When God Delays

(John 11:1-21)
4-6-2025



Introduction: v.1-3

*** Sometimes it seems that God delays His coming to our rescue at the times when we feel we need Him most.**

Why did God delay the healing of a man whom Jesus loved? Why did God let him die?

I. **God delayed the healing of Lazarus so that Christ might be <u>glorified</u> (v.4-7)**
(God's Will done in God's Time brings Him the <u>Highest Glory</u>)

II. **God delayed the healing of Lazarus so that Christ might <u>walk in the protective light of the Father's will and timing</u> (v.8-10)**
(God's Will done in God's Time results in <u>safety and blessing</u>)

III. **God delayed the healing of Lazarus so that Christ might be <u>believed on</u> (v.11-21)**
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Do you find it difficult when people make you wait or put you on hold?

In NYC, we do a lot of waiting. . . we wait in long lines (EX: Motor Vehicle Dept. In 1988). . . we wait in traffic jams. . . we wait for the subway or bus, etc.

But we live in a society that doesn't like to wait. We have access to instant-everything. From instant breakfasts to fast food restaurants, to the quick retrieval of information from the internet. We want it <u>now</u>!

We are a very impatient people! We tend to live for the Now! Immediate gratification, immediate pain relief. Everything has to be right away.

We find it harder than ever in this fast-paced "rat race" to be patient and wait. We are a driven people who don't know the meaning of the word "later." We see this especially in our children.

We expect things to be done when we want them to be done, with little or nor consideration to God's timing and will. But you know, His ways are not our ways; His thoughts are not the same as ours, as Isaiah 55:8-9 says For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. [9] For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Have you ever had a need—a need you thought was an emergency—and you sincerely brought it to God in prayer, but He didn't answer it at the time you thought He should have?

This was the burden of Martha in John 11:21. "**Lord** (she says), **if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."** (11:21). She says in effect: "Oh, Jesus, where were You?" "If only you could have come sooner." "We sent word to you that my brother Lazarus was sick and you didn't come on time." "You were not here when we needed you most."

We have the benefit of reading the end of the story and finding out that Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. The story ends well, but the time from Lazarus' sickness until four days after his death was a time of intense prayer and a request for immediate help----but where was help? It apparently was not to be found in Jesus. Note John 11:37.

The emphasis on the first half of this chapter centers on the <u>delay</u> of Christ's coming to Lazarus' aid (cp. V. 6, 15, 21).

"John selected this miracle as the seventh in the series recorded in his book because it was really the climactic miracle of our Lord's earthly ministry. He had raised others from the dead, but Lazarus had been in the grave four days. It was a miracle that could not be denied or avoided." (Wiersbe, p. 333-4).

v. 2
Things that may seem "bad" even happen to people who love Jesus Christ.

Mary's love for Christ is so authentic and so outstanding that John records it here even before that great demonstration of love ever occurred (cp. Jn. 12:3; Mt. 26:7; Mk. 14:3).

v. 3
Things that may seem "bad" even happen to people whom Jesus Christ loves in a special way.

Urgent word is sent to Jesus that a man whom He specially cared for is deathly ill. Note: God's love for those who undergo trials is not diminished in any way while they go through difficult times. (Rom. 8:35ff).

"Lovest" = *agape* - the highest form of love; an unconditional, giving love.

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v. 4
"This sickness is not <u>unto</u> death" – will not <u>ultimately</u> and <u>finally</u> end in death.

Although this sickness would lead to temporary death (v. 14), it would not end in permanent death.

God's purpose and plan for Lazarus' sickness was to glorify Himself.

Yes, God's will often includes illness (contrary to the "health, wealth, and prosperity gospel" charismatics of our day).

--God's will for Job to have a [physical affliction brought glory to God.

--God's will for the Apostle Paul to go through his life and ministry (after conversion) with a "thorn" in his flesh was also for his betterment and for God's glory (2 Cor. 12).

"Glory of God. . . Son of God" – when the Son of God is glorified, God is glorified because the Son of God is God!

v. 5
God's seeming disinterest in our crisis does not mean His love for us has ceased. And He is never disinterested in the plight of those He loves.

v. 6
"Jesus was in Bethabara, about twenty miles from Bethany (Jn. 1:28, 10:40) (a vigorous one-day journey by foot).

"He abode two days still" – Jesus wanted to give enough time for Lazarus' illness to lead to death so as to heighten the glory of His miraculous power. It would bring Jesus more glory to raise a man from death than it would to prevent a man from dying. So He delays His coming to Bethany in order that He could set the stage for one of His greatest miracles.

Jesus wanted to give time to prove that Lazarus was really dead, so He waited two days before making the trip back to Judea. He deliberately waited and set up this miracle to prove His power.

II. God delayed the healing of Lazarus so that Christ might <u>walk in the protective light of the Father's will and timing</u> (v.8-10)
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Jesus was a wanted man in Judea, and He was about to "step on a hornets' next" (so the disciples thought).

Why would Jesus enter an apparent "bear trap"? People were waiting in Judea to kill Him.

Jesus knew that nothing could happen to Him until the Father's hour came.

