

**Sermon Series Four: Believe and Live**  
***(The Gospel of John: Signs of the Messiah - 1:1-12:50)***  
**John 11:1-16**  
***The Resurrection and the Life (Part One)***

Have you ever considered the fact that even your illnesses or death constitute an occasion for God's glory to be revealed? By glory we mean the splendor of God's honor or reputation. Chapter 11 records the last and most powerful of the seven miraculous signs in the Gospel of John - the resurrection of Lazarus after having been dead for four days. The miracle's primary purpose, however, was not to restore Lazarus to life or to comfort his grieving sisters, but to bring glory to Jesus Christ and to God the Father. Against the backdrop of rejection and hatred on the part of the Jewish leaders, Christ will reveal the glorious splendor of his life-giving resurrection power as irrefutable proof of his deity. Indeed, physical death is a powerful divine object lesson of what sin does in the spiritual realm. Just as physical death ends life and separates people, so spiritual death is the separation of people from God - the loss of life which is in God. Jesus has come so that people once spiritually dead in their sin may be given a new life - a full and abundant life.

As the story begins we are introduced to an anonymous man who is sick - very sick. Later we will discover that his name is a shortened form of a Hebrew name, Eleazar, which means "helped by God." This certainly is a fitting name in light of this story. Further, Lazarus is the brother of Mary and Martha. Interestingly, these three names are derived from Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic roots. Perhaps this is a hint that this story is relevant and important for people from all cultures and all backgrounds. Consequently, this story is most certainly relevant to you, whoever you are.

Now since the purpose of the story is for God's glory to be revealed, we must ask the question, "How is God's glory revealed in this passage?" God's glory is revealed through his creation, the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection, and his gracious provision of salvation culminating in the new heavens and new earth. But I am going to focus on how God's glory is revealed through us as individuals. When we

allow God to work unhindered through us, our actions point to the greatness, the wonder and the character of our God! **What we'll discover, today, is that God's glory is revealed in four ways:**

### **I. God's Glory Is Revealed through Our Selfless Acts (11:2)**

John identifies Mary as the one "*who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair.*" We will say much more about this later in chapter 12 where John narrates this incident. But for now we will note that Mary spends about a year's equivalent of wages, and performs an action which was the work of mere servants showing deep humility and devotion. When we make sacrifices, even to the point of busting our budgets, to generously provide for the underprivileged, a friend or acquaintance going through difficult times, or for the ongoing ministry of our church, our sacrifice demonstrates that as Christians we are living objects of what Christ is like. When we stoop to let others shine above us, this causes people to think more favorably and even to give praise to our God.

A pastor tells this story: A medical doctor who utilized his skills in Ethiopia for more than 60 years, Nathan Barlow dedicated his life to helping people with mossy foot. Mossy foot is a debilitating condition which causes swelling and ulcers in the feet and lower legs. The subsequent deformity and secondary infections makes people with mossy foot social outcasts - equivalent to lepers. The pastor says, "I met Nathan shortly before he died. His daughter attended my church and brought him to her home from Ethiopia when his health started to fail. After only a few weeks, he couldn't handle being in the States. The people he loved were still in Ethiopia, so his daughter flew him back home so he could spend his last days there. Once, Nathan got a toothache and had to fly away from the mission field to get medical attention. Nathan told the dentist he didn't ever want to leave the mission field for the sake of his teeth again, so he had the dentist pull out all of his teeth and give him false ones. This amazing man was the first to help these outcasts, and he spent his life doing it. Yet no one really knew about him. It surprised me that such a man of God would faithfully serve for so many years, despite minimal recognition."

## **II. God's Glory Is Revealed through Our Faith and Even Our Doubts, In Threatening and Difficult Times (11:3-6)**

*So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was."*

Lazarus is gravely ill, so Mary and Martha send an urgent plea for help to the Lord. In the culture of that day, there entreaty is a polite way of appealing to the love of friendship and affection that Christ had for Lazarus and their family. He had spent a considerable amount of time visiting with the family. But they also demonstrate self-control in their polite invitation because they knew, as we will see, that it would be extremely dangerous for Christ to travel anywhere near Jerusalem at that time.

It is clear that Mary and Martha believed that Christ could heal their brother in an instant, if he desired. What would seem to be an impossible situation - in a time when medicine was in its infancy - they believed to be a situation where God could demonstrate his amazing power as *Jehovah Rapha*. We too can have faith in the healing power of Christ. I have heard doctors, surgeons, and specialists tell me that they often see medical marvels which simply cannot be explained scientifically. I have had two such situations in my own life. Christians bring glory to God when others see them stand strong and courageous instead of falling apart when their world seems to be falling apart.

It most certainly would have shaken Mary and Martha's faith when Jesus delays coming for two days. Why did he not come immediately? Wasn't this urgent situation of prime importance? Was he disinterested? Was he a friend in name only? Jesus will dispel any doubt about the authenticity of his love, for his delay will prove to not show disinterest but to demonstrate divine purpose. His delay will show that sickness and even death may sometimes be God's will for his people. Even when we doubt or deny him in the sea of our troubles,, he will not deny us! He can and will even turn our doubting into joy.

But before we go on, Jesus said that Lazarus would not die when in fact he did die. It sounds a bit contradictory doesn't it? What Jesus is telling his disciples is that death would not be the final outcome of Lazarus' sickness, but that the splendor of God's reputation, and that of his divine Son, would be magnified through the events about to transpire. God would use the physical sickness, affliction, and even death of a believer to bring glory to his name when he raised him from the dead.

