Beyond the Pulpit

RESOURCES FOR CONTINUED STUDY

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN *Presbyterian Church*

The Mysterious Love of Jesus — *November 8, 2026*

In John 11:1–16, divine purpose challenges how we encounter suffering and death. When news arrives of Lazarus' grave illness, Jesus allows his friend to die in order to reveal his glory by breaking death's grip (v. 4). Christ expresses the highest form of love by displaying his glory to his followers because he knows that's what they need most of all. In his dissertation *The End For Which God Created The World,* Jonathan Edwards emphasizes this point: "*It is a thing infinitely good in itself, that God's glory should be known by a glorious society of created beings. This knowledge is one of the highest, most real, and substantial parts of all created existence.*"[1] The central truth of this passage highlights **the mysterious love of Jesus:** a love that often delays when invited, yet always walks confidently toward death to unveil God's glory.

1. The mysterious love of Jesus often delays when invited. (vv. 1-6)

One common manifestation of Christ's mysterious love is that it often delays when invited. Despite loving Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, Jesus intentionally remains where he is for two more days instead of rushing to Bethany. To human eyes, an unhurried response to a crisis feels indifferent, but as Gerald Borchert explains, "*Humans generally interpret any delay in rendering help as cruel because of our perspectives on the avoidance of all pain and because of our general commitment to the immediacy of action as it pertains to time. But cruelty is hardly what this story is about.*"[2] Jesus permits Lazarus to die in order to display the glory of God and his own glory so that the faith of his friends and the disciples would grow.

READ John 2:4, 7:3-9

DISCUSS In verses 5–6, John notes that Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, and therefore stayed two days longer where he was. Humanly speaking, delay looks like indifference or cruelty. What pattern do we see in how Jesus responds to personal pressure from loved ones in the other passages? On what basis does he make his decisions?

READ Job 38:1-7, 42:1-6; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

DISCUSS The most important way that Jesus loves us is by showing himself to us, by letting us see his glory. When Job experienced catastrophic loss and suffering, how did God comfort him in Job 38–42? Did God explain why he suffered, or did he reveal something else?

READ John 9:3; John 1:4-5

DISCUSS How is Jesus' reply in verse 4 comparable to John 9:3 in the account of the healing of the blind man? How do the overarching themes of "light" and "life" shine through both of these accounts, even amidst darkness and physical suffering?

2. The mysterious love of Jesus always walks confidently toward death. (vv. 7-16)

When Jesus resolves to return to Judea, the disciples object, fearing the hostility of the religious authorities. Jesus reassures them that walking in the Father's will is like walking in the light of day, where one does not stumble (v. 9). He then informs them that Lazarus has fallen asleep and that he is going to awaken him, but the disciples mistake physical sleep for natural recovery. According to one commentator, by using this metaphor, Jesus reframes their understanding of death: *"Why does Jesus call death 'sleep'? He's showing them a distinctly different perspective on death. They fear death. They see death as the ultimate winner. It's why they don't want to go to Judea. Jesus sees death much*

[1]Jonathan Edwards. *The End For Which God Created The World.* 1765, Boston. Printed and sold by S. Kneeland. 21
[2]Gerald L. Borchert. *John 1–11, vol. 25A,The New American Commentary.* 1996, Nashville. Broadman & Holman Publishers. 351
[3]Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg. *Exalting Jesus in John.* 2017, Nashville, TN. Holman Reference. 228–29.
[4]St. Helens Bishopgate. *Read, Mark, Learn: John.* 2013, London. Christian Focus. 129

SANCTUARY
Aaron Tolson
FELLOWSHIP HALL
Brian Salter
SERMON SERIES
The Gospel of John
PASSAGE
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differently. Death is no worse than sleep, and there's no reason to fear sleep."[3] Speaking plainly, Jesus reveals that Lazarus has died, adding, *"for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe"* (v. 15). Christ willingly steps into the darkness of bereavement and threat out of obedience and love. Even as Thomas calls the group to follow him so *"that we may die with him"* (v. 16), Jesus confidently leads the way toward Bethany—demonstrating that, *"The glory of God is revealed in his dealing with the greatest problem facing the human race–death."*[4]

NOTES

READ Luke 8:52–55; Psalm 23:4

DISCUSS Why does Jesus describe death as "sleep" to his disciples? How does his perspective on death differ radically from the disciples' fear of it?

READ Hebrews 11:1; Mark 9:23–24

DISCUSS In verse 15, Jesus tells his disciples, who already left everything to follow him, that he is glad he was not there *"so that you may believe."* What is the difference between static, initial faith and a growing, tested faith? How has God used a confusing or painful trial in your life to expand your trust in him?

READ Isaiah 25:7–9; Ezekiel 37:12–14; Daniel 12:2

DISCUSS Ever since the Fall in Genesis 3, humanity has lived under the shadow of physical and spiritual death. How does Jesus expand on the OT belief of the resurrection in today's passage?

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

Holy Sonnets: Death, be not proud

By John Donne

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

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