

Love's Baffling Delay

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon explores the theme of God's purposeful delays in answering prayers, emphasizing His love and sovereignty in our lives.

Duration: 58:06

Topics: "Love"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the skepticism surrounding the historicity of a particular event mentioned only in the Gospel of John. They argue that while some may dismiss John as an unreliable historian, it is important to consider the collective testimony of the four evangelists. The speaker then acknowledges the presence of doubt and confusion in the face of God's delays. They proceed to discuss a specific event in the 11th chapter of John's Gospel, describing it as a combination of sorrow and victory. The speaker encourages the audience to refer to their New Testament and emphasizes God's omniscience and understanding of all details.

Transcript

I would like to call your attention this evening to the very remarkable message that the Lord has given us in this eleventh chapter in the book of the Gospel written by Saint John. My text is too long to read again, but I trust that you will hold your New Testaments, keep it in your hands and keep looking at the passage from time to time to see that we are not going astray. I have entitled this Love's Baffling Delay because I want to focus attention very particularly upon this.

I do so very largely because of praying people, God-fearing people in this congregation and those who visit us from time to time, have in recent times expressed a very real concern that so many of their prayers have not apparently been answered. They take it that in many cases the Lord is saying, quite dogmatically, saying no to requests which they have brought before Him over and over again. Requests which they have clearly considered to be born out of His will and to be consistent with every tenet of Christian truth.

And some are beginning to doubt. I have found this not only with younger Christians, but I have found it with some older believers as well. A tendency to wonder what should be our attitude if and when God does not immediately answer our prayers.

Now, this message of ours tonight by no means addresses that vast question. It's a subject all its own. But I believe that there is something in this chapter, something which is exceedingly relevant, something which is vital to the child of faith, something that should enable you and enable me to go out into a new week in an entirely different attitude towards God's delays in answering some of our prayers.

Perhaps it is only honest of us and right and proper that before we talk about God's delays, we should acknowledge His goodness and His provisions to date. We should acknowledge His blessings even on this lovely day and this week, during this week that has passed, that we are here as a token of God's mercy. We have heard of what we call accidents here and accidents there, of people flying in the air, on sea, on land.

We have heard of this, that, and the other. And so many of our fellow creatures have suddenly been taken into eternity, and yet here you are, here am I, on this lovely Lord's Day evening in the comparative comfort of this sanctuary, and above all else, free to draw near to the God who is our Creator and our Redeemer. Let us acknowledge that.

Nevertheless, I shouldn't be at all surprised if there is anyone here who is not in some measure baffled by God's delays. Well, let's look at the event before us. This event has been aptly described as a trinity of sorrow and an anthem of victory, and both of these at one and the same time.

It was G. Campbell Morgan who first wrote those words, I believe, in the first place, though they have been quoted by many people since. What he meant was this. It begins with tragedy, sickness.

Sickness leads to sorrow. Sorrow leads to comfort. Comfort leads to questioning.

And then there are all kinds of things that emerge that I can't possibly take time to trace now, until ultimately we move from the tragedy to the triumph. We move out of the shadows of sorrow and of sickness and of sorrow, and the Lord, there in all His majesty, reveals His glory as He calls Lazarus by name and brings him out of the terrain of death to continue His life upon earth until God's time is done. A trinity of sorrow and an anthem of victory, both at one and the same time.

Of course, critical souls are boggled at the general historicity of this. You don't want me to go into that. I notice some of you are students and some of you are theological students.

Well, you will know as well as I do that so many of our liberal theologians have got a lot of fun out of this. John is the only one who mentions it, they say. And John is not apparently a very reliable historian.

And so we don't give it much credence because it's only John who records it. It would be probably wise to take them more seriously if they believed what the four evangelists say when they say things in common, together. As, for example, when the four evangelists speak of our Lord multiplying a few loaves and a few fishes.

But the fact that the four evangelists are in concert saying something does not mean that our critics accept what they say. Why then should we take them so seriously when they raise an objection such as this? Anyway, let us move from there. From our point of view this evening, what we want to stress is just one main aspect of the message that emerges out of this incident.

We are concerned to show how divine love may sometimes delay, deliberately delay, in bringing relief. But if deliberately delay, the delay is a purposeful delay. And in due course we shall know the reason for the

delay and be the better for it.

