bless me in proportion to my love to Him. It's just the opposite. Everything I have is because He loves me. What a thrilling thought. And He really loves. He loves so much that He gives and we don't deserve, right? He loves so much, when He cares when we don't care. He loves so much that He chastens us. And you've got to love to chasten. You know that, don't you? He loves so much He blesses us when we don't deserve His blessing. He just loves and loves and loves and loves. Listen, if He acted on the basis of our love we would be powerless, we would be weak, we would be blessingless, we would be without resource, we would be feeble because that's how our love is. But, praise God, He operates on the basis of His love for us. That's a tremendous truth.

Then I want you to look at the word "love." It's a terrific word. "Lord, behold he whom Thou lovest." Now, you know, there's lots of words in the Greek for love. Eros which means, "sex love." Agapa which means, "divine supernatural love," you know, God love. There's another word, phile, that means like human affection, brotherly love. Of all those three words, the word here is phile, brotherly love.

You say, "What does that prove? Oh, just this, it's beautiful. Jesus was not only God, He was also what? He was a man. Listen, do you know that Jesus actually had a warm love for the man Lazarus? Listen, I want my Savior to be human, don't you? O divine but human, too. And so the sisters say, "Hey, you know that Lazarus that you have that warm human affection for?"

Listen, Jesus ... you know, you have men in your life and friends in your life that you just love. Listen, Jesus needed that. He was a man. He needed human affection, both ways. That's a picture of the humanity of Jesus Christ, isn't it? It's obvious that Jesus shared a divine love. We know He loved everybody from an agapa love, He loved everybody. But from a phile love, there were certain ones that He just had a warm affection for. And the thought is that as a man, Jesus loved the physical companionship of Lazarus. He just loved him, man to man.

You can see His love, look at verse 35. Two words, what are they? "Jesus wept." And look at verse 36, beautiful, "Then said the Jews, Behold ... what? ... how He loved him." Jesus really loved Lazarus on a mantoman basis.

You say, "Well, what's so practical about that for me?" Just this: Jesus as a man needed the fulfillment of human love. Did you know that? He needed to love and be loved as a man. You know what that means to you and me? That means that He understands our need for that, doesn't it? Listen, when you're alone sometime and you're lonely, or maybe when you're with a crowd and you're lonely, and you feel kind of empty of love and loving and you feel like there's not really anybody that you can love and anybody that really loves you, you can say Lord, You know how I need that love. And He'll say Yeah, I know, Lazarus fulfilledit for me, Bee. He knows. Wherever you are He's been there, right?

And just wait on Him. Somewhere there's a Mary or a Martha or a Lazarus for you to love and be loved by. Jesus knows you need that. It can be a lonely world but there's somebody for you to love and be loved by.

You say, "Well, how do you know He'll do that for me?" Because He holds back no good thing from His children, does He? He knows. Why do you think He was a man? That He might feel what we feel. He knows we need that. Sympathetic Jesus, sympathetic.

There's another thing about that verse that .. I could go on and on about that thought, I can go on and on about most things ... heh, as a matter of fact. Anyway, verse 3, another thing that strikes me as really being thrilling here is the fact that Mary and Martha went right to the source. Isn't that good? They didn't...you know, they didn't fool around, they knew where to go, right? If you've got somebody who's got a problem, you go right to the Lord. Terrific! I wonder if we do that. God is our ref uge and our strength, a very present help in time of trouble. Boy, when the people were murmuring in the wilderness about every ten minutes or so, the Bible says Moses went and cried before the Lord. See. Didn't call a committee, he told the Lord.

I remember Hezekiah. Hezekiah got that threatening letter from Rabshakeh, just really a scary letter, terrorizing. And oh, what you going to do, Hezekiah, what are you going to do? Get the army going, get a committee, get a thing? No, he just took it out and he went before the Lord and he laid the letter out. And he said, "God, just look at that. Now what You going to do about it?" You know, just laid it right out before God, let Him read it.

