

September 18th, 2016

I AM GLAD THAT LAZARUS DIED

John 11:1-16

The most ultimate reality that ever has been, and ever will be is the glory of God. The greatness of God, the excellency of His Person, the all-surpassing value of His character, the blinding light of His white hot holiness is the ultimate reason why everything exists.

Numberless galaxies were created to display the glory of God's power (Psalm 19:1). The world was spoken into existence so that human beings could see that every molecule, every mountain, every nursing mother, indeed the whole earth is full of His glory (Isaiah 6:3). The wicked are sent to hell to demonstrate the glory of God's righteousness against sin (Romans 9:22). The redeemed are brought to heaven in order to showcase the glory of God's mercy for ruined sinners (Romans 9:23). Everything that God plans, purposes, and brings to pass terminates on the display of His infinite worth. **There is no deeper motive in the heart of God for everything that He does than the glory of God.**

Our passage this morning puts this on display in a shocking way. I want to offer two very disturbing truths that I believe this passage undeniably teaches.

Truth 1: Jesus *purposely* breaks the hearts of His people to bring Himself glory.

Truth 2: Jesus does this with a glad heart.

The reason why these truths are disturbing to us, is because they challenge the way that we think about love. We start with a wrong definition of what love is. We think that we are loved when when we are made much of. We think that we are loved when we are praised, when we are made the center, when all the planets of our galaxy revolve around us. If you praise me, and tell me how great

I am, I will feel loved by you. This is how the world operates. Love to me, is making much of me.

Jesus is going to let Lazarus die in this passage to destroy this paradigm. Not because He doesn't love Lazarus. Not because He doesn't love Martha and Mary. In fact, we are going to see Jesus weep over Lazarus death (v.35), and the Jews see this and respond "See how he loved him! Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?" (v.36-37) Yes. But less glory would have been seen. Less glory would have been savored. And therefore less love would have been communicated. Jesus is going to let Lazarus die *because* He loves him. v.4 "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Being made to see and savor the glory of God is the highest way that Jesus loves us.

If we can get this truth, all our sufferings, all our heartaches, all our sicknesses, all the deaths of our loved ones, all the betrayals that we will face, will ultimately and finally be seen as some of God's greatest gifts in our lives.¹

The Big Idea...

Jesus will do whatever it takes for us to see His glory and this is the chief way
He loves us

☆ The Loving Glory of Jesus (v.1-6)

☆ The Fearful Unbelief of Man (v.7-16)

¹ As the Apostle Paul said "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Romans 8:18)

I. The Loving Glory of Jesus

A certain man named Lazarus

v.1-2 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.

Unlike the others whom Jesus healed in the gospel of John, we are told this man's name: Lazarus. We weren't given the name of the woman of Samaria (ch. 4); the invalid (ch. 5); the woman caught in adultery (ch.8); or the man born blind (ch. 9). But we are told Lazarus' name. Why? Because, our author is pressing on us that Jesus had personal, intimate relationship with him. And Jesus had personal, intimate relationship with his sisters—Martha and Mary. Jesus visited their house frequently (Luke 10:38-42; John 12:1-8). It was this Mary whom we will see pour out an extravagant and expensive ointment on Jesus in John 12.

We can't let these details pass us by. Jesus knew this family intimately. He loved them. They supported Jesus financially with their own means. They were not on the outside looking in. They were on the inside. Jesus ate with them, laughed with them, ministered to them. If they had children, Jesus would have held them in His own arms, and kissed them with His own lips. This family felt first hand the care and compassion of Christ.² And now Lazarus is ill. Deathly ill.

“He whom you love is ill”

v.3 So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”

² Beloved, if you are in Christ, this is your relationship with Jesus. He's brought you into His fold. You don't know Him merely as some historical figure, but as your Savior and friend.