### **III. God's Glory Is Revealed through Our Submission to His Will Even in the Face of Persecution (11: 7-10, 16)**

*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?" Jesus answered, "Are there not 12 hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ... So Thomas called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "let us also go, that we may die with him."*

Here they were having a fruitful ministry and now Jesus is talking about taking a life-threatening journey to the vicinity of Jerusalem? In their minds, the situation did not seem to require the Lord's immediate attention since Lazarus was not going to die. Further, could Jesus not heal him from a distance like he had done before? What's up with that? It would be foolhardy to go back to the place where the Jews had recently tried to stone him! And then there were all those death threats. We cannot imagine how scary this must have been for them. But in spite of all of that, Thomas (yes doubting Thomas) will encourage them to trust Christ and make the journey. And so they did!

One of the great blessings of God is that he will always provide comfort and bring strength in the face of persecution. That is precisely what Jesus does in this proverbial saying. *First*, He reminds them of the way in which the Jews and Rome divided their day - 12 hours of daylight followed by 12 hours of night. *Second*, he says the person who walks during the day will not stumble, because the sun sheds its light on obstacles to be avoided. But the one who walks during the night, will

stumble, because the darkness of night obscures obstacles in the path. The basic lesson is that walking in the light prevents stumbling. Those who walk in His light and according to His will have no need to fear. They can rely on the Light of the World to keep them from stumbling. *Third*, walking in the daylight represents following the guidance of God's will. Walking in the night pictures living without divine illumination or authorization. And living in the realm of darkness or evil is dangerous. *Fourth*, the 12 hours in the day also symbolize the duration of the Lord's earthly ministry as allotted by the Father. Just as no one can lengthen or shorten a day, so the disciple's concern could not extend the time allotted to Jesus, nor could the Jews hostility shorten it. Every hour of Jesus' journey was lived within the will of God and therefore under God's authority and protection. Jesus would die only when God's ordained time came for him to die.

The same is true for you. If you live your life following the Light of the World and being led by that light, you need not fear persecution. You will complete the ministry that God has for you and will live every moment that God has ordained for you. You are an emissary of the King of Kings and go forth under his protection and guidance. Even if you die, he will use your death to bring others into his kingdom. You will, by your submission to his will, bring great honor to him and display his glory to others! It was said by one Christian father martyred by ISIS (when his family pleaded for him not to go to Syria to work). "I have one God. He's the same here and there." His omnipresent God would be there to protect him just as he had been at home. His brother said, "He lived according to the Bible. I can't remember something he did wrong. One witness of his beheading said, "I saw that he had strength in his last moments." The 27-year-old man insisted that there was a heavenly light shining on his brother's face, even after he was decapitated. And that consoled me."

#### **IV. God's Glory Is Revealed through Our Acceptance of His Truth Even When It Is Mysterious or Countercultural (11: 11-15)**

*After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his*

*death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."*

Sleep was a common Old Testament metaphor for death. But it was a common perception in Jesus' day that when you died there was no such thing as a resurrection. Many people thought of those who fell asleep in death as staying asleep or staying dead - even though the Old Testament spoke clearly of the resurrection in Daniel 12. The disciple's confusion then is completely understandable. They misunderstood Jesus' words in verse four and believe that Lazarus' condition was improving, and he would continue to do so with adequate rest. But Jesus was speaking of something that ran contrary to the culture in which they lived. Jesus ends their confusion by an explicit omniscient statement that Lazarus is dead. And then he tells them that he is glad that he is dead. Why? Wouldn't he rather have healed him? What Jesus knew was that their faith would be more greatly strengthened by raising a man that was obviously dead than by healing that man. (Later we see that he had been dead four days when Jesus arrives.)

God often calls us to believe in him even when circumstances don't make any sense at all. He even asks us to believe things that go directly against the culture of our day. He asks us to believe that God created the world and it did not evolve. He asks us to believe that marriage is the union of a man and a woman and that everything else is an aberration to him. He asks us to believe that the only wholesome sexual relationship is a relationship between a man and a woman. He asks us to believe that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. He asks us to believe that the husband is to be the loving leader and primary provider in the home. All of this runs directly contrary to our culture. Consequently, Christians routinely are called bigots by a hostile world. But God is glorified when we have the metal and strength to stand tall and strong on the principles of the Bible even in the face of losing friends and even our jobs because of what we believe. A great example is the pizza shop that refuses to cater a gay wedding because they will be seen as condoning an unscriptural union in marriage. They have been reviled all over the press for exercising their religious freedom.

## **Conclusion**

We do not simply want to see glory; we want to be a part of it. A pastor tells this story: When we lived in Chicago, a friend of ours regularly gave us Bulls tickets. Every year I would take my son, Johnny, to a game. The seats were located alongside the tunnel at the United Center, so when the Bulls ran out on to the floor, when Michael Jordan would run through the tunnel, everybody nearby wanted to give him a high five. They wanted to share his glory. We all want to touch glory. We want to connect with it. We want to be a part of it, even though we know we are not worthy. The Bulls had a reserve player named Stacey King. During the 1990 season King only started six games and averaged 15 minutes per game. But one night, during an overtime game against Cleveland, he contributed to an important victory. He said it would always be the greatest memory of his life: the night he and Michael Jordan scored a combined total of 70 points in a NBA playoff game. Michael Jordan scored his career-high 69 points, but King shared in the glory.

God wants to display his glory through you! He will use your selfless thoughts and actions, your faith in a time of impossible circumstances, your resolve in the face of persecution, and your trust even when everything seems mysterious or everything you believe runs directly against the culture in which you live. Think of it! This week God will bring into your life a number of opportunities to display his character and to demonstrate his glory through you - yes you! Indeed every moment of your life is an opportunity to display the character that will one day be revealed to have been an important part, no matter how seemingly insignificant, in his kingdom plans for this world and the next.

