

Life and Love

John 11

The seventh sign which the apostle John recorded for us in his gospel is clearly the most powerful. In fact, as you examine the 'trend' of the signs John picked to nurture our faith, they lead us up a spiritual mountain and with this chapter we are nearing the summit. Each sign has stretched our hearts to embrace an increasingly impressive Savior. Like Abraham with his son Isaac ascending Mt. Moriah, we can sense the approaching lesson, the impending decision point. We are being guided toward the apex of belief a step at a time.

A careful study of Genesis chapters one and two shows that the first statement God made to Adam dealt with death. (Gen 2:15-17) And, since Paul wrote, "*The last enemy that will be destroyed is death,*" like bookends, you can consider it as the first and last enemy of mankind. (See 1 Cor 15:26). We all must deal with death – our own and the death of those we love.

Thus, as we make the trek up this spiritual mount so to speak, the panoramic vista is not revealed until we reach the top. There, the breath-taking scene is revealed -- the ultimate plan and purposes of God. Unless you take these next steps of faith concerning life and love, your faith will be frail. Whether 'the hike' has left you hopeful or heavy of heart, hang in there. This sign will usher you in to a whole new perspective.

*Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom **You love** is sick."*

When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

The first thing John wanted us to understand is that there was a wonderful, personal, even intimate and worshipful relationship between this little trio and Jesus. In fact, it is emphasized that Jesus loved Lazarus. Their words and conduct lead us to assume that the siblings loved Christ as well, but the critical point that John, by the Spirit, communicated was Jesus' love. This is vital to keep in view, for we often tend to think that God responds to us, to our need, to our plight because we love Him and that isn't so. God loves you. His response to your pleas is not based upon the condition of your sometimes wayward heart. It is based upon His relentless, compelling love for you and His Son. It is a love that doesn't change. It is vast and never ending.

The Lord's message, likely carried back to the family, spoke of God the Father and God the Son being glorified through the circumstance. Specifically, He said that His beloved friend's illness would not end in death. What a difficult thing it must have been for Mary and Martha to hear that and yet witness their brother's dying and being

entombed. Can you relate to that? Have you ever felt let down by the Lord based upon something you thought you understood from His Word or that you thought you received in prayer?

*Now **Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."***

Now, lest you think, after those first verses, that Jesus loved Lazarus and Mary, since she was known for her worship of the Lord, but less so Martha, the Spirit turned around the order and clarified that Jesus truly loved Martha (and, oh, her sister too). This is to dispel the notion that God only loves the 'spiritual' folks, the really worshipful ones. Lazarus was the one in need, Mary was the spiritual celebrity of sorts and Martha, well she was just there to serve. She expressed her love differently than Mary and perhaps the intensity of spiritual matters was a bit much for her. Nevertheless, John emphasized that Jesus loved her. So too, those of you who relate to Martha.

Also, notice that little "So" (or "Therefore" depending on your translation) following the declaration of His love for them. In other words, what He did, He did because He loved them. He stayed two days before making His return. Now, we know that He could have spoken the word and Lazarus would have been healed or even raised up. The trek back to Bethany wasn't necessary for His friend's health. But it all was

necessary for a far more consequential purpose – their faith.

Limited by His earthly body, His return came when the man had been in the tomb for four days. Although it is not our main lesson, I suggest that this whole story is prophetically picturesque as well. We realize from 2Pet 3:8 that a prophetic day represents a 1000 years. Thus, Jesus waiting to return to Bethany (which means House of Misery) for two days could picture Christ waiting two thousand years to return to our miserable planet earth in order to save and resurrect His people. The four days could picture the four thousand years it's been since the calling forth of Abraham and the beginning of the Jewish people until now. And interestingly enough, Lazarus the name means "helped by God", whereas both Mary and Martha's names are rooted in the word for "rebellious" or "rebellion". Remember, this is a word picture and has nothing to do with the specific people. This may be significant in light of Zech 13:7-9 which, referring to the Jewish people in the last days, says,

Then I will turn My hand against the little ones.

And it shall come to pass in all the land,"

Says the LORD,

"That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, (the rebellious)

But one-third shall be left in it: I will bring the one-third through the fire, (those 'helped by God')

Will refine them as silver is refined,

And test them as gold is tested.

