

Jesus' Explanation in John 11: "The Beauty of God's intentions"

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 16 March 2015 12:00

In John 11 we have a remarkable 'anatomy' of why Jesus acted as He did. Below is the text and my comments; for our present purposes I will only comment on selected verses I wish to highlight. The full text is given up to verse 45 and the verses selected are shown in bold type.

In my humble opinion, what Jesus did here can also apply to all situations, not just sickness, etc., because Jesus is in control of every aspect of our lives and has power to overcome all obstacles and troubles. What we see is a beautiful explanation by Jesus of why He acted as He did, against all odds. I have no doubt He did it this way not just for the Jews at the time, but for all believers in every age.

1.

Now a certain [man] was sick, [named] Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.

2.

(It was [that] Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.)

3.

Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.

4.

When Jesus heard [that], he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

5.

Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.

6.

When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place

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where he was.

Comment:

Lazarus was ill. He and his family were known to Jesus, Who loved them all. Yet, His actions when He received news of Lazarus' sickness might seem odd. This would be so if Jesus was an ordinary man, but, He was and is God, so every breath He took was known to the Trinity, and everything He said and did was deliberate, precise, totally purposeful and true to His purposes. Mary and Martha were concerned enough to send for their friend, Jesus, because He was no ordinary friend – He performed miracles, healing people instantly. This was their hope – that He would come straight away to heal their brother.

Jesus immediately sent a message back. He told them that "This sickness is not unto death". Then, He added an interesting and amazing comment – that the sickness was allowed to progress to death "for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

Thus, Jesus had a divine plan, and it meant the death of Lazarus. The death was conclusive in human eyes. Lazarus, once dead, would never be seen alive again until he was resurrected at the end of time; his sisters knew that. But, there was more to the situation than they could ever know! In essence, Jesus took Lazarus 'to the wire' and beyond. He allowed His friend to die for a divine purpose, that God would be glorified in His Son. Can you take this, personally? What if the sister was you, seeking the power of the Lord and yet seemingly denied it... until He came forth with healing?

Of course, this can be *any* serious situation. It is likely that the awfulness of your situation is already in God's hands, and He is preparing you for an answer. But, on earth, you cannot yet see this answer, so you fret and worry. Please hold fast – Jesus will be glorified by whatever the outcome will be! And, if you remain calm and at peace, a faithful witness, He will reward you in your hour of need.

You will notice that Jesus loved Mary, Martha and their brother, Lazarus. He was not delaying His attendance for lack of love. But, He *was* delaying for His purpose, which must always be

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good. Many times, God will take us to the very brink of disaster, and sometimes even into disaster. Not because He lacks in love towards us, but because He DOES love us! His eternal will must be done, no matter how badly we might take it personally. We do not know His will at times, so we misinterpret it.

In spite of His love for the family, Jesus tarried two more days in the place He was staying. Yes, He COULD have come straight away. If He had, and had healed Lazarus of his sickness, it could easily be misconstrued as an 'ordinary' healing, because many people come close to death only to have a natural healing. And this is how people like to think of healing, even today. Also, many claim to heal or to be healed by God, when, all along, they are simply experiencing either a delusion, or a naturally-occurring respite. A true miracle is always 'other', from outside this world.

For example, we may only refer to a healing as 'miraculous' if it is of a condition that no man can cure, and this fact is known throughout medicine. Jesus was working beyond human medicine and human hopes, and that is why He stayed where He was for another two days. Lazarus was to die, by Jesus' will, so that a greater miraculous event could take place, that would obviously point to Jesus as Lord. The tears of the sisters was not an issue – something superior was to take place.

1.

Then after that saith he to [his] disciples, Let us go into Judaea again.

2.

[His] disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?

3.

Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.

4.

But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.

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5.

These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

6.

Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.

7.

Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.

8.

Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

9.

And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.

Comment:

After two days, and knowing Lazarus would die in human terms, Jesus said He and His disciples must go. They tried to dissuade Him because the Jews were turning violent, but when God decides, nothing can stop what He decides from happening. He told them that Lazarus was "asleep". "Sleepeth", *koimaō*, means either to die, or to literally go to sleep, but the meaning of 'to die' is used as a metaphor. The primary meaning is to literally sleep. It is also used spiritually by Jesus, for those who belong to Him are said to 'sleep' instead of die. His disciples, however, did not understand Him in this matter... they replied that if Lazarus was only asleep then he would soon get better.

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But, Jesus meant that Lazarus was dead, and so He plainly told them this. I hazard a strong guess that He used the word 'sleep' because, for a Christian, the physical death in this world is only a transition to Paradise, whereas for the unsaved, they die and wait in the grave until the day of their judgment.

