

78. Love enough to delay

May 28, 2017

It has been said, "How long one minute is depends on which side of the bathroom door you're on." None of us wants to wait for anything, especially nowadays, since just about everything is expected to be done in a nano second. But when it comes to the spiritual area, God doesn't care how much we hate to wait or how hurried we are. To make us be more like Jesus, our God often, actually quite frequently, uses time-delay. You might say that our God loves us enough to delay the answers to our prayers on many occasions.

As John 10:40 mentioned, Jesus was across the Jordan River for a short time and now He moves back into the area of Jerusalem/Judea and into the shadow of the cross which is just only a few days away.

In this portion of the study, we are going to see four characters:

- 1) **The critical patient Lazarus**
- 2) **The concerned sisters Martha and Mary**
- 3) **The cringing disciples**
- 4) **The confident Jesus**

I believe that the Lord Jesus has a great lesson for us to heed this morning.

A. THE CRITICAL PATIENT LAZARUS

John 11:1-2 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.

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 one can possibly get: resuscitation from the dead.

Some Bible commentators use the word 'resurrection' for raising Lazarus from the dead. Technically and theologically, it is the wrong word to use. It should be resuscitation, not resurrection. The first resurrection of mankind was done by Jesus Himself. But this resuscitated Lazarus had to die again. A major bummer for him.

This is not the same Lazarus who was mentioned in Luke 16 as a beggar. Just the same name, very common name, like "Joonho Kim" in Southern Sweden. The emphasis in the verse is the critical sickness of Lazarus, not Lazarus himself.

B. THE CONCERNED SISTERS, MARTHA AND MARY

John 11:3-6 Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." 4 When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.

Lazarus was very sick enough for his sisters Martha and Mary to seek the help from Jesus immediately. They were confident that Jesus had healed those in the multitude whom He did not have any personal relationship with, certainly He would be there instantly to heal His friend Lazarus.

I just love the way the sisters asked Jesus without any demand, without any negotiation, and without manipulation. Their request in v3 was tender, humble, and simple. They are simply relying on the love of Jesus for Lazarus. It is a surrender to His love. It is loaded with humility without any demanding instruction.

The sisters' message does not say, "Lord, Lazarus who really loves You is sick." That is a bribery. Listen, if Christ operates in our lives solely on the basis of our love for Him, we would be in such a sorry shape because our love for Him stinks absolutely and pathetically and is inconsistent because our love for Him is often what we can get out of Him if we are truly honest with ourselves.

I am so glad that God does not bless me in proportion to my love for Him. Everything I have, everything I can do is because He loves me. He blesses us not because we deserve His blessing, but because He LOVES us.

In English, we have one word for 'love' and it covers many areas. You can say, "I love my wife," and with the same word you say, "I love football." I sure hope that you love your wife more than football.

But in Greek, we find that there are several words for 'love'. Many people have heard about the word 'eros' which is a physical and sensual love which the Bible never mentions anywhere. In v3, apostle John uses the Greek word 'phileo' to express Jesus' love for Lazarus. You may say, "OK, your point is?" Hold your horse, I am getting there. Jesus was not only God, but He was a man with brotherly affectionate love for Lazarus. Of course, out of this word 'phileo', we get the word 'Philadelphia' – the city of brotherly love.

Then, in v5, we find another Greek word for love. This time apostle John uses the word 'agapao' from which we derive an English word 'agape'. Many of you already know the meaning of this word: divine love, unconditional love, no-matter-what love. Because of this love, Jesus delayed.

This is where some people would say, "I don't get it. What kind of sick love is this that Jesus allowed Lazarus to die?" Somehow there are believers who have a completely unbiblical concept that a true born-again Christian should not be sick, nor should anyone be poor. Because they were taught that, if they are sick or poor, it means that they do not have enough faith in God; or they have hidden sins; or God doesn't love them enough. Because of this kind of heresy, some even depart from the faith in God with utter dismay, all the while these heresy teachers live high on the hog with the followers' donations to their ministries.

How are these teachers going to explain away Job's suffering? Do you remember Job whom God bragged to satan in Job chapter 1 – a blameless and upright man? As you know, God allowed satan to bring total havoc on Job's life, from losing his wealth, health, reputation, as well as all of his 10 children. To justify their faith movement heresy, they have to ignore this portion of the Bible, the very sentence out of God's own lips. That's a totally messed up theology.

Job 1:8 Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"

Listen to me carefully, please. God's love for the believers of Jesus Christ is not a pampering love, rather a perfecting love through the trials. The fact that He loves us,

and we love Him is no guarantee that we will be sheltered from all the problems and pains of life.

