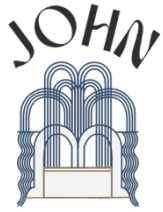


An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN



“Victory Over Death”

Part 1

John 11:1-16

Theme: By trusting the wisdom, love, and power of Christ even through painful times, we grow in faith and behold the glory of God.

Introduction: Has God ever confused you in His management of your life’s circumstances? There are times in the Christian life when God’s ways seem very confusing. We pray sincerely. We know Christ loves us. We bring our burdens honestly to Him. Yet instead of finding relief, our circumstances worsen. The sickness gets worse. The sorrow deepens. The prayer seems unanswered. And quietly, maybe even with fear, we begin to wonder: “Lord, if You truly love me, why did You wait?”

John 11 takes us straight into one of those moments. This is not just a story about death and resurrection; it reveals how the Lord works in the lives of those He truly loves. Lazarus is sick, Mary and Martha are heartbroken, the disciples are afraid, and Jesus deliberately delays.

We might conclude that Christ’s actions were lacking in love at first. He waits while a friend suffers. He stays distant as grief unfolds. He guides His disciples back toward danger in Judea. But behind every delay, sorrow, and fearful situation, there is the sovereign plan of God.

What the disciples and sisters could not yet see was that Jesus was not abandoning them in their pain; He was preparing them to witness a greater revelation of His glory than they had ever seen before. And isn’t that often how God works in our lives? The Lord frequently allows us to reach the point where:

- our strength is exhausted,
- our solutions have failed,
- our confidence in ourselves collapses,
- and all human hope appears buried in the grave.

Only then do we start to realize that Christ is not just capable of improving tough situations — He is the resurrection and the life.

As we observe Jesus in John 11:1–16, we will see that Jesus sovereignly uses suffering, delay, danger, and even death to strengthen His followers’ faith and reveal the glory of God. The propositional statement is this: “**By trusting the wisdom, love, and power of Christ even through painful times, we grow in faith and behold the glory of God.**” **[READ TEXT]**

- I. **The Appeal for God’s Intervention – 11:1-3**
- II. **The Awareness of God’s Intention – 11:4-6**
- III. **The Allegiance to God’s Influence – 11:7-16**

I. **The Appeal for God’s Intervention – 11:1-3**

A. **The Introduction to the Family – vv. 1-2**

1. In this section, Jesus is about two months away from His own death (most

likely, these events occurred in early February of AD 33).

2. Jesus is amid the “Perean Ministry,” a time of relatively private instruction of the disciples in final preparation for His death.
3. The shadow of the cross now hangs heavily over every movement of Christ –
 - a) *The public ministry is essentially complete.*
 - b) *The rejection of Israel’s leadership has hardened.*
 - c) *From this point forward, everything moves rapidly toward Calvary.*
4. Jesus had performed six signs recorded by John – all designed to demonstrate that Jesus Christ was the Son of God:
 - a) **Water to wine** – (2:3), illustrating the lack of joy outside of God’s provision.
 - b) **Healing the Nobleman’s son** – (4:46), illustrating that sin is a disease that has robbed men of the original health of the soul.
 - c) **Restoring the lame man** – (5:7), illustrating that sinners are without strength to help themselves.
 - d) **Multiplying the loaves & fish** – (6:5) illustrating that men are dependent on God to impart the resources for spiritual strength.
 - e) **Walking on the Sea** – (6:18) illustrating the dangerous condition men are in without Christ.
 - f) **Giving sight to the blind man** – (9:1) illustrating that sinners are altogether incapable of perceiving either his own wretchedness and danger, or the One who alone can deliver him.
5. As miraculous as these signs are, the final sign of Christ’s ministry is that which caused the most inarguable certification of who He is – the raising of a man who had been dead for 4 days.
6. This man is introduced appropriately by a name that means “he whom God helped” – *“Now a certain person was ill, **Lazarus from Bethany, of the village of Mary and Martha her sister.**”*
7. We are given an editorial comment as John, many years later, looks back at the significance of what was about to happen and how it impacted both Lazarus’ family – especially Mary – *“It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.”*
8. This anointing doesn’t happen until six days before Jesus’ betrayal and crucifixion but is caused by the events surrounding Lazarus’ resurrection from the dead and is therefore understood as an expression of gratitude.