And John the Baptist was beheaded, you know where John's disciples went? To Jesus and they told Him. Some people have known where to go, the source of all our help.

What examples for, us. Listen, we have not a high priest who

cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities but was in all points ... what? ... tempted like as we are, yet without sin. He knows**.** Wherever you are He's been there in terms of understanding

human life. That's why Peter says casting all your care...where? ...on Him for He careth for you.

So, the sisters of Lazarus acquainted with the critical condition of their brother appeal to Jesus and they left it in His hand. And they just said, "He's sick." No instructions. It reminds me of verse Psalm 37. Listen, "Commit thy way unto the Lord." Isn't that good? Commit thy way to the Lord. Then it says, "Trust also in Him."

You say, "Well, now why does it say trust also in Him in connection with commit thy way?" Because you know what most people do? "Lord, here's my problem," and then they get an ulcer. See. They commit their way unto the Lord but they don't trust Him. We get on our knees, "0 God, I have this need, here's my problem," and then oh, oh, oh, oh, see. That's why those two have to go together. Commit your way to the Lord and then do what? Trust Him. See. Now I don't want to get an ulcer. He said commit your way to the Lord and then get an ulcer. That's about right.

All right, verse 4. "When Jesus heard that He said, This sickness is not unto death but for the glory of God that the Son of God might be glorified by it." Jesus said Listen, the whole point of this is not death. Death may happen but death isn't the end result. What is the end result? The glory of God. It's all set to be for the glory of God.

And you notice there it's the glory of God and the Son of God. Remember, I've said this before in other contexts in John, you do not glorify God unless you glorify the Son and you do not glorify the Son unless you glorify God. This idea of believing in God apart from Christ is not scriptural. There's no glory given to God by anybody anytime who is not also having to give glory to the Son. And to give glory to God means the Son is glorified and to give glory to the Son means the Father is glorified. One and the same because the glory of God is both theirs.

All right, so he says the whole thing is to manifest God's glory. It's sickness for the glory of God. You know, this is ... we'll talk about this tonight in our message ... but a lot of people who are in the faithhealing thing feel that sickness is always a result of sin. That isn't true at all. Here sickness had nothing to do with sin. Back in chapter 9 it had nothing to do with sin. Here it was for the glory of God. Then the healers always come along and say, 'Yes, and the glory of God is always great when there's a healing." That's not true either. Sometimes God got glory by healing, didn't He? You know, even today somebody might get sick, God will heal him so we can give Him glory, right? Sure. But other times, somebody gets sick and

God doesn't heal them and gets the glory that way. You say how.

Because suffering often produces a stronger servant.

Look at Paul. God never healed Paul. Paul remained with his infirmity in the flesh. Why? Because he was a better man for it, a stronger Apostle, a greater man in terms of God's service. And God got the glory by Paul's illness rather than by his health. So, being sick can be for the glory of God just as well as being healed can be for the glory of God.

All right, verse 5. This is really interesting. "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." Now that I ... you know, that must have been a kind of a little thing in John's mind just to tongue and cheek in a sense. Because what he says is, "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus," and it's important that he say that because of what's going to come in the next verse. Incidentally, the word there is agape which is from agapa, it's divine love. Here he's not talking about the phile love, the affection, here he's talking about divine love. Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

Now why does He say that? Because of verse 6, look at verse 6. "When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was." Now you eliminate verse 5 and read it like this: And he was sick, he came and gave the messageno verse 5 he says the sickness is for the glory of God and when He had heard it He just stayed there for two days. And you say, "Wow, that's real concern, real love." So he puts in verse 5. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

Why does he put it in there? To explain the twoday delay. You see, He loved them so much He stayed where He was for two days. You say, "That's a strange kind of love. The guy's dying and He's just staying around for two days."