Now that's the message that I see glistening throughout this passage and attracting anyone who has questions concerning some of God's delays. Now, whereas there are areas of experience in which God seems to have answered some of our prayers even before we have asked. Have you noticed how Isaiah, for example, refers to this about God answering our prayers before we've ever asked them.

In other words, He has foreseen our problems before we ever saw them. Foreseen all our difficulties and before we've even framed or fashioned our prayers, God has gone ahead of us and He's answered our prayers. That's a very precious experience and we suddenly wake up to it and we see that God has made provision for an exigency before we ever saw the difficulty.

But there are occasions when God does delay. And this is an experience which you find really everywhere in the Bible. That may sound strange.

You find this in the history of Moses, you find it in the history of David, you find it down through the Psalms and the Prophets. You find occasions when no amount of prayer seems to bring the answer that God's people are after. Whether it be personal or concerted prayer on the behalf of God's people.

There are times when the heavens turn into brass and there are times when it is as if God were struck with the incapacity to hear and He does not answer. So it seems. Even the great Apostle Paul, do you remember, had to stop praying for one particular reason.

He's not the only one. I choose him simply as an illustration but you remember he had that thorn in the flesh, whatever it was, 2 Thessalonians chapter 12. And he besought the Lord, he begged the Lord for this on account of this more than once, twice, three times.

Now I can imagine Paul praying. We read his prayers and they are prayers. There are depths.

We sense the depths of the man's soul from his prayers. I can hear almost, overhear Paul praying for this, this, this thorn in the flesh, wherever it may have been, begging the Almighty God for the glory of His name, for the good of His cause, for the extension of His kingdom, for the spread of His church, for the profit of the redeemed, for the gathering of the lost, for on all accounts take this thing away. And God says to Paul, Paul you might as well stop praying.

I'm not taking it away. But I want you to know Paul that I have grace for you to bear that and my grace is sufficient for you. God said no.

But at other times God's no is a temporary one as it were. It's a delay. And that's what we have in this passage before us.

Now let's look at the fact of Christ's delay here. The inspired record does not hesitate to tell us in the boldest possible terms that when Jesus heard the news that Lazarus was ill, I read in verse 6 here, he stayed where he was two more days. Now that's rather staggering.

Taking that at its face value. Jesus heard the news that Lazarus was ill, ill, not dead yet, ill. He loved Lazarus and he loved his two sisters, he loved the family and the family had been exceedingly kind to him.

And now deliberately rather than go to their aid, Jesus just stayed where he was two extra days. What a remarkable thing to do. How callous you said it was to go to their aid.

How thoughtless if you really loved Lazarus and the family and knew that the two sisters had no other relation and no other perhaps close friend at hand. Especially turning back in the record of events, we are told that the Jews of Judea had recently, I quote, picked up stones again to stone Jesus. That is chapter 10 and verse 31.

And following that we are told they later tried to arrest him or seize him in some of the translations, but he escaped from their hands. Now, let's get this. Recently, somewhere in the area of Bethany, Jesus' life has been endangered.

Once, twice, more than twice. Then the narrative proceeds in verse 40. Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days.

He there stayed. Now when Lazarus became ill therefore, and his condition showed signs of deterioration, his sisters Martha and Mary sent someone with a message to inform him. Tersely, he whom you love is sick.

The one whom you love is sick. The one you love is sick. It was a post-haste message.

There was no time for elaboration. It was urgent and it was a kind of telegram message. Whether the word translated Lord simply means Sir or whether we are all ready to understand it at this stage in the New Testament as meaning something more than that, as scholars may argue among themselves, but at least it meant this much.

Mary and Martha expected something from Jesus of Nazareth that they did not and could not expect from anybody else. Surely the word Lord does not mean here all that it came to mean to the disciples and to the apostles after the resurrection from the dead and the coming of the Spirit. It was at that stage that they beheld the glory of this word Lord as applied to the Lord Jesus Christ.

They saw the fullness of his deity and his majesty and his glory. But even at this point, even at this point they sent post-haste to him and they say to him, Lord, the one you love is sick. You see their expectations from him are such as can't be compared with their expectations from anyone else already.

There is something remarkable in the statement. The appeal to our Lord's sovereignty is there implicitly. He can do something.