B. The Intercession for the Feeble – v. 3

1. This family was close to Jesus, as can be seen from the message they sent to Jesus – *“Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.”*

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2. The urgency of their appeal is seen in the term “*behold*” [ἴδε] – literally it says: “look!” or “take note!”
3. They also use a term for “*sick*” [ἀσθενέω] that means that he was gravely ill, “incapacitated” – emphasizing the effects of the sickness – weakness and exhaustion, suggesting that Lazarus had struggled about as much as he could and was near the end – cp. *Romans 5:6*.
4. They model the proper way to relate to God – not telling Him what to do as if He were ours to instruct – but instead asking Him to do what seems best.
5. They had such confidence in the Lord’s heart that they knew He would do what was best for them in the situation, and all they felt they needed to do was inform Him – “*if Jesus knows, Jesus cares!*” – cp. *1 Peter 5:7*.
6. They based their plea neither on their brother’s love nor even on their own love for the Lord, but solely on the Lord’s love for their brother.
7. There are valuable lessons to learn from the example of approaching the Lord in this text.
 - a) *Freely bring your burdens honestly to Christ.*
 - b) *Trust Jesus’ heart even when His timing is confusing to you.*
 - c) *Submit your desires and resulting requests to God’s wisdom.*
 - d) *Base your confidence on your knowledge of God’s love and grace.*
 - e) *Remember that God may accomplish greater glory through temporary sorrow.*

II. The Awareness of God’s Intention – *11:4-6*

A. The Clarification of the Priority – *v. 4*

1. Lazarus likely died while the messenger was on his way to Christ, which accounts for the four days of burial.
 - a) *The first day is the day that it took for the messenger to leave Bethany and find Jesus.*
 - b) *Days 2 & 3 are the two days He waited before He began the trip to Bethany*
 - c) *Day 4 is the day He took to travel to Bethany.*
2. Jesus responded when He heard of Lazarus's serious condition: “*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.*”
3. Jesus’ comments were not that Lazarus would never die, but that Lazarus’

illness would ultimately result in something other than death.

4. Jesus understood God's purpose in this event, recognizing the glory God sought by giving His Son the opportunity to perform His greatest miracle.
5. Basically, Jesus sees this event as the most significant moment in His self-revelation as the Messiah – the 7th sign of His ministry.

B. The Compassion for the Participants – vv. 5-6

1. It is interesting to watch the way Scripture portrays the heart of the Lord here: *“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.”* (Imperfect indicative)
2. Humanly speaking, it was extremely difficult for Jesus to stay away, knowing that the people He cared about were suffering and agonizing over Lazarus's death.
3. However, we are told that it was His love for them that caused Him to stay away: *“So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was.”*
 - a) *We often assume that if God cares, He will immediately relieve my sorrow.*
 - b) *Yet it was in light of Jesus' love for Lazarus that He delayed!*
4. God's purpose for raising Lazarus was to bring glory to God by clearly demonstrating the identity of Christ through this powerful miracle.
5. While healing Lazarus would have repeated other healings and raising him immediately would have duplicated previous resurrections (such as Jairus' daughter and the widow's son at Nain), allowing Lazarus to be dead for four days would remove any doubt and make the miracle even more impressive.
6. Jesus' desire to strengthen Mary and Martha's faith led Him to delay, allowing them to face the pain of death so that they could later experience the greater joy of the miracle of resurrection.

III. The Allegiance to God's Influence – 11:7-16

A. The Confidence in God's Protection – vv. 7-10

1. It was probably difficult for the Lord, humanly, to know that people whom He cared about so much were suffering – cp. [*Hebrews 4:15*](#).
2. However, his allegiance to God's plan and to what God desired to do was so intense that He maintained His distance; His delay was not indecision, it was obedience.