John 7:30
Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come.

John 8:20
These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come.

v. 9-10
As Ryrie states: "Jesus states that He could safely go back to Judea, where an attempt had been made to stone Him (11:8), as long as He was walking in the light of His Father's will."

The same principle holds true to the child of God. Nothing can happen to you outside of God's will and timing. When you walk in the protective light of the Father's will and timing, there is safety and blessing. You are untouchable!

Christ's **"twelve hours"** were not to be finished until He cried out, "It is finished."

We are, in a sense, <u>immortal</u> as we are doing God's will. And no one can kill us or even harm us unless God gives the okay.

EX: of Balak who tried to destroy the people of God but could not!

EX: of Daniel and his 3 friends (Dan. 3)

EX: of Paul who had many "close calls" (2 Cor. 11).

The only safe place for us is right in the middle of God's will.

--The special protection of God is on those who are busy about His will.

--We won't be stopped until the work is done.

III. God delayed the healing of Lazarus so that Christ might be <u>believed on</u> (v.11-21)
(God's Will done in God's Time results in many coming to <u>faith in Christ</u>)

v. 11
"Lazarus sleepeth" – Although Lazarus was dead (v. 14), Jesus refers to him as sleeping. Why? Sleeping is a euphemism to show that death ahs no ultimate power over God's people. God uses this term in the New Testament in reference to His saints, never regarding the lost. --Because death to the believer is nothing but restful sleep, until Jesus awakens our bodies at His return (cp. 1 Thes. 4:15-16).

In the N.T., this term "sleep" is <u>never</u> used of an unbeliever in death. Only believers.

It is qualified in Verse 14 - "those who sleep in Jesus"

I Cor. 15:15 - "We shall not all sleep..."

EX: Lazarus (Jn. 11:11)
Young Damsel (Lk. 8:52)
Those who arose after Christ's resurrection (Mt. 27:51-53)

Jesus is the "first fruits of them that slept" (I Cor. 15:20)

The word "sleep" indicates 1) the <u>restful</u> effect of death for the child of God (for "to be absent from the body = present with the Lord" - II Cor. 5:8) [NOTE: it does not hint at "soul sleep"]; and 2) it also shows the <u>temporary</u> nature of death (Hiebert, p. 188)

v. 15
Unless we knew what Christ was talking about, His statement would seem strange.

"I am glad for your sakes that I was not there."

Jesus was glad that He wasn't there to heal Lazarus when he was sick; He was glad that He was not there to prevent him from dying; He was glad He was not there to attend his funeral and burial. Why? Because He is going to allow Lazarus to stay dead for four days to demonstrate His power over death, which would result in FAITH.

v. 16
Why pessimism from the notorious doubter? The threat of death (v. 8) leads the fearful Thomas to lament that they, too, would soon die as Lazarus did. But can death occur where the Author of life does not allow it? No. Impossible.

v. 17
"Four days already" – by the fourth day decay would begin to set in, especially in a hot climate like Palestine. – As Martha said, "Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days""(v. 39).

v. 20
Martha's always on the move, and Mary is always at rest either in worship, prayer, or listening to her Master's voice.

v. 21
Jesus did not really need to be there in body; He could have healed Lazarus from a distance, as He did the nobleman's son (Jn. 4:43-54).

CONCLUSION:

The Bible has many references to "standing still" or "being still" and seeing God's great salvation (Exod. 14:13; 1 Sam. 12:7; Job 37:14).

And the Bible has several references to waiting on the Lord (Ps. 27:14, 37:34; Prov. 20:22; Ps. 37:9, 123:2; Is. 8:17; Is. 40:31).

Hasty decisions are almost always costly decisions. And unbiblical ones.
EX:
1) King Saul's hasty and unbiblical sacrifice ("to obey is better than sacrifice")

2) Nadab and Abihu's hasty sacrifice of "strange fire" (Lev. 9:23- 10:3).

3) Peter's impulsive decision to strike Malchus, cutting off his ear, in defense of Jesus.

4) The Israelites of old got quickly tired of manna and asked for "meat" in the wilderness. God's sent the meat but also sent "leanness to their souls'

5) The Israelites would later "jump the gun" and prematurely ask for a king. God, knowing their worldly impatience, gave them a king but one who would not have a heart for God as would God's choice David.

God gently leads His sheep, whereas Satan hastily drives those who belong to him.

Beware of rushed decisions. Before you decide, ask yourself:

1. Have I prayed about this decision?
2. Have I sought Godly advice in this decision?
3. Would this decision lead me to violate any one of God's clear commands?
4. Do I have absolute peace about this decision?

Let's give God time to do His great works in and through our lives!

I'm not calling for lazy passivity! But rather for a patient trust! Be actively serving Christ; do His general will, and He in His time will guide you to His specific will for your life.

Some practical advice: Wait for God's time in –

--your career choice (go to school, get your training, rather than rushing into a career)
--marriage – your life's mate
--ministry (not a novice)
--salvation of a loved one
--making that big purchase (EX: a home)
--building a ministry

Songs: "O Rejoice in the Lord"; "In His Time" ("He makes all things beautiful in His time")