Martha and Mary lived in Bethany with was over 90 miles south of where Jesus was beyond the Jordan (10:40).³ It was a four day journey to travel to where Jesus was. The sisters, unwilling to leave their sick brother, sent messengers to Jesus. And the message they send is simply “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”

This is all that is recorded. They probably said more, but this statement is the most important part. Our author is making it painstakingly clear that Jesus doesn't simply have a generic creational love for Lazarus, but a special, eternal, electing love. On this ground, is an implicit plead for Jesus to come and heal him. What are Martha and Mary doing? They're pleading. They're praying. “Lord come and heal our brother.”

And the tension here is palpable. If John 11 had been inserted earlier in this gospel, we might completely miss it. Up to this point, Jesus has been healing complete strangers. Men and women whom He just “happened” to be walking by. But Lazarus was not a stranger. He was one whom Jesus loved. This is the setup. Severe suffering in the context of deep abiding omnipotent love. Those are the first two strands of our story: suffering and love. Now Jesus responds with our third strand: glory.

This illness...is for the glory of God

v.4 **But** when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

This illness is *for* something. This broken-hearted suffering is not meaningless. It has a universal everlasting significance. This illness is for the glory of God.

When Jesus uses the word “glory” here, he doesn't primarily mean that God will be honored. God will be honored. But that is not Jesus' primary meaning. When Jesus says that this illness is for God's glory, He means that God's majesty and worth will be revealed, uncovered, unveiled. And it will be

³ See D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), pg. 405-408 for the location of where Jesus was at this point.

revealed *through* Jesus Christ the Son. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and *we have seen his glory*, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1, 14) Jesus invaded planet earth, *mainly*, so that we could see the greatness of the glory of God. **That is the biggest category in Jesus’ mind at this point, namely, the display of His great glory.** And every event under the sun, will ultimately serve that same purpose.

‘Lazarus you are on your death bed so that I can be seen to be marvelous beyond your imagination. Martha, Mary, you are crying yourselves empty, so that God can be seen to be exceedingly great.’

At this point, maybe some of you are scratching your heads. How does seeing God’s glory square with God loving us? Because remember, Jesus gives this answer to the messengers to give them *comfort* and *assurance*. But how is Jesus being glorified good news for suffering believers? Let’s press on.

I love you...therefore I’m letting Lazarus die

v.5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

Let’s pause. How should the next verse read? Jesus loved this family. Lazarus is deathly sick. He holds the universe in His hand and can heal anyone with just clay and spit (John 9:6-7), or by simply speaking the word (Luke 17:7). Since Jesus loves this family, what should v.6 say? It should say that Jesus went to Bethany and healed the man. Isn’t that what you or I would do? If our friend lay sick in the hospital and we had the antidote, would we not go and heal our friend whom we loved? Of course we would. And why we we do that? Because our love compels us to. But that is not what v.6 says. Let me read them together.

v.5-6 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. **So**, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Now if you have an older version of the NIV, v.6 reads “Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two more days.” Oh the difference between “so” and “yet.” The word in the Greek is οὖν *oun*. οὖν indicates a truth that necessarily follows from the previous truth.⁴ οὖν is often translated in our Bibles as “therefore.” As we see Jesus say in Matthew 6:33-34

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. **Therefore** (οὖν) do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Christ promises that when we seek His kingdom first, He will provide all the things that He deems we need for life and salvation. **Therefore** (οὖν) don't be anxious. “Don't be anxious” *follows* from the assurance that Christ will provide.

That's what we see in v.6. Jesus loves Martha and Mary and Lazarus, **therefore** (or so) He didn't go to heal Lazarus, He stayed two days longer. If we accept the older NIV word “yet”, it overthrows the whole meaning of this passage. “Yet” communicates “however” or “in spite of.” In other words, Jesus loved them, *but in spite of His love* for them, He stayed where He was.⁵ Meaning, Jesus' love for them wasn't the reason why He stayed. But this divorces seeing the glory of Christ from being loved by Christ. Oh how tragic. Fortunately, the NIV in 2011 changed this back to “so.”

