

The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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Do Not Give Up! God Knows what He is Doing! (Part 1) (John 11:1-44)

In John 11, we discover some of the most glorious truths in Scripture. We see the Saviour showing that death is no match for Him. We see His tenderhearted devotion to those in distress—Mary and Martha. We see the great faith that Mary and Martha had in believing that Christ could have healed Lazarus. We also see revealed the great confession of Martha about the future resurrection. There are many other truths that are found in this chapter, but none of these would have been known, if God would have responded to the first request of Mary and Martha.

It is not easy to have our prayers answered with a “No,” or with delay. But that is what happened to Mary and Martha. So often we think that something is wrong or that God is not listening to us when our request is not immediately answered. For sure, we need to examine our lives and make sure that we have no unconfessed sin, but God does not always respond immediately to our requests. His delay does not mean that He has not heard, nor does it mean that He does not care. There are several instances in Scripture where God does not work at the time nor in the manner in which the person thinks that God will. Some examples would include Abraham and the birth of Isaac—God promised a seed through Abraham and Sarah, but they became impatient and tried to fashion their own way to help out God. It resulted in trouble—trouble that remains even today. Think of Joseph—God had revealed that he would rule his brethren. For revealing the dreams, he was sold into slavery. At the end, although he may not have understood every detail about all that he went through, he said, “Ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good” (Genesis 50:20). He did not turn his back on God because he knew that God was in control. Several other examples would include

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Moses, David, and Paul.

In fact, Paul reminds us in Romans 8:28, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.” All things may not seem good at the moment, but if we keep our eyes on God, He will work them out for our good and His glory. In John 11, we find this reality displayed in vivid detail.

Before we delve into the message, I want to cover three important subjects by way of introduction. In John 11, a miracle is performed, an I AM statement is given, and a resurrection takes place. This is the seventh and final miracle that Jesus performs prior to His crucifixion. John records fewer miracles than the other Gospel writers, but in accordance with inspiration, he has a reason for doing so. John’s theme is the deity of Christ. As the ministry of Christ unfolds, each miracle is recorded both to put forth and to remind the reader that the man in this book is not simply a man—He is God in human flesh. John could have recorded a multitude of miracles (and says so in 20:30-31), but the Holy Spirit guided him to record these seven: 1. The changing of the water to wine (2:1-11); 2. The healing of the nobleman’s son (4:46-54); 3. The healing of the lame man at Bethesda (5:1-27); 4. The feeding of the multitude (6:1-14); 5. Walking on the water (6:15-21); 6. The healing of the blind man (9:1-41); and 7. The raising of Lazarus (11:1-46). These miracles, though only a small record of all that Jesus did, prove that He is indeed God in human flesh. He had control over physical infirmities, He had control over nature, and He had control over death. John, inspired of the Holy Ghost, proves that Jesus is God through the miracles that He performed.

There is another way in which John proved that Jesus is God—through His words. Seven times Jesus declared Himself to be God in a unique way. The Jews knew what He was doing and often became angry—angry enough to stone Him in John 10:31-33. Jesus used two words—three letters in English. Those words let everyone around Him know that He was declaring Himself to be God. He said,

“I AM.” Those words took the Jews back to the burning bush where God revealed to Moses His personal name—I AM THAT I AM. We see it translated sometimes as Jehovah or Yahweh. This is God’s name, and the Jews knew that when Jesus said I AM, He was claiming to be God. They did not want to accept Him as God or the Messiah, and they hated Him for saying that He was God. Seven times Jesus would say I AM and add a phrase to it. Here are the seven I AM statements: 1. I am the bread of life (6:35); 2. I am the light of the world (8:12); 3. I am the door (10:9); 4. I am the good shepherd (10:11); 5. I am the resurrection and the life (11:25); 6. I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6); and 7. I am the vine (15:5). These statements declare Jesus to be God and the only way of salvation. They also prove Him to be sufficient for our salvation and our daily walk with Him.

