SO THAT GOD’S SON MAY BE GLOIRFIED

John 11:1-16

Key Verse:11:4 “When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”

In most musical works there are thematic melodies which are repeated. When we listen to these melodies, we figure out the composers’ intentions and passion in their music. In the same way there is an overarching theme which is repeatedly emphasized in John’s gospel like thematic melodies in music: *Believe (pisteuo)*. There are seven miracles written in John’s gospel which reveal the glory of God so that people might believe that Jesus is the Son of God. John 2:11 describes the miracle of Jesus’ changing water into wine in this, “*What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him*.” After Jesus healed a royal official’s son, the royal official and his whole household *believed* (4:53). When people saw Jesus feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish, they said, “*Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world*.” (6:13) When Jesus walked on water, his disciples worshiped him saying, “*Truly you are the Son of God*.” (Mt 14:33, Jn 6:20) Before Jesus opened the eyes of a born blind, he said to his disciples, “*Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him*.” (Jn 8:3)

Today’s passage introduces Jesus’ last miracle which he had performed before he suffered. This miracle was the most powerful and climatic one because Jesus overruled our last enemy which is death. In this event Jesus helped his disciples to believe him as the Son of God. The main character in today’s passage is not Lazarus or his two sisters, but Jesus’ disciples. Jesus helped his disciples to believe in him through Lazarus’ resurrection. Let us learn what Jesus wants us to do when we are in the similar situation like Lazarus sickness.

First, Lord, the one you love is sick. (1-3) Look at verses 1-3. “***Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.***” This family is introduced in Luke 10:38-42. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus lived in Bethany, a small village 2 miles away from Jerusalem. They might have had no parent, so Jesus often visited them and cared for them like a father. Verses 3 and 5 explain their love relationship with Jesus; *“Lord, the one you love is sick.” (3) “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*” (5) According to Luke’s gospel Jesus visited their house, and Martha prepared food for him and his disciples while Mary was listening to Jesus’ word at his feet. (Lk 10:38) This Mary later poured perfume on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. (Jn 12:3) They really loved Jesus and served him as they did their father. Jesus also loved them as his own children. There was no other family like Lazarus’ family, which was so close to Jesus in the Bible. Last week the West family drove to Philadelphia to attend Roxana’s commencement ceremony. They drove a long distance to encourage her because they love Roxana, as she is their lovely daughter. Jesus loved Lazarus’ family as the lovely Father did his children.

Lazarus was sick. His sickness was not a minor illness such as a stomach ulcer or a cold with fever, but a critical illness which was threatening his life. This was an emergency case. His life could have been over in seconds or in minutes. At that time Jesus and his disciples stayed at the vicinity of Judea where the messenger of Martha was able to reach him. The message was “*Lord, the one you love is sick.*” It meant Jesus should immediate visit the dying Lazarus. How did Jesus respond to this urgent message?

Second, God’s Son may be glorified through it. (4-6) ***When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”*** (4) His disciples and the messengers expected Jesus to immediately visit Lazarus. They expected Jesus to touch Lazarus and raise him by the hand as he did for other sick people. He should have come to Lazarus faster and quicker than anyone else because he loved Lazarus. To their surprise, Jesus didn’t go right away, but instead just said the words, “*This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it*.” Jesus meant that Lazarus would not die and that his sickness would glorify him. These days we have smart phones which allow us to communicate with others quickly and easily. But at that time the messengers had to run long distances to deliver the urgent message to Jesus. The situation was critical, as it was a matter of life and death. But Jesus’ response seemed to be unrealistic and even irrelevant.

Why did Jesus respond in this way? What did he mean when he said this in verse 4? Verse 5 gives us an answer. Look at verse 5. “***Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus***.” According to verse 5, Jesus’ answer was an expression of his love for this family. His love manifested through his delay in verse 6. “***So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.***” OMG! Jesus stayed two more days where he was. He did not follow the messenger right away, but remained at his current vicinity for two more days. Suppose what would have happened to Lazarus if Jesus visited Bethany two days later. Lazarus would have surely died in two days. In fact, Lazarus had been dead even before Jesus arrived at Bethany. We don’t understand why Jesus delayed his arrival and why he treated Lazarus in this way.

When we look at the original version of this passage in Greek, the word ‘love’ in verse 5 is different from the word ‘love’ in verse 3. The word ‘love’ in verse 3 is ‘*phileo*’ while the word ‘love’ in verse 5 is ‘*agapao*’. *Phileo* is human love whereas *agapao* is God’s love. Martha and Mary asked human love from Jesus, but Jesus responded them with God’s love. What does this mean? Jesus loved them so much that he wanted to give them something better than what they asked. God’s love is much deeper, higher, wider, and wiser than human love. God’s love is like a pacific ocean whereas human love is like a pond near our neighbor. We call God’s love unfathomable. Unfathomable means immeasurable. We cannot reach, measure, or comprehend God’s love for us. How can we understand God’s love who sacrificed his One and Only Son to die for this sinful world? Can we sacrifice our children to release murderers, Satan-worshipers, kidnappers, or terrorists? No! We can’t!