But this is where our story seems to take a turn into the bizarre. **v.6 means that Jesus intentionally delayed for two days and let Lazarus die because He loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.** How does this follow? To answer this, we must connect the truth of v.4 with the truth of v.5-6.

Truth of v.4: The illness was for God's glory (specifically to glorify the Son)

⁴ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?page=8&strongs=G3767&t=NASB#lexResults>

⁵ The 1984 version of the NIV translates οὖν as “yet”, which completely changes the entire passage! This translations divorces the display of God's glory as the ultimate way that Jesus loves us, which is the biggest point of this passage. Consequently the latest version of the NIV (2011) changed the “yet” to “so.”

Truth of v.5-6: Jesus let Lazarus remain ill *because* of His love for him and his sisters.

When we put these two truths together, a third universe defining truth arises, namely: **Seeing the maximum amount of the glory of Jesus *is the way that Jesus loves us.*** The ultimate way that Jesus loves His people is by doing whatever it takes, including allowing us to go through heart breaking suffering, in order to see His glory.

The connection between God loving us and God showing us His glory is inseparable. The way that God loves us chiefly is by displaying to our souls the greatest display of the glory of Jesus Christ. God's loving us *is* showing us His glory. But we naturally do not believe this, just as His disciples did not believe it.

II. The Fearful Unbelief of Man

Too scared to see glory

v.7-8 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?"

The disciples were terrified at the prospect of returning to Judea. They had good reason to be. Jesus was almost murdered in the street, and if Jesus was in danger so were they. But let us remember, these were not generic men. They had names: Peter, and James and John (etc.) They had families. Jesus was asking them to put their lives on the line. It wouldn't be much different if Jesus asked you to walk openly with Him in the streets of Somalia. There the al-Shabab terrorist group, (who merged with al-Qaida in 2012) will execute known converts or any found with Christian literature.⁶ Voice of the Martyr's reports On September 25th 2011, al-Shabab entered into a known Christian family's

⁶ <https://www.persecution.com/public/prayermap.aspx?clickfrom=%3d6d61696e5f6d656e75>

house when the parents went off to work in the morning. Inside was 17-year old Guled Jama Muktar, who was preparing for school. The neighbors reported that they heard screaming, and then suddenly it stopped. Guled Jama Muktar was beheaded. Why? Because the Muktar family held secret Bible meetings in their house. Guled was a Christian.⁷

Yes the disciples were afraid. But oh American Christians need to wake up. We are not threatened with death (yet) but we are often reluctant to share the gospel with our neighbor or our family members because we are afraid that they won't like us anymore. How much more fearful are we, than these disciples?

This is how Jesus meets their fear.

Jesus' first answer: 'Follow Me if you want to see glory'

v.9-10 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 anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

Jesus is saying 'The time of darkness when I will go to the cross is not here yet. I still have work to do in the light. My life is not theirs to take, I will lay it down when it is time.' "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." (John 10:18)

But Jesus is also applying this to his disciples and us. He is the light of the world. If we are walking in the light of His glory, we will never stumble! Guled Jama Muktar did not stumble when He was beheaded.

Unbelieving friend, there is something to fear far worse than being beheaded. Entering into eternity without ever tasting and seeing the glory of Christ. If you have not been born again, you are walking in the darkness. You're stumbling to your death. And there is a day coming very soon when you stand before King Jesus and your eternal fate will be irrevocably sealed. The book of John was written so that you would believe the gospel and be saved. "...

⁷ https://www.persecution.com/public/newsroom.aspx?story_ID=%3d343339

these [things were] written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31) So believe, and live.

That’s Jesus’ first answer to the disciples’ fear. Follow me—the light of the world—if you want to see glory, and you will never stumble.