Next, Jesus gave another explanation that has travelled down through time to this very day: He said He was **glad** not to be with Lazarus! Not because He did not love him, but "to the intent ye may believe"! This is a remarkable statement. He then added a note that implies that what was to follow was a divine playing-out of a far greater plan than to attend a funeral. "nevertheless let us go unto him". I can almost hear Jesus sigh because He knows He was working towards a complete miracle, and death was only something that was a part of that plan. This is again implied by His use of the word *exypnizō*, for 'sleep'. It means literally to awaken someone from sleep. How this must have confused the disciples! It was, then, His intention all along to create a miracle in Lazarus.

How often in our own lives does God allow us to go through awful times, so that we will remain faithful and then receive a reward from the Lord? But, how many fail such a trial and instead become depressed and frightened? Jesus is telling us: 'Hold on my dear friend! I know your plight and will help you shortly. Don't fret!' Of course, Jesus does not always give us what we desire, because it is not part of His plan. Even so, whatever the outcome it is perfect, even if our tears continue.

1.

Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellowdisciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.

2.

Then when Jesus came, he found that he had [lain] in the grave four days already.

3.

Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off:

4.

And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

Jesus' Explanation in John 11: "The Beauty of God's intentions"

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5.

Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat [still] in the house.

6.

Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

7.

But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give [it] thee.

8.

Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

Comment:

By the time Jesus finally arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days. To put it bluntly, Lazarus was well and truly dead and everyone knew it. In human terms, no-one expected anything from a dead man. Jesus was met by Martha, but Mary remained at home, grieving. Martha said that if Jesus had been there, her brother would not have died. She, like others in her village, thought only along human lines, even though she was talking to the Son of God. Jesus, however, does not think along human lines, except in understanding our weakness!

Though distressed by her brother's death, she acknowledged that whatever Jesus asked the Father to do, would be done. It is evident, though, that she did not envisage a miracle at that stage. Jesus had already told her by message that Lazarus would not die. He now says "Thy brother shall rise again." Again, He was referring to life, not death. "rise again", *anistēmi*, is a verb meaning to rise up (from laying down) to rise from the dead. There are other meanings, but in this case the meaning was clear – Lazarus was indeed 'asleep' and would come back to life. This time, it was the turn of Martha not to understand, so she replied as one who believed in the resurrection of the dead at the last trump. When we concentrate only on our personal tragedy or distress, we can fail to see the better picture given by Jesus.

Jesus' Explanation in John 11: "The Beauty of God's intentions"

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1.

Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

2.

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

3.

And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

Comment:

Jesus has compassion, and so He did not rebuke Martha for her lack of understanding. He said that whoever believed in Him should never die, and asked if she believed it herself. I suggest that this is a vital question to ask ourselves in our day: do we truly believe we will rise one day to enter Heaven? If not, then all talk of our 'faith' is a delusion. This fact must be understood, or the Lord may not act on our behalf in a sad or bad situation. 'Belief' in the resurrection is held by all who claim to belong to Him – but few truly believe it, as we can see in the way they react to life's awful situations. I can say this with knowledge for, sadly, I have done so myself.

1.

She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

2.

And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee.

3.

As soon as she heard [that], she arose quickly, and came unto him.

Jesus' Explanation in John 11: "The Beauty of God's intentions"

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Monday, 16 March 2015 12:00

4.

Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him.

5.

The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there.

6.

Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

Comment:

While Jesus stood on the boundary of the town, Martha hurried to get her sister, Mary, who rose up and left the house. The others with her assumed she was going to grieve at the grave of her brother. Mary, like her sister, assumed that Lazarus would still be alive if only Jesus had reached him in time. She fell at Jesus' feet in grief. Thus, she, too, thought only in human terms, and not in terms of Almighty God, Jesus. She was thus prevented from relief for her grief. Sadly, Jesus' power was, in her mind, only workable during life!

1.

When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled,

2.

And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see.

3.

Jesus wept.

4.

Jesus' Explanation in John 11: "The Beauty of God's intentions"

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Monday, 16 March 2015 12:00

Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!

5.

And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?

Comment:

Jesus saw the way she and her friends grieved and He "groaned in the spirit, and was troubled". Why do you think Jesus wept? The Jews perceived that He wept because He loved Lazarus so much. But, is this the real reason? I suggest not. After all, Jesus knew He was about to raise Lazarus back to life – why should He weep? The answer is in verse 38! He groaned within Himself, because neither the Jews nor Mary and Martha understood His words or intentions.