One other category that needs to be mentioned is the resurrection. There are five resurrections that precede this one and two that follow. Three resurrections are recorded in the Old Testament: 1. The raising of the widow’s son by Elijah (I Kings 17:17-24); 2. The raising of the Shunammite’s son by Elisha (II Kings 4:18-37); and 3. The soldier brought to life upon touching Elisha’s bones (II Kings 13:21). Christ brought two other people back to life: 1. Jairus’ daughter (Matthew 9:18-26); and 2. The son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-18). Peter and Paul also had power to raise the dead: Peter raised Tabitha in Acts 9:40, and Paul restored Eutychus to life in Acts 20:10. These miracles prove that God is the giver, sustainer, and restorer of life.

Now we turn our attention to the raising of Lazarus and what it means to us. There are many things that we can learn from this passage, but one thing in particular the Lord brought to my mind. We must remember—DO NOT GIVE UP! GOD KNOWS WHAT HE IS DOING! So many times we feel burdened to do a particular task for the Lord, but when everything does not work out like we think it should, we quit and say that we must have been wrong, and the Lord wants us to move on. This happens too many times in churches where the pastor gets discouraged when God does not work as fast as they think that He should. They leave and miss out on God’s blessings.

Missionaries, whether foreign or stateside, face the same struggle. The church is not growing as fast as they would like, or the people are not as open, or whatever the reason may be. The missionary-church planter gets discouraged, packs it in, and heads back home—missing out on God’s blessing. The evangelist gets discouraged when he is not booked up and leaves the field of evangelism and misses out on being a blessing to churches and seeing people get saved.

People pray, and God does not respond immediately to their request. They get discouraged, quit praying, and quit going to church. On and on the examples could go, but the basic thought is that God did not respond when you thought that He should. One thing that we must remember—GOD KNOWS WHAT HE IS DOING! We may not understand it now, and may not understand until we get to heaven, but we must be like Joseph and trust in God. Some may mean evil to us, but God will work it for our good. We may not get an immediate response, but God knows what is best for us! We must surrender our lives, our desires, our wills, everything that we are and have, to God’s will. We should pray, but if God delays His response, we must never give up! He wants what is best for us. We must be willing to surrender our lives to Him. He knows what He is doing! He will work it out for His glory. Let Him do what is best!

In pondering the reality that God knows what He is doing, we will consider four thoughts: I. The Problems of the Saints; II. The Purposes for the Situation; III. The People in their Struggle; and IV. The Performance of the Savior. We begin with **The Problems of the Saints**.

Salvation did not eliminate problems in our lives. The problem of sin and the resulting eternal punishment was eliminated, but we will still face problems in our lives. Mary and Martha had communed with Jesus many times during His earthly ministry. He had been to their house many times, but that did not eliminate all problems for them. Notice that problems manifested themselves in The Distress of the Saints. Verse 1 says that Lazarus was sick. Verse 3 says that they sent word to Jesus because of Lazarus’ sickness. Distress means to

cause sorrow, misery, or suffering to; pain; trouble; to exhaust or weaken with strain of any sort. The family had a big problem: one was sick; the others were caring for him and concerned about him. The distress was not because Jesus did not care for them. They plainly say, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." Jesus cared for these three people, perhaps more than anyone else that He had dealt with in His ministry. Some might get upset with that statement, but of no other family is it said, "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." You may be distressed, but it is not because Jesus does not love you. He does love you. He knows what He is doing! He has something bigger in mind than what you can comprehend. Do not worry! Do not complain! Let Him work.

Another problem of the saints was The Delay of the Savior. Based upon verse 18, Jesus was in Jerusalem about fifteen furlongs off, or about two miles. In thirty minutes, He could have been with Mary and Martha, but He waited two days before going to them. Why? He had something else in mind. God is close to you. He can hear your plea. He knows your prayer. But He does respond immediately because He has another plan. It is not because He does not love you, and it is not because He is too far away. He does love you and He is always near. But He has a better plan in mind and wants to do something greater than what you are asking. Do not give up! God knows what He is doing! We will continue next month.

(Please go to our February 2008 Newsletter to see the completion of this sermon.)