

## SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**JOHN 11:1** Now a certain *man* was sick, *named* Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.

**2** (It was *that* Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.)

**3** Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest 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 might be glorified thereby.

**5** Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.

**6** When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.

**7** Then after that saith he to *his* disciples, Let us go into Judaea again.

**8** *His* disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to

stone thee; and goest thou thither again?

**9** Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.

**10** But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.

**11** These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

**12** Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.

**13** Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.

**14** Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

**15** And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.

**16** Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.

### NOTES

# Jesus' Response to a Dire Need

Lesson Text: John 11:1-16

Related Scriptures: I Corinthians 15:12-19; Matthew 9:18-26

TIME: A.D. 30

PLACE: Perea, east of Jordan River

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep" (John 11:11).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **JESUS SUMMONED—John 11:1-4**

**Lazarus and his sisters (John 11:1-2).** Jesus had demonstrated His power and authority over the laws of nature, diseases, and hunger. Here He demonstrates His authority over our greatest enemy: death.

The town was Bethany, located about two miles east of Jerusalem on the road to Jericho, at the home of a family consisting of two sisters, Mary and Martha, and their brother, Lazarus. "

Jesus had been in Jerusalem (John 10:22-23), but because of opposition He had retreated to the other side of the Jordan River. While He was there, Lazarus fell sick.

**The sickness (John 11:3-4).** It was undoubtedly when the sisters saw Lazarus's sickness getting worse that they thought of Jesus. They sent word to Him, asking Him to come and help.

Jesus' response was encouraging: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God" (vs. 4). Jesus' apparent downplaying of Lazarus's illness is surprising. We now under-

stand, of course, that He was actually waiting for Lazarus to die before He arrived.

### **JESUS DELAYED—John 11:5-14**

**The delay (John 11:5-6).** John makes a point of telling us that Jesus loved all three members of this family. John tells us this to assure us that Jesus' delay in responding to the sisters' plea indicated no callousness on His part.

Despite hearing of Lazarus's sickness, Jesus stayed where He was for two more days. This indeed seems a very strange response to such an urgent and desperate need. Jesus had a bigger purpose in mind than merely healing a sick friend. By allowing time for Lazarus to die, Jesus set the stage for the greatest of His seven miracles in John's Gospel.

**A puzzling decision (John 11:7-8).** After the two-day delay, Jesus announced to the disciples, "Let us go into Judaea again" (vs. 7). This was surely a surprise to them, as seen in their responses to Him (vs. 8). "They obviously did not yet ap-

preciate the Father's protection of His Son until His appointed hour or the inevitability of Jesus' death" (*Constable's Notes*, net.bible.org). Since Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters, it would seem that, humanly speaking, He would have wanted to go to Bethany immediately. Apparently the Father restrained Him. Jesus' timing was perfect, since it was guided and directed by the Father.

**A curious response (John 11:9-10).** As He often did, Jesus answered His disciples with a question, a rhetorical one. Our first impression of this question may be that it had nothing to do with the disciples' concerns. He simply asked if there are not twelve hours in a day. Then He went on to explain that if someone walks in the light of the day, he will not stumble, but if he walks in the darkness, he is at great risk of stumbling. Jesus meant that as long as He walked in the light of His Father's will, He was safe and protected from danger.

We too are in the safest place possible when we are living within God's will. Staying obedient to Him is equivalent to walking in the light, while living in disobedience allows spiritual darkness to invade our lives.

**Sleeping Lazarus (John 11:11-14).** Jesus then said, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep" (vs. 11). He meant that Lazarus had now physically died.

The disciples missed Jesus' figurative reference completely. He had to tell them plainly that Lazarus was dead in order for them to understand.

### **JESUS DETERMINED— John 11:15-16**

**Glad (John 11:15).** Jesus said He was glad for the disciples' sake that He had not been there in time to save Lazarus because this would now be

an opportunity for them to strengthen their faith in Him.

Jesus was not glad Lazarus had died, but only that the disciples would now be witnesses to the glory of God's kingdom that would be manifested when He brought life out of death.

**Doubt (John 11:16).** Thomas's response shows that his fears had devolved into resignation and apathy. But we should give him credit for remaining loyal and willing to follow Jesus, no matter the cost.

—Keith E. Eggert.

## QUESTIONS

1. In what town did this incident take place, and where was it located relative to Jerusalem?
2. Why had Jesus left Jerusalem, and what happened while He was away?
3. What was Jesus' response upon hearing Lazarus was sick?
4. If Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters, why did He delay two days before going to help them?
5. How did the disciples react when Jesus said they were going to Judea?
6. What seemingly unconnected rhetorical question did Jesus ask?
7. How did He explain His question?
8. What was the real meaning in His explanation, and what does this mean to us?
9. What did the disciples not understand about what Jesus said, and how did He clarify?
10. Why did Jesus let Lazarus die?

—Keith E. Eggert.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Because of human sin, no one escapes sickness and death (John 11:1-3).
2. God uses unlikely things, such as death, to bring Himself glory (vs. 4).
3. The Lord works on His timetable; we should not insist He works on ours (vss. 5-6).
4. The things we see should not deter us from the things we know God has for us to do (vss. 7-8).
5. We need the light of God to perceive things in a spiritual way and accomplish His purposes (vss. 9-13).
6. Sometimes God allows us to experience difficulty in life in order to increase our faith (vss. 14-16).

—Brandon Byler.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why do we experience death in this world (John 11:1-3)? Why are the circumstances leading up to it so painful to endure?
2. How can God use even death for His own glory (vs. 4)?
3. Why did Jesus delay going to Lazarus (vss. 5-8)? How do you think this delay affected the disciples? Lazarus's sisters?
4. Can you know for sure that you are walking in the light of God (vss. 9-10)? How?
5. What are some things you have experienced in your life that have increased your faith in God (vs. 15)?
6. How can you help your family, friends, or coworkers focus on God through difficult times?

—Brandon Byler.

## Golden Text Illuminated

**“Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep” (John 11:11).**

As a consequence of the Fall of man (cf. Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-24), we all have an appointment with death (cf. Heb. 9:27). Nevertheless, to believers in Christ, death is not a period, but a comma. It is not the end of life, but a transition to eternal bliss with Jesus Christ in heaven (cf. Luke 16:22; John 11:25-26; II Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; 3:20).

Jesus uses a phrase for death that should have been familiar to His disciples. He says, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.” To Christians, death is like sleeping. “Sleep” refers to the body, not to the soul or spirit. Moreover, death does not mean cessation of all life for a Christian. It might sound scary because it is unknown, but we have the encouragement, hope, and comfort of eternal life (cf. I Thess. 4:13-18).

It is important to note that only Jesus has power over death. He says, “but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.” Wow! That statement alone eliminates all fear concerning death. No one can raise the dead but God, but Jesus has the power to raise the dead (cf. Matt. 9:24, 29-30), for He is God (cf. Heb. 1:8).

Just as the death of Lazarus was followed by a bodily resuscitation, the believer's death will be followed by a bodily resurrection at the return of Jesus Christ for His church.

Are you prepared to face death someday? Put your trust in Jesus. He alone has conquered death, and He has the power to raise the dead.

—Kenneth E. Ware.