They will call on My name, And I will answer them.

*I will say, "This is My people";
And each one will say, "The
LORD is my God."*

It may also be significant that Jesus will say next, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him." If indeed Lazarus represents, as his name indicates, the remnant of the Jewish people whom God helps during the tribulation, the following verses which clearly pertain to that time are in line with this prophetic picture:

*Your dead shall live; (the remnant who will be saved)
Together with my dead body
(Jesus) they shall arise.
Awake and sing, you who dwell
in dust;
For your dew is like the dew of
herbs,
And the earth shall cast out the
dead.*

*Come, my people, enter your
chambers, (in the wilderness during
the tribulation?)*

*And shut your doors behind
you;
Hide yourself, as it were, for a
little moment,
Until the indignation is past.
For behold, the LORD comes
out of His place*

*To punish the inhabitants of the
earth for their iniquity;*

*The earth will also disclose her
blood,*

*And will no more cover her
slain.*

Isaiah 26:19-21

*Awake, awake!
Put on your strength, O Zion;
Put on your beautiful garments,
(robes of righteousness?)
O Jerusalem, the holy city!*

*For the uncircumcised and the
unclean
Shall no longer come to you.
Isaiah 52:1*

*At that time Michael shall stand
up,*

*The great prince who stands
watch over the sons of your people;*

*And there shall be a time of
trouble, (Jacob's Trouble – the
tribulation)*

*Such as never was since there
was a nation,
Even to that time.*

*And at that time your people
(the Jewish remnant) shall be
delivered,*

*Every one who is found written
in the book.*

*And many of those who sleep in
the dust of the earth shall awake,
Dan 12:1,2*

Be that as it may, Jesus waited because He loved them. Likewise, God will wait until the time is right concerning you and I as well. Not because He doesn't care but just the opposite, because He does. If Jesus had responded immediately as the sisters (and Lazarus!) desired, the healing would have taken place and yet the far greater miracle would have been missed. And as a result, the people's belief in Jesus as the Christ would have been static and less potent.

*The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi,
lately the Jews sought to stone You,
and are You going there again?"*

*Jesus answered, "Are there not
twelve hours in the day? If anyone
walks in the day, he does not
stumble, because he sees the light
of this world. But if one walks in the
night, he stumbles, because the*

*light is not in him." These things He
said, and after that He said to them,
"Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go
that I may wake him up."*

*Then His disciples said, "Lord, if
he sleeps he will get well." However,
Jesus spoke of his death, but they
thought that He was speaking about
taking rest in sleep.*

*Then Jesus said to them plainly,
"Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for
your sakes that I was not there, that
you may believe. Nevertheless let
us go to him."*

This last verse grabs me. He said that He was glad He wasn't there so that they would believe. Believe what? Again, we are reminded that John has presented this specifically to help us to believe that Jesus is the Christ (See John 20:30,31).

However, they had already confessed that they believed He was the Messiah back in chapter Six when Peter said, "You alone have the words of life." But, as with Martha in the coming verses, I suggest that their faith in Christ was not yet full. Likewise, our faith in Christ grows; we often believe in a Christ Who first changes our direction in life, Who then provides for us, Who heals our maladies and does miracles, Who teaches and comforts us, Who leads us in our pilgrimage and then Who ultimately goes with us through the valley of the shadow of death and resurrects us to eternal life.

*Then Thomas, who is called the
Twin, said to his fellow disciples,
"Let us also go, that we may die with
Him."*

You gotta love Thomas. Church history indicates that he may have been called the Twin because he so

closely resembled Jesus. In any case, he was willing to die with the Lord. Perhaps this was why he was bitterly defiant in accepting the resurrection, feeling shunned and left out when Jesus at first appeared to everyone else but him. Perhaps he felt like his love was unreciprocated. Ever feel that way? Like Thomas, when we do, we need to consider His scars.