So you see, verse 5 is interjected that we might understand that the delay did not mean He didn't lave. Right? Can you imagine love on the basis of time? You say, "God, You have 20 minutes to fulfill his need...20 minutes, Oh, God doesn't love me, God doesn't care." See. Ridiculous. You don't measure love on the basis of time. And sot John fires in verse 5 so we know that the delay of verse 6 isn't a delay of love, it's only a delay of time. And God often makes us wait, doesn't He?

You know, human love would have hurried to Bethany with heart pounding, you know. Got to get there, got to get there. Divine love wasn't in any hurry at all. I mean, what does omniscience got to worry about, right? Just waiting for God's time and He knew that the delay would make His love all the more real. And He knew the delay would bring more glory to God, more joy and faith to the lives of Mary, Martha and the Disciples, more fantastic testimony to the people around. The delay was important. The delay was based on lave. He wanted His Disciples to have all the faith they could have. He wanted Mary and Martha's joy to be totally complete. Love caused the delay. He wanted to delay until it was the right time to really have an impact. And so He delayed. They didn't understand the delay but Jesus did. And during the delay, Lazarus died, during those two days. And that was setting up the great miracle that Christ was going to perform.

It's interesting how God makes us wait. Let me give you a little principle that might help you, you know, when you worry about the fact that God doesn't just really jump in fast. God often makes us wait before His love becomes visible. His love is there but it may not be visible, we may have to wait. But remember this, if you're waiting for God, that's a giltedge guarantee that blessing is on the way only it's probably coming in a package you're not expecting.

In other words, when you pray and you expect something and it happens, then it's all ... it's one thing. But when you pray and nothing sort of happens, you can be sure that God is wrapping up something that you really might not initially recognize. And just hang on. And Isaiah had it right. Fantastic verse, write it down somewhere. Isaiah 30:18, listen to this, now don't get so busy writing it you can't listen. Isaiah 30:18, listen, "And therefore will the Lord wait." The Lord waits once in a while, right? Why? Listen to this, "That He may be gracious unto you."

You say, "Now wait a minute, if He really wanted to be gracious unto me, He wouldn't wait so long." No, wrong. It takes God a while to wrap up all the packages the way He wants them delivered. And, friends, if you're still waiting, be ready cause when it comes it's going to be blessed. Don't hurry God. And the end of the verse says, "And therefore will God be exalted." God loves you so much He may make you wait for something much better than you ever dreamed you were going to get in the beginning. Don't ever settle for the second best, wait. The Lord knows what's best and He knows the right time. And you never interpret His love by time, do you? The poet said, "His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour, the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower." And Isaiah said, "Blessed are they that wait upon the Lord."

All right, so we see the critical man and the concerned sisters. Now very quickly, cause this dialogue moves very rapidly, the cringing disciples. Verse 7, "Then after that saith He to His disciples, Let us go into Judea again." Now, He just escaped from there with His life, right? So He says to His disciples, "Men, let's go back to Judea." Well, that went aver real big.

Verse 8, "His disciples say to Him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone Thee, and goest Thou there again?" What are ... Lord ... they want to stone You there. And besides, we've got a good ministry coming around here. This is a terrific place. Look back at verse 42, "Many believed," we've got a good thing going. Let's get this ministry built up, Lord. No sense in going back to Jerusalem and getting stoned, that's ridiculous.

They didn't understand. And I think, too, that they looking back to what Jesus had said in verse 4 when He said the sickness is not unto death figured that meant Lazarus wasn't going to die physically. You know, they're probably thinking, Lazarus isn't even sick enough to die, Jesus said, what's the point of going back to Jerusalem? Ridiculous. All we're going to do back there is get killed. And there's no sense in that.

Well, Jesus replies with a fantastic illustration. You know, as a Christian you don't need to fear death, no time. Don't even fear death. It's no problem. You'll never die one split second before your time, or one split second after your time. Verse 9 and 10, Jesus illustrates this with a Hebrew illustration and I'm not going to take the time to take every part of it apart, I just want you to see the meaning. Verse 9 and 10, "Jesus answered, Are there not 12 hours in the day? If any man walk in a day he stumbleth not because he seeth the Light of this world," that's the sun and the sky. "But if a man walk in the night he stumbles because there's no light in him."