What kind of love did Jesus want to give them? Jesus wanted to give them resurrection and eternal life. Later Jesus told Martha, “*I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”* (Jn 11:25,26) When Jesus said, “*This sickness will not end in death*”, he meant that he would not only cure Lazarus of his sickness, but also he would raise him from the dead. Jesus would provide him eternal life. People think that a serious illness will end in death. They also believe that death is the end of their destiny. But Jesus did not think so. Lazarus would not die in his sickness, but he would rise again after he had died. Jesus wanted to plant resurrection faith into his disciples’ hearts and later into the hearts of the two sisters. Jesus wanted his disciples to overcome the power of death and to live victorious lives with resurrection faith. Jesus would raise Lazarus from the sickness so that they might have had faith that God would raise them as Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Above all, they would believe that our God could raise Jesus from the dead so that Jesus might be glorified through his resurrection. This is reason why Jesus said, “*It is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it*.”

To the eyes of people, Jesus’ response seemed mean and cruel to those who loved him. We may also think similarly when we are in a similar situation like Lazarus. We expect immediate responses and quick answers from the Lord. But it does not always work the way we expect. God sometimes answers us in different times and in different ways from ours. But we must believe that God’s time is the best time and that God’s way is the best way. God loves us with *agapao* even though we ask for *phileo.* Our prayer is not denied, but delayed. God delays his answer in order to give us the best gift in the best time. God’s plan for our lives is much bigger, higher, and deeper than our comprehension. Isaiah 55:8,9 says, “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord.**“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*” God’s gift for us is far greater than we request. A billionaire once asked a famous golfer to play golf together with him. To the billionaire, playing golf with the golfer was a great honor. The golfer agreed and they played a full course. After the game the rich man wanted to express his gratitude to the golfer. The golfer expected a gift card to buy an expensive golf bag. When he opened the envelope from the rich man, there was a check with money enough to build a full size golf course. The golfer expected a golf bag, but the billionaire gave him a full size golf course. We expect from God based on our faith according to our need. But God answers us based on his love and his plan for our lives.

When Jesus was crucified on the cross and his disciples were scattered, people thought that the season of Christ was over. The story of Jesus seemed to end in tragedy. But, that was not the case. Jesus rose again from the dead and his kingdom would continue to expand and spread to the end of the earth. In Jesus there is nothing which will end in tragedy. All things may glorify God’s name, and all things may work for the good for those who love him. (Ro 8:28) When Paul was imprisoned in Rome, his enemies thought that Christianity will end with his imprisonment. But it was not true. In prison Paul wrote many letters to the saints which were composed of more than half volumes of the New Testament. God used Paul in prison more than he did during Paul’s missionary journey. What kind of attitude we should have when problems arise in us and among us? We must have the view of Jesus to see all things through God’s perspective. God wants us to see all things in view of Jesus and for God’s name sake and for his glory. Amen!

Third, so that you may believe (7-16) After two days passed, Jesus said to his disciples, “***Let us go back to Judea***.” (7) How did his disciples respond to Jesus’ words? “***But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back***?” (8) The disciples were afraid of going back to Judea because of the hostile Jews. They did not remember the sick Lazarus, but the angry Jews. Jesus answered them. Let us read verses 9,10. “***Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light***.” Jesus said similar words to his disciples right before he opened the eyes of the man born blind. “*As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world*.” (9:4,5) In these verses Jesus taught them two things: First, Jesus came as the light of the world. Second, Jesus would die soon so that they might be prepared. Jesus predicted his death so that his disciples might believe that his death was not a tragic victim by evil people, but glory by God’s deliberate plan. Later Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed in front of 3,000 people in Acts 2:23-24, “*This man (Jesus) was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him*.”

Look at verse 11. “***After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up***.” Jesus knew that Lazarus was dead. But he said that Lazarus was sleeping and that he would go to wake him up. Jesus saw death as sleep. To the eyes of Jesus, death is not a painful and horrible nightmare, but a sound and peaceful sleep for the happy morning. Indeed, to Christians death is a transitional process from this world to God’s kingdom and a turning point from temporary earthly life to eternal heavenly life. Did his disciples understand what Jesus meant? Look at verse 12. “***His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.”*** They did not understand it at all. Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. (13)

How did Jesus help them to understand his words? Look at verses 14-15. “***So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.***” Jesus meant that he would go to Lazarus not to wake him up from natural sleep, but to raise him from the dead. He did not go to Lazarus right after he heard the news because he wanted to help his disciples to believe. In order to help them to believe, Jesus disappointed many. Jesus disappointed the messenger and the two sisters. He disappointed many people who were waiting for his immediate visit. But Jesus delayed his visit for the sake of his disciples. Jesus wanted them to believe that sickness would not end in death, but it would be for God’s glory so that God’s Son might be glorified through it. We are often disappointed by the delay of God’s answer. We are disappointed when things do not go well as we expect. We lose heart when the tunnel of suffering and pain does not seem to end. But this is the hour for us to trust in God and believe in him. This is the hour for us to remember the word of Jesus. All our suffering and difficulties will not end in sorrow and tragedy. No, but it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through them. Amen!

Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “***Let us also go, that we may die with him.***” (16) We are not sure if Thomas really understood what Jesus meant and suggested others to follow him. Still, we credit his loyalty to Jesus. Let us read verse 4 all together.