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3. *“Then after this ...”* that is, when sufficient time had transpired to guarantee the fulfillment of God’s glory, *“He said to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea again.’”*
- a) *Lazarus had to die.*
 - b) *The burial had to be unquestionable.*
 - c) *Human hope had to expire.*
 - d) *The miracle could now display unmistakable glory.*
4. As soon as He suggested this, the disciples who were still looking over their shoulders for those following them after they left Judea protested: *“Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?”*
- a) *The Jews first desired to kill Him because He claimed equality with God by “working” on the Sabbath – [5:16-18](#).*
 - b) *Jesus wisely avoided any premature conflict by centering His ministry in Galilee - [7:1](#).*
 - c) *Jesus Himself exposes their motives – [7:19](#).*
 - d) *The effort to kill Jesus became public knowledge – [7:25](#).*
 - e) *They tried to seize Him – [7:30](#).*
 - f) *Jesus boldly confronts their motives to murder Him – [8:37](#).*
 - g) *Jesus continues to identify their motives – [8:40](#).*
 - h) *They attempted to stone Him to death because He stated that He was Yahweh – [8:59](#).*
 - i) *They again attempted to stone Him because He identified Himself as equal to the Father – [10:31](#).*
 - j) *Again, they sought to seize Him for the purpose of execution – [10:39](#).*
5. Jesus’ response shares how confident He is in the sovereign protection provided as one follows the will of God:
- a) *First, he states, “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.”*
 - (1) *The span of a day is measured – and fixed – it doesn’t expire before the number of hours by which it is measured has completed its course.*
 - (2) *In the same way, Jesus had been given a work to do by the Father and had set the time of His crucifixion (repeatedly referred to as “the hour” that has not yet come) – [Psalm 139:16](#).*
 - (3) *Jesus says that as long as they are walking within the light of God’s plan, they have nothing to worry about, and they are free to go wherever the will of God would take them – [Psalm 118:6](#).*
 - b) *Then He states a warning of sorts: “But if anyone walks in the night, he*

stumbles, because the light is not in him.”

- (1) By this, Jesus warns the disciples that if they step out of God’s will – i.e., walk in the night – they are vulnerable to stumbling.
 - (2) If they refused to walk with Him to perform the will of God, then “stumbling” was inevitable.
6. Thus, Jesus indicates that God is able to keep them from that which would prevent their ability to perform the work of God – cp. [*Jude 24-25*](#).

B. The Commitment to God’s Provision – v. 11-16

1. Jesus then informs the disciples why it is the will of God that they go – *“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep.”*
 - a) He refers to *“our friend Lazarus”* to convey that they all had benefited from their fellowship and friendship with him.
 - b) *“... fallen asleep ...”* is a euphemism referring to death – used only of those who are among the redeemed, conveying the benefit of dying: *“asleep to the world which it has left (Job 7:9-10; Isaiah 63:16; Ecclesiastes 9:6) but awake with respect to its own world (Luke 16:19-31; Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-23; Revelation 7:15-17; 20:4).”*¹
2. However, they miss the analogy and, in their desperation to avoid going back into Judea, argue that sleep is good – *“The disciples then said to Him, ‘Lord if he has fallen asleep, he will recover’.”*
3. The implication is that Lazarus will recover on his own if he can just rest – *“Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep.”*
4. Jesus, knowing that the disciples also needed their faith strengthened, informs them that *“Lazarus is dead.”*
5. He then mentions that it's good this has happened and that positive results will come from it: *“... and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him.”*
 - a) The disciples are still not sure what is happening – they only know that their confidence in Christ was so strong that it might result in their own harm – *“Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, so that we may die with Him’.”*
 - b) Thomas was likely very sincere in his commitment and intention to die with Jesus, but as we will see, his courage deserted him when death seemed imminent.

So What?

¹ William Hendriksen, p. 143.

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1. When God's timing feels slow or difficult to understand, what truths about His character help steady your faith?
2. In what situations do you struggle most to submit your desires to God's wisdom instead of insisting upon your own plans?
3. What areas of your life require greater submission to God's timing rather than your own expectations?
4. How does this passage challenge the assumption that avoiding hardship is always the wisest or most spiritual path?

Theme: By trusting the wisdom, love, and power of Christ even through painful times, we grow in faith and behold the glory of God.