

John 11:1-37

How would you characterize Jesus' relationship with the family of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (vv. 1-3)?

Jesus had established a love relationship with them. They knew He loved them. They were secure in His love.

When Lazarus was sick and his sisters sent word for Jesus to come, what did He say was the purpose of this sickness (v. 4)? So that God's glory might be revealed and God's Son would be glorified. God ordained/allowed this to happen so that Jesus would come and raise Lazarus from the dead and thus He would be manifested again as the true Messiah. Raising someone to life glorified God by revealing His Son.

We know that the bottom line purpose of any miracle is to glorify God. What does it mean to glorify God? It means to bring Him honor through what we say, how we act, and how we think. Causing/enabling people to think favorably about God. To glorify God means we make Him known to others. Glorifying God means to acknowledge Him as sovereign in all areas of life.

When Jesus got the word about Lazarus what did He do (v. 6)? Jesus did not go immediately to their home. He waited two days. But His delay was not from lack of love (cf. v. 5), or from fear of the Jews. He waited till the right moment in the Father's plan. Not even His love for Martha, Mary, and Lazarus could force Christ to act ahead of the proper time. Everything He did was in obedience to His Father's will for Him, and in keeping with the divine timetable.¹

God's delays are not God's denials. If our prayers are not answered immediately, perhaps He is teaching us to wait, and if we wait patiently, we will often find that He will answer our prayers in a much more marvelous way or within a better time frame than we ever anticipated.

How did the disciples react to Jesus's plan (vv. 7-8)? Jesus' decision to return to Judea seemed foolhardy to the disciples. They reminded Him that the Jews there had recently tried to stone Him (10:31, 39) after He had given sight to the blind man. They were surprised that He would even think of going back into Judea in the face of such personal danger.²

What did Jesus mean by daylight and night (vv. 9-10)?

- On a physical level -- In Jesus' day there were no streetlights to illumine the cities. In fact, there was little artificial lighting of any kind. So when the day ends, a man's work has to be done. To be out and about after nightfall is to stumble and risk injury.
- On a spiritual level -- men who do not "have the light" stumble (morally) when they attempt to walk in the darkness. Darkness is a description of the world which is characterized by evil and unbelief. Only when one follows Jesus as the "light of the world" can one go about "this present darkness" in safety. Jesus is the light whereby a man may walk and not stumble.
- Taken in context -- People should respond to Jesus while He is in the world as its Light. Soon He would be gone and so would this unique opportunity.

What was the misunderstanding between Jesus and His disciples (vv. 11-13)? The disciples didn't understand what Jesus meant by his statement that Lazarus was asleep. The words "*Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there*" seem shocking at first. But if Lazarus had not died, the disciples (and readers of all ages) would not have had this unique opportunity to have their faith quickened.³

Why was Jesus "glad" that He had not been there when Lazarus died (vv. 14-15)? If He had been there, Lazarus would not have died. Jesus would have healed him when he was sick. Nowhere is it recorded in the New Testament that a person died in the presence of the Lord. Lazarus' death was "*so that you may believe.*" The disciples will now see a greater miracle than the prevention of death. They would see a man raised from the dead which would greatly strengthen their faith and which would be the clearest demonstration of Jesus' identity so far, and would convince many people that He was, indeed, God's Son. Waiting two days resulted in a bigger miracle with a bigger impact.

What do you make of Thomas' comment (v. 16)? Thomas expressed what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus. He was willing to go with Jesus, even if it meant dying with Him. Thomas didn't understand all that Jesus said or

meant, but what he did know was enough to make him willing to die with and for Jesus. This was the first reference in the Gospels to Thomas saying something. Thomas gets a bad rap as a doubter, but here his devotion to Jesus and his courage stand out. On another level it is prophetic of most of the disciples' destinies.

How long had Lazarus been dead when Jesus arrived (v. 17)? He had been dead for four days. There is a Jewish belief that the spirit of a person stays near the grave for three days hoping to return to the body. But on the fourth day decomposition sets in and the spirit finally leaves. After that, there is no hope of resuscitation. The fact that Jesus raised Lazarus after he had been dead for four days would have left no question that Jesus had truly raised a dead person.

How did both Martha and Mary respond to Jesus (vv. 21, 32)? *"If you had been here, my brother would not have died."* The sisters were having a hard time understanding Jesus' delay. But they were trying to trust that Jesus had a purpose. Martha had confidence that God would grant Him His request and that He would bring good out of this seeming tragedy. However, even now, she did not dare to believe that her brother would be raised from the dead.⁴

It was real faith that enabled Martha and Mary to believe that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus from dying. Still, their faith was imperfect. They thought He could only do this if He were bodily present. They did not realize that He could heal a man from a distance, still less that He could raise the dead.

How did Jesus respond to Martha (v. 23)? *"Your brother will rise again."* Martha had no thought of an immediate resuscitation but she did believe in the final resurrection at the last day.⁵

Application: **What are some of the purposes of God's "delays" in our lives?** God uses delays to mold our hearts to line up with His, to quiet us so we won't get ahead of Him, and to strengthen our faith. Sometimes He also does it simply to bring honor to His name.

Jesus stated the fifth "I AM" as what (v. 25)? The Resurrection and the Life. **What is required for eternal life (vv. 25-26)?** Belief. Nothing beyond faith In Jesus is required to be saved.

How did Martha respond to Jesus (vv. 21, 24, 27)? She gets it! She understands who Jesus is. Martha makes a clear profession of saving faith. Her faith was sincere and legitimate but it was limited; she knew nothing yet about the future for both her brother Lazarus and Jesus. She realized based on the Old Testament that her brother would rise from the dead someday but she had no idea it would be that very day.

Martha's faith blazed forth in noontime splendor (v. 27). She confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God, whom the prophets had predicted was to come into the world. And we should notice that she made this confession *before* Jesus had raised her brother from the dead and not afterwards!⁶

How would you describe Jesus emotions (vv. 33-35)? He was troubled (Gr. *etaraxen*). This is another strong verb that describes emotional turmoil. Jesus' tears are proof of His compassion for fallen humanity (Luke 19:41).

Why did Jesus weep (v. 35)? The Bible doesn't tell us, but most likely because He was face to face with the consequences of sin, and particularly the sin of unbelief. He was angry at the tyranny of Satan who had brought sorrow and death to people through the tragic consequences of sin. Jesus wept three times: (1) here, (2) over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), and (3) in the garden of Gethsemane (Hebrews 5:7).

How did the Jews respond to Jesus' weeping (vv. 36-37)? The crowd wrongly interpreted His tears as an expression of love for Lazarus or frustration at not being there to prevent Lazarus from dying and heal him. He could have done so, but instead He was going to perform a mightier miracle, which would bring greater hope to believing souls.⁷

¹ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1530.

² Ibid.

³ Edwin A. Blum, "John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 313.

⁴ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1531.

⁵ Edwin A. Blum, "John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 314.

⁶ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1532.

⁷ Ibid., 1533.