Jesus’ second answer: ‘I’m glad that Lazarus died’

v.11-15 After saying these things, he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.” The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

Jesus is now telling them, that the reason He wants to go back to Judea is because He is going to raise Lazarus from the dead. That’s how Lazarus’ illness and death is for the glory of God. **Jesus is going to show the universe that He doesn’t just grant life, He is life itself.**

When Jesus goes to Bethany, Martha meets him, and Jesus tells her

“Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life.” John 11:23-25

Jesus is life. Jesus wants us to see this. He is life. That’s why Jesus says “Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.” Jesus was glad that Lazarus died. Not as an end itself. Jesus will weep over this. He’s going to shed tears over this and be deeply troubled in His spirit (v.33, 35). He enters into our grief. He is not a callous hearted Christ, but the most tender hearted man in the cosmos. But He is **glad** that Lazarus died, so that we could see glory and believe.

This is only one of two places that I know of in the gospels where it says that Jesus is glad.⁸ χαίρω (khī'-rō) in the Greek. It means to rejoice exceedingly. Lazarus is dead. The sisters are heart broken. The disciples are terrified. And Jesus is rejoicing. This is unbelievable. This is Christianity.

Why is Jesus rejoicing? Because what is about to happen is going to change eternal destinies for many. When Lazarus is raised from the dead at the end of this story, souls will awaken, some for the first time, others to deeper depths, to the reality that there is *no one* more excellent, more enjoyable, more soul-exhilarating than Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus is rejoicing because souls will see His great glory and believe. Look at v.15 again. "Lazarus has died, and *for your sake* I am glad that I was not there, *so that* you may **believe**. What has John taught us about belief in this gospel? John 6:35 "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." Believing in Christ means to have your soul satisfied in him as your body is satisfied with bread. It means to have your soul drink Him in as life-giving water and never be thirsty again.

This is how the first part of our passage connects with the last part. "This illness is for the glory of God (v.4)...so that you may believe (v.15)." In other words, 'this event is to display the all-surpassing worth of who I am such that when you see it, you are satisfied with Me, pleased with Me, that you admire me, that you find me as your supreme treasure.'

This is what salvation *is* MAINLY. Heaven will be glorious because we will have unobscured vision of the greatness of the Jesus Christ. Without this heaven would not be heaven. Eternal life is not the prize. Everyone is going to live for ever. Satan is going to live for ever. The reprobate will live forever. They will abide for ever in the lake of fire. Eternal life *in itself* is not the prize. Gaining Christ for eternity is the prize. "No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants

⁸ The other place is in Luke 10:21 "In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."

will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.” Revelation 22:3-5

Application

Our Doctrine: Jesus will do whatever it takes for us to see His glory and this is the chief way He loves us

This event wasn't birthed in a theological vacuum, divorced from tears and soul crushing pain. And neither are our lives. On Tuesday morning, I sat down at my desk put my head in my hands and wept. Sorrow almost weekly fills my soul. At least one or two days out of every week I just want to crawl under a rock and die. My reoccurring prayer is from Psalm 13:1-2 "How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?" I feel in my soul those two days when Jesus delayed going to Martha and Mary. We all do. If you haven't yet felt Jesus hiding his face from you, it's coming. For others, you've already felt it. Or feel it now.

What should we do? We need to adopt Jesus' definition of love. Jesus will do whatever it takes in our lives, including wounding us deeply, in order for us to see Him most clearly, and that's what love is. **Being loved by Jesus means that He gives us what we need most.**⁹ What do we need most? Healing in this life? Suffering-free living in this life? No. Otherwise our North Korean brothers and sisters who are looked up in concentration camps under the despotic rule of Kim Jong-il are not loved. **No, what we we need most is a soul transforming revelation of His glory.** When Jesus gives us that, we know that He loves us because when we see Him for who He is, He becomes our all-

⁹ <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/this-illness-is-for-the-glory-of-god>

satisfying treasure. **And when Jesus is willing to let us suffer in this life, to give us that, we know that we are deeply and infinitely loved by Him.** Suffering is not evidence that Jesus has abandoned us. **Suffering is evidence that we are deeply loved by Jesus.**¹⁰

When Martha and Mary get their brother back at the end of this story, they will feel the love of Christ. But not *mainly* because they got their brother back. No, they will feel the love of Christ more deeply, because Jesus used the death of their brother to bring them into a fuller knowledge and fuller enjoyment of Him.