Now what's He saying? Just this, He's saying, don't you people realizethat there's day and night? Twelve hours in the day, twelve hours in the night. General statement. To the Hebrews every day was arranged around a 12hour day, the light period of light, and then night 12 hours. And so, Jesus is saying don't you realize that a day can't finish until it's over with? Don't you realize that no day is done until it's done? Don't you realize that you can't turn the day off at 12 after three if it's not time for the day to be turned off?

Now what's He saying? He's saying this. God has prescribed the bounds of My life and by all your concern, you can't lengthen it and by all the Jewish rejection, they can't shorten it. Do you see now what He is saying? He ... what have I got to fear, what have you got to fear? God has fixed the calendar. We shall live out the day. Now there is coming a time when night comes, right? Isn't that what Jesus said earlier in John when He said work while it is day for the night cometh when no man can work? Sure. We only have our lifetime, don't we? God set the boundary on our lifetime, we'll not live a minute after and die a minute sooner. If a man is serving God, he has his day. God gave him his day, prescribed the bounds and that's how it's going to be and he can't lengthen it and he can't shorten it. A time of life is granted by God. Jesus is saying the time allotted to Me to accomplish My ministry has been set by God in eternity past and you boys can't lengthen it and the Jews can't shorten it.

And remember how often He talked about "Mine hour is not yet come?" See, He knew when midnight hit. And it wasn't yet. Well, this has great application for us. No Christian needs to fear death. What are you in danger of? God set eternal bounds on your life. You're not going to the one second before God says your ministry's through, come on home. That's a fantastic assurance. What do you need to fear? You can walkinto the teeth of opposition, hostility, hatred, everything, and just say here I am, invincible. Until God says I'm going, I'm not going.

Now there's also a serious note to an unbeliever. If you don't know Jesus Christ, you've never invited Christ into your life, consider this. Time is extended for no man. And God set boundaries on your life, too, and there's just enough time to receive Christ but no time to spare.

The legend of Dr. Faustus, which was made into the drama by Christopher Marlowe. In that Faustus struck a bargain with the devil, you know. He said, "If the devil would serve him for 24 years, at the end of 24 years held give his soul to the devil forever." At the end of those 24 years, Faustus knew he made a bad bargain. He said this in Marlowe's play, "Oh Faustus, now hast thou but one base hour to live and then thou must be damned perpetually. The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike, the devil will come and Faustus will be damned." There was no more time and that's the way it is in life. God gives the bounds of time and there is no more time.

Verse 11, "These things said He," this indicates a little pause here, the disciples kind of think about it, wand after that He saith unto them, Our friend," notice the disciples, evidently, really loved Lazarus**,** too, "our friend Lazarus sleeps but I go that I may awake him out of sleep."

Boy, what ... talk about the confident Christ, Lazarus ... what He's saying to them is, fellas, Lazarus is dead but I'm going to go wake him up. See. Confident power. He's going to wake him up.

Well, the disciples didn't get the message, of course. They thought He was talking about the fact that Lazarus was taking a nap. And they thought that was real good cause if you're real sick a nap is good for you. And they say that in verse 12, "Then said His disciples, Lord, if he sleeps, he'll probably get better." See. That's real good if he's resting nice, comfortable. Sort of pseudomedics, really didn't know what they were talking about. But the confident Christ has no problems.

And finally He says Well, let Me give it to you real simple, fellas ... verse 13, "However, Jesus spoke of his death but they thought that He had spoken of taking of rest of sleep, or in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. See, getthe message, Lazarus is dead.

You say, "Well, He didn't seem too concerned." No, in fact He was glad. He was really glad. You say, "That's heartless." No it isn't, it's not heartless. He was glad. "How do You know He was glad?" Verse 15 tells me He was glad.