If only he were here, if only he would come, if only he would return, even now things could be different. Even so Jesus delayed two whole days, away beyond Jordan, before he did anything for the one whom he so evidently loved. He deliberately lingered before he came back to Bethany.

Now have you been faced by something like that? Indeed it could be, it could be a stumbling block to some of us in our worship here tonight. That some unanswered prayer has become an occasion of doubt that is so serious that we cannot really worship God. I have met that.

And I'll be quite honest with you, I've had to handle things like that in my own life. That it is possible, it is possible because of some of the delays of the Lord, it is possible for the spirit to be so poisoned that really we can't see him doing anything good for us at all. Whereas if we only knew it, it's only a delay, and a delay for a period, and ultimately, ultimately it will be for the glory of God and the good of all concerned.

But the eye of faith you see has got so dim. When we get old we generally find that we need to change our glasses rather often, our spectacles rather often. And you know spiritually it's like that, we can get like that.

The eye of faith becomes dim and we only see like men of flesh, and we don't believe and we don't trust. The fact of Christ's delay, the nature of Christ's delay. You see there are delays and delays.

Some delays are enforced, others are deliberate. Some delays arise out of unconcern, whilst others are altogether different. Let's examine our Lord's delay in this instance.

What are we to say about it? Let me say two or three things which I think are quite important. One, it was not the delay of ignorance but of knowledge. Jesus not only knew that Lazarus was ill, when in due course Lazarus, many miles away, died, Jesus knew that he had died, yet he delayed.

His delay was not a delay of ignorance, it isn't. He could never say to Martha and Mary, if I only knew it was as bad as this I would have hurried, I would have had a first class plane to bring me here or something like that, or whatever they had in these days to compost, hasten, try to help you. No, no, no, no.

He knew all the time. No delay of our Lord will ever be due to ignorance. Let's take that in, it's worth taking in.

No delay of our Lord in your life or mine will ever be due to ignorance on his part. In this instance he knew more than the human informants that had come to tell him about Lazarus. The sole thing they could tell him about Lazarus was this, that Lazarus was ill.

He whom you love is sick. But he knew that Lazarus had died. They didn't.

He knew more than his informants, yet he delayed. And my friends, if I may say so, he always knows more than you and I can ever tell him in prayer. Always more.

This is related also to our message this morning. One reason why we do not need to babble as the pagans do, to use Jesus' words, is because our Lord knows what we need before we ask of him. Our problems are known to him.

He knows more than we can tell him. And we think we've got to fill him in with all the details. Well, it's good in fellowship with our Lord sometimes to do that.

But it's not necessary in all the detail. He knows it all better than you do, better than I do, better than any of us do. If you have any doubts about this, I suggest to you that among other things, you should sit down and read again the first three chapters of the book of Revelation.

I remember when as a young pastor, puzzled by some of the problems that I faced in my first charge. One of them was the first funeral service that I conducted. It was the burial of a little girl of about nine years of age.

Beautiful little thing, a little angel in flesh, with golden curls down over her shoulders here, who died of this awful thing we call cancer. I had never met this so close at hand before. Oh, how we sweated before the Lord and wondered, what are we to say to these people? What word of God is there for this family? Weeping and wondering and asking questions.

What is there from the Lord? And I remember at that time, I was reading in the book of Revelation, and I came across these words over and over again. I know. I know.

I know. I know. You read it.

How our Lord tells the seven churches over and over again. It's almost monotonous. When once you read it, you think that the record, what you call it, has got stuck on the record.

And it's coming on all the time. I know. I know.

I know your troubles. I know your trials. I know your circumstances.

I know this. I know that. I know.

I know. And somehow or other, it got through my thick skull. He knows all about it.

You know, brothers and sisters, there's nothing going on in our lives but that He knows. He knows. And there will be no delay whatsoever, because He is ignorant of any fact relevant to the case.

He knows everything. Jesus' delay was not due to ignorance. Jesus' delay was not due to carelessness.

He loved them. His love for Lazarus was something about which the two sisters were unequivocally certain. They had no doubt about this, as evidenced in the terms of their message to Him.

Behold, He whom you love. They seemed to separate and isolate Lazarus from themselves and to say, He whom you love, as if Jesus' love for Lazarus was something quite different from His affection for them. He whom you love is sick.