Remember, God the Father loves His Son perfectly, yet He allowed His Son to drink the cup of sorrow and experience the shame and pain of the cross. We must never, never think that love and suffering are incompatible. Actually, our God's love for us and His allowance for our suffering together shape us, mold us, and transform us into the image of His Son Jesus Christ.

When we find ourselves encountered by disease, disappointment, delay, and even death, our only hope and encouragement is the Word of God. We must live by faith, not by sight.

According to John 1:28 and 10:40, Jesus was at Bethabara which was located about twenty miles from Bethany. If the messenger pushed himself real hard without any break, he could have made the trip in one day. Jesus sent him back with an encouraging message as we see in v4. Then He did something that made everyone around Him wonder – He stayed two more days at Bethabara. By the time Jesus and His disciples arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days.

When the messenger arrived back home, he would find Lazarus already dead. What would Jesus' encouraging message do for the grieving sisters now because their brother is already dead and buried? To make the matter more difficult to understand, Jesus didn't come until the fourth day.

Let's clear any confusion before we move on. Was the Lord Jesus waiting for Lazarus' death? No, He was not waiting for him to die. The same day when the messenger left to Bethabara for Jesus, Lazarus died and Jesus knew about it by His divine foreknowledge. Then, why did Jesus delay two more days?

Please keep this in mind. Jesus lived on a divine timetable as we'll learn in v9. He was waiting for God the Father to tell Him when to go to Bethany. I see two reasons here:

1) Greater authenticity to the miracle

The fact that the man had been dead four days gave greater authenticity to the miracle and greater opportunity for people to believe, including His own disciples.

2) Overcoming the Jewish folk tale

According to an old Jewish folk tale, the spirit of a dead person hovers over one's dead body for three days for an opportunity to return to it. Jesus didn't want anyone to think that the spirit of Lazarus came back to his body according to the silly folk tale.

Even the borrowed tomb of Jesus which was owned by Joseph of Arimathea had a spirit window which the Jewish people thought the dead person's spirit would depart through after three days.

C. THE CRINGING DISCIPLES

John 11:7-14 Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought 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 one walks in the night, he

stumbles, because the light is not in him.” 11 These things He said, and after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.” 12 Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.” 13 However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. 14 Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead.

Jesus’ ministry at Bethabara was going very well. Many people believed in Him and it was safe for the disciples of Jesus. They were satisfied there. Out of the blue, here comes the bad news from Bethany about Lazarus and Jesus tops it off by telling them that they are going to go there. Jesus’ disciples were thinking, “Maybe Jesus was out in the sun too much. Doesn’t He know that there is a contract by the Pharisees from Jerusalem on His head – dead or alive, but preferably very dead? Besides, the town of Bethany is only a short distance from Jerusalem.” They were cringing at the idea of going to Bethany.

If I may explain v9 and 10 in a simpler way, we all have a time of life granted by God to accomplish what the Lord tells us to do. We cannot lengthen it with all the healthy organic foods and nutrition in the world. At the same time, nothing can shorten His schedule for our lives that are designated by Him. Live for His glory, not for yourself.

D. THE CONFIDENT JESUS

John 11:15-16 And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.” 16 Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”

Jesus was not glad that Lazarus was dead, rather He was glad that this situation would build His disciples’ faith in Him when His crucifixion comes – His power over death.

We have many jokes about this “Doubting Thomas.” He always gets a bum rap for being analytical. Yes, we cannot say much about his faith, but his love for Jesus was stronger than any other disciples’. So much that he was willing to die with Jesus. Great devotion and great despondency at the same time.

Before you discount Thomas’ faith, see if you can match his love for Jesus. You may say, “When they crucified Jesus, Thomas didn’t die with Him.” No, he hightailed out of the Garden of Gethsemane like the rest of the disciples. But later on he DID die for Jesus as a martyr.

You may say that you are willing to die for Jesus. That’s good. But can you say, “I am willing to live for Jesus”? Most of us live for ourselves, for our own goals, for our own pleasure, for our own material possessions, for our own financial gains, for our own carnal desires, and for our own physical gratification over building and expanding the Kingdom of God. Many of us think that it is someone else’s job. Try that excuse when you see Jesus.

Instead of thinking, “I don’t like this preacher. He is convicting me.” Wait a minute, I cannot convict you, it is the Holy Spirit’s job. If the Holy Spirit is convicting you, what do you need to do? Repent and obey Him.

E. APPLICATIONS

- 1) God's love for the believers of Jesus Christ is not a pampering love, rather a perfecting love through the trials.
- 2) Our God's love for us and His allowance for our suffering together shape us, mold us, and transform us into the image of His Son Jesus Christ.
- 3) Our lives are individually granted and scheduled by our God to live for His glory. Don't waste it by living for your selfishness because you've been bought at the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- 4) Don't say that you are willing to die for Christ, unless you are willing to live for Christ first.