*So when Jesus came, He found
that he had already been in the
tomb four days. Now Bethany was
near Jerusalem, about two miles
away. And many of the Jews had
joined the women around Martha
and Mary, to comfort them
concerning their brother.*

*Now Martha, as soon as she
heard that Jesus was coming, went
and met Him, but Mary was sitting
in the house. Now Martha said to
Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here,
my brother would not have died. But
even now I know that whatever You
ask of God, God will give You."*

*Jesus said to her, "Your brother
will rise again."*

*Martha said to Him, "I know that
he will rise again in the resurrection
at the last day."*

*Jesus said to her, "I am the
resurrection and the life. He who
believes in Me, though he may die,
he shall live. And whoever lives and
believes in Me shall never die. Do
you believe this?"*

*She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I
believe that You are the Christ, the
Son of God, who is to come into the
world."*

Notice how she skirted the answer? Now, she was grieving and perhaps deeply disappointed in Jesus. The Lord had said her

brother wouldn't die and yet ... he died. She called for His help and He had seemed to turn a cold shoulder. She wanted to believe. She gave Him the best answer she could at the time. Perhaps, "the Christ, the Son of God" meant to her an anointed teacher or healer or great leader, someone with influence in the heavenlies. This was what it meant to the disciples at this point. Yet, Jesus wanted her to believe something far more powerful; He wanted her and His disciples to believe a pinnacle principle of Christian faith – *"I am the resurrection and the life."* Notice that this potent faith is in the person of Jesus and that it is in the present tense – not something He was or will be but something He is forever.

And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you." As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there."

Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

Mary's statement, echoing Martha's, was true. That's exactly why He'd waited. But she didn't understand that yet any more than her sister. Martha probably used

the name "Rabbi" when she said "the Teacher". In any case, that description is a long ways from what we should think of when we hear the title, Son of God. Whether or not she ever held a more noble concept of Jesus, at this point He was just a Teacher.

The bitterness of disappointment can do that to our concept of the Lord. We may publicly confess that we think of Him as "the Christ, the Son of God" and yet privately consider Him "the Teacher". Indeed, Jesus was the Teacher but He was/is far, far more.

Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?"

They said to Him, "Lord, come and see."

*Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how **He loved him!**"*

Many have proposed reasons for Christ's tears here. The wording though points back to His seeing Mary weeping as well as those with her. What this tells me is that despite His divine power and foreknowledge, Jesus and God the Father completely know and even share our sadness. The Greeks thought of divinity as being stoic, that is, unfeeling. However, Jesus, seeing the sorrow of His dearly loved friend wept with her. (See Romans 12:15) As He walks with us through the deepest, darkest times of our lives, He's not there 'in name only' but rather as a participant, One Who knows the way because He's traveled it before and now along with you.

And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

Fundamentally, this expression, "groaning in Himself" means to be moved with anger. Was He angry at their lack of faith? Perhaps. Martha still didn't get it. No one present got it. They simply DIDN'T know who Jesus really is. And so, this was to be a wake up call for everyone including Lazarus.

Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

Like Mary and Martha, the death of a loved one can sorely test our faith in Christ. We can allow our grief to relegate Him to the role of the 'Someday Savior' – because we don't understand His ways. The

whole situation then stinks and whether like Mary we fall weeping at His feet or like Martha simply run away from the spiritual intensity, our feeble perception of Christ is wrongly based upon our seeing Him as late or missing or utterly disappointing. Meanwhile, He weeps with us.

Like Lazarus, we have all been wrapped in the grave clothes of sin and doubt. But Jesus loves us. Coming forth from the tomb in response the call of Christ is a wonderful picture of salvation. But even in such a state – new life – we need to be 'unwrapped' and Jesus gives that job to those who love us.

Like everyone in the story, Jesus wants us to know, to truly know, that He is the Resurrection and the Life. It's not just someday in the 'sweet bye and bye'. It's in Him and it's now – life and love.

Climbing this pilgrimage trail, the dark horizon that has drawn your attention downward suddenly gives way as you reach the summit. There, the splendor and magnificence of the heavenly view lifts your tired, broken heart into excitement, cascading joy, a perfect peace. You are filled with astonishment at Who this Man really is. 'What was I thinking??' your heart sings and laughs. He is so much more than I ever thought. And He's led me here because He loves me. How difficult the journey can be, but it is truly unworthy to be compared to what awaits us who love Him. Now, I know God sent You. Hallelujah!