Over and above that fundamental fact, however, let's notice one or two other things that are said in Scripture. And it's very important here, I think, if we are to get the message. The writer of the Gospel knew that Jesus not only loved Lazarus but also loved His two sisters.

He loved the three of them. I read in chapter 11 and verse 5, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. The writer of the Gospel knew that.

Somehow or other it had become evident that Jesus had a special, a peculiar fondness for this little family. One day our Lord turned to a man who said that He would follow him wherever he went. He said, Look man, do you really mean what you say? Do you know what you say? Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests where they may have their young.

But the son of man whom you say you are going to follow hasn't a place to lay his head. A fox is better off than he is. The birds of the air are better off than he is.

He hasn't a place whereon to lay his head that he can call his own. There was one home at that stage. There was one home whose door was always open to him.

It was at Bethany. And somehow or other the affection of our blessed Lord for this Bethany family was evident to the writer of the Gospel. Not only that, even the Jews had noticed it.

The unbelieving Jews, I read in verse 33 of chapter 11, I read when Jesus, well let's go back a little bit, when at last our Lord arrived in Bethany and had addressed the two sisters separately, He came to the

graveside. The passage describes much weeping and then continues with verse 33. When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

Having asked the location of Lazarus' grave, Jesus went towards it, and at that point we read that He too joined the weeping. Then follows this comment, verse 36. Then the Jews said, see how He loved him.

The writer of the Gospels knew it. Martha and Mary knew it. The Jews knew it.

It was evident. So you see, our Lord's delay, our Lord's delay was not because He did not love Lazarus. Brother, sister, believe the word of God.

The Savior may delay in doing something for you despite His love for you. The fact that He delays does not necessarily mean that He does not love. There are delays of love.

He's got something better in mind than you want at this particular moment, and because of that He will not come now. He will not do what you want Him to do just now. He will delay.

He will stay where He is a little while. The delay was not caused by carelessness, but by love. Then let me say this.

Neither was our Lord's delay born out of a sense of inability to help or to cope, but rather out of a sense of sovereignty over the entire situation, and out of His known capacity to come into the situation and to transform it utterly in due course, however bad things may be. Jesus did not say, look, I'm sorry, I'm not coming there now. Death has come.

The ultimate has taken place, so I'm not coming anywhere near. I can't cope with that. None of it.

He knew what was there, and He knew the dangers en route to get there. I shall come back to those in a moment. He knew all the difficulties, but with calm serenity He said, I'm not coming yet.

He delayed. Both Jesus Himself and His disciples were aware of the many dangers that surrounded Jesus at this time, and of the peculiar difficulties that stood in the way of His return to Bethany. Now I've already hinted at this earlier on.

I want to come back to it. Let me read verses 7 and 8 again. Then He said to His disciples, let's go back towards Judea.

But Rabbi, they said, a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you're going back there? You don't often go back to a place where you've had a very bad hiding, or where you've had a very bad stoning, or where you've been humiliated once. You don't easily turn back to that place soon after, do you? When Jesus insisted upon His ability to cope, and upon leaving for Judea, Thomas called Didymus the twin. Thomas said, oh, isn't it wonderful how the New Testament records these things? There's a sense of humor here, as well as much else, of course.

But dear old Thomas the twin said, well, let us also go, he says, that we may die with him. You see, what he means is this. If you're going that way, Lord Jesus, there's only one thing for it.

The people who tried to stone you a few weeks ago, they're going to stone you again, and you're going to have it. But if you're going to have it, we want to be with you in death, if need be. We'd rather be with you

in death than without you in life.

So let's go, fellows, said Thomas the twin. Thomas was certain that this was so dangerous an errand to undertake. Jesus can only go there at expense to his own life.

Nevertheless, over against that background, our Lord was sure of his ability to cope. That's what I want to hear. That's what I want to see.

He knew that as well as Thomas. He knew all about that as well as Thomas did, better than Thomas did. Nevertheless, he knew that he was able to cope.

En route, having arrived in any circumstance, Jesus was sure of his ability to finish the work which the Father had given him to do in Jerusalem. And Bethany was en route to Jerusalem. And he would go to Jerusalem via Bethany.

Jesus was sure of his ability to help. This has been made clear already, and it's very evident, for example, in these words. After he had said this, he went on to tell them, our friend Lazarus, see the disciples hadn't got the message yet.