"And I am glad." See, I told you He was glad. "And I am glad ... why? ... for your sakes ... for your sakes that I was not there." I mean, I'm glad I didn't get ... I'm glad he's died to the intent "ye may...what? ... believe." Now Jesus says this is good because when this miracle comes to pass, your faith is going to leap forward. And you know something? They needed to have faith in Jesus' ability to give life, didn't they? Because pretty soon they were going to see their beloved Savior hanging on a cross and they were going to need to reach back for some reservoir of faith to believe that He had power over death, weren't they? And so Jesus verifies His power over death in this great miracle and it is a miracle to show the disciples His power so that when the cross comes they'll trust in His power. And so He was glad.

Listen, what does omniscient omnipotence got to worry about? So he's dead, that only means we get to raise him, see. Tremendous, that you may believe.

Now, the idea of believing doesn't mean they had no faith, it just means their faith should be increased. But isn't it an interesting thing about faith that as you move one step up in faith, the step you just left seems like unbelief? Have you ever thought about that? I look back on my life and I ... I look back and it used to...what it looks like now is unbelief. Every new step of faith makes the last step look like unbelief. Every time my faith expands, I think I used to be unbelieving. And the disciples had faith but they needed to believe more and this miracle was going to be part of it.

Verse 16, "Then said Thomas who was called Didymus," and that means "twin." He was a twin. "Then said Thomas who was called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go that we may die with Him." See. He's going to go back to Jerusalem, we might as well go. You know ... it's really kind of an interesting thing. I really admire his love. I can't say much for his faith. He...his love was so strong he was willing to die for Jesus and his faith was so weak he knew he would. You know. Great devotion and great despondency at the same time. Big love, little faith, see.

Well, before you knock his faith, just see if you can match his love. He was saying, we can't let our Savior die by Himself, let's go die with Him. Now that's love, that's love. Before you criticize his lack of faith, see if you can match his love. He loved Jesus.

You say, "Well, when they did crucify Jesus, Thomas didn't die with Him." No, he scattered like the rest of them, but he sure had good intentions. And you know something? Later on he did die for Christ. History tells us he was a martyr. He did die for Jesus if not with Him. No, I really can't say too much for his faith, but I certainly can say something for his love. He was willing to go right back into the teeth of the hostility, into the seething unrest.

You know, I don't know about me and I don't know about you, about whether we'd be willing to die for Christ. But the sad part of it is most of us haven't even been willing to live for Him. You know that? Most of us live for ourselves, for our own goals, our own pleasure, our own material possessions, our awn money, our own desires, our own physical cravingswhether it's sex, or food, or whatever else it may bewe live for ourselves. Friends, that is as remote as it can possibly be from dying with Jesus, or for Jesus. That's the antithesis. Thomas says let's go the with Him. We say let's live for ourselves. And we claim to be Christians. And we knock Thomas's faith when our love can't even scratch his.

Listen, you need to be, first of all, willing to the to self, then you'll move a little closer to the poll of being willing to die for Jesus. You need to crucify yourself and so do I, daily. Thomas meant it. And the measure of his life was his selfless sacrifice. And that's the measure of your life, too. Don't say "I love you" and then live for yourself. Your love's a lie. Don't say anything if need be, just live for Jesus Christ and be willing to die for Him, then your love doesn't even need to speak. It's obvious. The

measure of your love is your selflessness, that's the measure of your love. And with Thomas, we should all say, whatever the cost, my love is so strong that I'll die to self and to life if need be, for Christ whom I love.

And so we meet the characters in preparation for the manifestation of the glory of the Son of God.

Father, we thank You this morning for Your Word, what its taught us. Thank You for Lazarus. Lord, we're anxious to meet him in heaven. Thank You for Mary and Martha. Thank You for Thomasteaches us what not to be in faith and what to be in lave. Thank You for teaching us this morning.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).