Our Duty: Recognize that the glory of Christ is better than life itself

In our passage, after Jesus said “Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.” (v.15) Thomas, the twin said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” (v.16) I think it’s very difficult to understand what Thomas ultimately meant here, but it looks like courageous pessimism. He is encouraging his fellow disciples on to their duty, to obey Christ and to go; but he seems only to see defeat and death.

¹⁰ Paul says in Romans 5:2-5 “[2] Through him [Christ] we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and **we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.** [3] Not only that, but **we rejoice in our sufferings**, knowing that **suffering** produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces **hope**, [5] and hope does not put us to shame, because **God’s love** has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

Notice how Paul connects the three things we saw in our passage. Glory, suffering, and love. He says in v.2 that “we rejoice in **the hope of the glory of God.**” The deepest foundation of joy for the believer is the hope of seeing the supreme treasure that God *is*. v.3 “Not only that, but **we rejoice in our sufferings.**” Why? Because of what suffering produces. At the end of those chain of blessings in v. 4 is **hope**. Hope is the ultimate product of suffering. Suffering produces a greater hope in the heart of the believer. Hope for what? v.2—the **hope** of the glory of God. How is this good for us? Paul is writing this to encourage suffering Christians. So how is a greater hope for the glory of God an incentive to rejoice in suffering? Because v.5 “...hope does not put us to shame, because **God’s love** has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Do you see? Suffering produces hope for the glory of God, and this hope gives us the real sense and experience of God’s love.

But what this whole passage is trying to correct in us is the idea that there is something more valuable than experiencing a sight of Christ's glory. What is the most valuable thing you possess? Your life. But what does the Scripture say about your life and the glory of Christ? "Because **your steadfast love is better than life**, my lips will praise you." (Psalm 63:3) Your steadfast love is better than life! I understand the Psalmist to mean: 'If I don't experience the glory of your loyal-covenant keeping love, it is better that I cease to live. Jesus, life without the ability to admire and praise the greatness of you, is not worth living.' That's what this passage is teaching.

Our Delight: I AM glad that Jesus died

My title this morning was meant to shock us, because this passage is meant to shock us. Every word that Jesus speaks in this passage is meant to make us question what we believe about ultimate meaning in life. Jesus was glad in a sense, that Lazarus died so that His people would see His glory. And He is willing to do whatever it takes for that to happen, because that is what love is.

But Lazarus' death is insufficient for this end ultimately. Jesus' gladness over Lazarus' death is a faint shadow of the Father's gladness over Jesus' death. Isaiah 53:10 says "But the LORD was **pleased** To crush Him, putting Him to grief;"¹¹ Father was *pleased* to crush Christ. Father was *pleased* to put Him to grief. The accumulated sufferings of all peoples for all times is nothing compared to what the Father poured out upon Jesus on the cross. Lazarus suffered one death, Jesus suffered an infinite death. Martha and Mary felt the sting of Jesus delaying for two days. Jesus felt the sting of Father totally abandoning Him on the cross. And Father was *pleased* to make Jesus feel His wrath. God sent His only Son into the world to die. That was His good pleasure, so that law breaking ruined sinners like you and me could be redeemed. That's what love is. **Doing whatever it takes to give us what we**

¹¹ NASB

need most. What do we need most? God. Our souls will only live, will only be truly satisfied, if we experience Him and His great glory. That why Jesus died. 2 Peter 3:18 says “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, **that he might bring us to God,**”