He groaned because of their lack of understanding, even though He expressly said Lazarus was only asleep. Their faith was overshadowed by the human situation, but Jesus' intentions were above all this; His intentions came from Heavenly places! Often, the groaning referred to is of indignation, but not here – Jesus loved them and so He hid His feeling of sadness for their unbelief. But, He shed tears for their unbelief, more than for their grief. Interestingly, this term (*dakryō*

) is only used of Jesus, but not of mourning. It is surely how our Lord cries tears when we sin or do not perceive the truth in what He does.

His critics were ever-present and asked why Jesus did not heal Lazarus while he was still yet alive. Thus, they acknowledged His power to heal, but had no idea that He also had power over death, probably because no man has this power. So they again thought only along human lines. When Jesus heard this criticism He again groaned inwardly, which suggests my interpretation of His tears is indeed correct.

1.

Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

Jesus' Explanation in John 11: "The Beauty of God's intentions"

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Monday, 16 March 2015 12:00

2.

Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been [dead] four days.

3.

Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?

4.

Then they took away the stone [from the place] where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up [his] eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.

5.

And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said [it], that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

6.

And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

Comment:

Jesus walked the short distance to the cave in the hillside, in which Lazarus had been laid. Martha, still not understanding, was told to remove the stone in front of the cave. She mildly protested and displayed unbelief by saying that Lazarus had been dead for four days and would already be stinking. Why did she not see that Jesus was about to do a great work – He did not ask her to remove the stone for nothing!

Turning to Martha He reminded her of what He had said. If she believed truly, she would see the glory of God. Did she not remember what He had said? Do we, today, remember this astounding truth? Then why do we not believe? Do we pray in belief, or in a woeful disbelief? I fear the latter is most likely the case. If Jesus impresses His powerful testimony on our hearts, do we dare to disbelieve, even as we seek His help? Probably, because of our inability to look

Jesus' Explanation in John 11: "The Beauty of God's intentions"

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Monday, 16 March 2015 12:00

to the Heavens, and so we fix our eyes only on the problem, not on Him (though everyone says they trust).

Despite Martha's lack of understanding, Jesus acted. He looked upwards and thanked the Father for hearing His prayer. Now, He said all this out loud, so that everyone around could hear Him. How many of us pray in secret because we inwardly do not believe God will answer? (I have some experience at this myself, it is sad to say). Jesus wanted everyone to know Who He was speaking to and Who was about to perform a miracle.

He explains that He speaks out loud for the sake of those who stood by, that "they may believe" that the Father had sent Him. The miracle, then, was about far more than raising a dead friend. It was about confirming to the Jews that He was indeed the Son of God with the keys to Heaven and hell. After declaring He was calling on the Father to perform a great act, Jesus cried out loudly "Lazarus, come forth". He could have done this without a word, but He wanted everyone to know Who was behind the miracle.

Lazarus immediately came to the cave entrance, still covered head to toe in grave clothes. So, Jesus told onlookers to remove them, that he could walk.

In this explanation by Jesus of why He acted as He did, we see a remarkable fact: that we must always look upwards to Heaven if we want to see Him acting on our behalf. He often works through earthly means, but there are times when He will act outside the laws of earth, and will bring about something astounding to everyone watching and waiting.

Our thinking and expectations must be from Heaven, and not just conjured-up within our ailing souls, a kind of self-delusion. This is because no matter how much we might wish a certain result, if it is completely outside our control and the usual means of earthly life, then whatever answer comes must, by definition, be Heavenly and miraculous. And, sometimes, Jesus will not intervene until it seems too late... but there is no such thing as 'too late' in God's economy, as we see with Lazarus! Our faith MUST transcend earth and reach far into Heaven, for that is where His glory starts to display itself. Then, whatever He does will transform the lives of many. This is Jesus' own explanation – do you believe it?

1.

Jesus' Explanation in John 11: "The Beauty of God's intentions"

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Monday, 16 March 2015 12:00

And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

2.

Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.

Comment:

The proof that Jesus acted from His Heavenly perspective is now seen: many of the Jews who stood around, and had heard Jesus call on Lazarus in God's name, now saw with their own eyes that God had answered an impossible situation with an impossible answer – impossible that is, to man. If you are in a bad position right now, look to God, for others are also watching you and what you do will guide them towards the Lord or away from Him. If your reaction is one of despondency then they will conclude your God is as nothing and never replies. If you believe, as Jesus asked Martha, you will wait expectantly for God's joyful answer, whatever it is.

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