

John 11:1-16

A man named Lazarus was sick. He lived in Bethany with his sisters, Mary and Martha. ²This is the Mary who later poured the expensive perfume on the Lord's feet and wiped them with her hair. Her brother, Lazarus, was sick. ³So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, "Lord, your dear friend is very sick."

⁴But when Jesus heard about it he said, "Lazarus's sickness will not end in death. No, it happened for the glory of God so that the Son of God will receive glory from this." ⁵So although Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, ⁶he stayed where he was for the next two days. ⁷Finally, he said to his disciples, "Let's go back to Judea."

⁸But his disciples objected. "Rabbi," they said, "only a few days ago the people in Judea were trying to stone you. Are you going there again?"

⁹Jesus replied, "There are twelve hours of daylight every day. During the day people can walk safely. They can see because they have the light of this world. ¹⁰But at night there is danger of stumbling because they have no light." ¹¹Then he said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but now I will go and wake him up."

¹²The disciples said, "Lord, if he is sleeping, he will soon get better!" ¹³They thought Jesus meant Lazarus was simply sleeping, but Jesus meant Lazarus had died.

¹⁴So he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵And for your sakes, I'm glad I wasn't there, for now you will really believe. Come, let's go see him."

¹⁶Thomas, nicknamed the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let's go, too—and die with Jesus."

Background

Verse 2 mentions Mary's act of worship that's recorded later in John 12. This is not a chronological error. John wrote his Gospel around 85 AD, long after the events. By then, Mary was well known for this act. In fact, Jesus said in Mark 14:9 that wherever the Good News is preached, Mary's deed would be remembered. Mary and Martha are also well-known from Luke 10, where they displayed different ways of responding to Jesus.

Verse 6 says that Jesus delayed for two days before going to Bethany. A Jewish superstition at the time held that the soul stayed near the body for a couple of days after death. Jesus may have purposely delayed His arrival so that Lazarus was dead for four days, ensuring there was no doubt about the miracle.

Bethany is near Jerusalem in Judea, making it dangerous territory. The disciples hesitated to return due to previous threats against Jesus. Yet, Thomas courageously said, "*Let's go, too—and die with Jesus.*" Some criticize him for not showing more faith, but at least he displayed courage. Unfortunately, Thomas is usually remembered for his doubt, not his bravery.

Teaching Points

1. The death of a believer is on schedule.

Lazarus' death was not premature, but perfectly timed according to God's plan. Even Jesus' delayed arrival was part of God's purpose. When God delays His response, it's not necessarily denial. He acts on His perfect timetable.

In verse 9, Jesus responded to His disciples' concern about the danger of going to Jerusalem by saying, *"There are twelve hours of daylight every day."* He was emphasizing that as long as He was walking in the light of God's will, His time had not yet come, and He would not die before the appointed moment. In the same way, we will not die until our earthly mission is complete and our appointed time arrives.

2. The death of a believer is like sleep.

The Bible uses the term "sleep" as a gentle metaphor for a believer's temporary physical death (Acts 7:60; 1 Thessalonians 4:13), awaiting resurrection of the body (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). This "sleep" refers only to the body. Believers' souls don't "sleep." Scripture shows the soul is with the Lord after death (Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:6; Philippians 1:21). So, the death of a believer is *like* sleep, in the sense that it is only temporary.

Application

1. Have you run a heavenly credit check lately?

A credit check instantly reveals a lot of information about you: where you live, work, payment history, and more. Similarly, Heaven keeps a detailed record of our lives. For example, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus are noted not just as siblings from Bethany, but Mary's act of anointing Jesus is recorded and remembered forever.

Your worship, growth, and actions also contribute to your "heavenly credit score." If you're not living fully for Christ, or just going through the motions, it's time to reflect on what's being recorded in your heavenly account.