

The Lord's Delay

(A Study of the Gospel of John; Message #41)

John 11:1-16

A. How do you explain this tragedy? For that matter, how do we explain ours?

1. Maybe God messed up...
2. Maybe God is angry; maybe we've exhausted his mercy

B. If you follow your troubles to their headwater, you'll find a sovereign God

"Trust me in your times of trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory."
Psalm 50:15 (NLT)

THE WHOLE STORY

- A. John 11 is the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead
- B. Lazarus, Mary and Martha are close personal friends of Jesus
- C. Jesus finally arrives - four days after the funeral
- D. After an emotional interlude, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead

THE PRAYER MEETING (11:1-6)

A. The chapter's opening words give immediate gravity to this chapter...

1. Lazarus is knocking on death's door. Why? He is sick for the sake of God
2. Jesus, Lazarus, Martha and Mary have more than a friendship; they have a deep love for one another; Jesus loves them - and they know it

B. So a prayer meeting is held in the middle of this first paragraph (11:3-4a)

1. Two friends of Jesus pray for a third (i.e., they send a message to Jesus)
 - a. It is always appropriate to just share our deepest need with him
 - b. It is a model prayer for personal crisis: *Lord! Your dear friend is very sick!*
2. Jesus answers: *"This is for the glory of God..."*

C. How is God glorified in this story? Obviously, by Jesus raising Lazarus

1. Less obvious: God is glorified when Lazarus' raising leads the Council to plan to put Jesus to death (so God can raise him)
2. What may look tragic in the beginning becomes glorious at the end:
"Look, the lamb of God, who is taking away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)

D. Suddenly there is a left turn in our story

1. In spite of his affection (love) for them, Jesus doesn't go and Lazarus dies
2. Note two things about this text:

- a. Jesus doesn't hurry; he doesn't need to; he is doing the slow work of God
- b. God's timing is always perfect; he may seem slow, but he is never late

THE DISCIPLES MEETING (11:7-16)

A. The disciples are not thrilled by Jesus' plan to go back to Judea (11:7-10)

1. It is not uncommon for people to magnify the strength of the opposition
2. Jesus: *"Daylight means safewalking; God's will is even clearer than daylight"*
"The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4)

B. Jesus longs for Faith (11:11-16)

1. John reminds us how much joy believing disciples bring to Jesus

"I've prayed this way, Father, so that these people standing here will believe - that you sent me" (John 11:43)

2. True disciples want to please their teacher; these disciples long to please Jesus; and trusting Jesus is the most basic way to please him

C. Have you been selected to struggle for God's glory?

"Have you been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in him, but to suffer for his sake?" (Philippians 1:29)

1. Do your prayers seem to remain unanswered? Is God moving slow?
2. Are people strengthened by your struggles? Are you able to be a witness?

D. God uses whatever he wants for his glory: history and nations; people and problems; a blind man, Lazarus, a kidnapped couple, you

1. A small season of suffering is a small assignment compared to the reward
2. Embrace the opportunity, explore it, ponder it, and use it for the glory of God

E. Thomas seems convinced he is going to Bethany to die

1. In spite of the risk; Thomas is committed to go, and he invites us to join him
2. Thomas understood the call of discipleship. So did Lazarus. May God be glorified through you and I as well!