They thought Lazarus was sick. They didn't know the truth. Jesus did.

But he says to them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm going to wake him up. How tender, our Lord, how tender, in breaking news that would be quite shattering to these disciples. They knew Lazarus and Mary and their kindness too.

You know, there are some medical doctors that break news to you so suddenly they take their feet from under you. You compare them with our Lord here. He doesn't immediately say, Lazarus is dead and he's going to be buried days before I see him.

He breaks it gently, Lazarus is asleep, he says. And I'm going to wake him up. Well, I can see them scratching their heads and saying, well, if he's sleeping, there's no need to wake him up.

Let the man sleep it off. But you see, his gentleness makes men and women great. This is our Lord.

He knows us and he loves us and he is able to capacitate himself to meet our weaknesses. He doesn't want to hurt us and he doesn't want to shock us. So different to so many people today.

But they didn't take that in, of course. That really kind of upsets them again. Well, if he's sleeping, let him sleep.

So then he told them plainly, he had to tell them plainly at last, Lazarus is dead. And then this. Now here is the point.

And for your sake, I am glad I was not there so that you may believe. But let us go to him. Now there it is in plain language.

There it is. Lazarus is not sleeping only. That's just a picture of what I wanted to get across to you, says Jesus.

It's only a metaphor. He's asleep. He's really dead.

And listen, he says, I'm glad that I wasn't there. You're glad that you were not there? Yeah, I'm glad that I was not there because I want you really to believe in me. I want you to know me in a manner that you may have such faith in me that you'll be invincible and will turn the world upside down.

And to that end, I'm glad I wasn't there. I've got something to show you. Jesus proposed to go to the dead Lazarus to do something that would enable the disciples to believe in a new way.

Now if you ask the questions, when did these disciples become believers? It's very difficult to reply. There was a process, I believe, a progression all along the way. There was a sense in which they believed in the beginning very, very early on, but they only believed as far as they knew.

Then he disclosed a little more of his glory to them and a little more of his grace and a little more of his majesty. And the more they saw, the more they believed. And the more they believed, the more they understood.

And that's the progress. And so there was still room for greater faith, greater trust. And Jesus says, I've got something I want you to see.

For that reason, among others, I've delayed. His sense of competence shines clearly forth like a solitary bright star in an otherwise dark sky. Oh, the nature of our Lord's delay, therefore, must not be seen, but must not be thought to embody anything in the nature of inability to cope, unconcerned for us or lack of care for His own.

Be assured, no delay of Jesus Christ in helping you means that He is ignorant of your plight, careless of your circumstances, or unable to aid you. That brings me to the third point, the purpose of Christ's delay. Now, first of all, this purpose is stated in prospect, and then it becomes evident in retrospect.

You see, first of all, He tells the disciples before He goes back to Lazarus and performs the miracle, and then when He has gone back to Lazarus and performed the miracle, we see the whole thing in retrospect. We have two points of view here. It's marvelous if you look at it from these two vantage points.

First in prospect, then in retrospect. The purpose was first stated in prospect. Look at verse 4. When He heard this, Jesus said, This sickness will not end in death.

No, it is for God's glory, so that God's Son may be glorified through it. Here is a sickness, a genuine sickness. It's a serious sickness, but our Lord reacts to the knowledge of it, to being told about it.

He reacts immediately in this way. This sickness is not with a view to death. Death will not be the end of it.

It is for God's glory, so that God's Son may be glorified through it. Look also at verse 11. So then He told them plainly, Lazarus is dead, and for your sakes I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.

Words we've already referred to. The illness that overtook Lazarus then will not be allowed to end in death. He may die, but death will not be the end.

Death will not be the terminus. We are going beyond the funeral. We are going beyond the burial.

There is something beyond the apparent end. The death he may die has a nobler, more precious end in view, namely the glory of God and His Son, and the eventual deeper, larger, purer faith of His disciples. Now that's it in prospect.

In retrospect, what? A Gospel writer proceeds now to show us how God and His Son were glorified in this sickness, and in the manner in which the Savior dealt with it. And that's what the rest of the record tells us. God and His Son were glorified.

Can I just refer to two or three things briefly? One, God and His Son were the more evidently glorified by love's lingering in this episode because it ultimately involved a greater manifestation of the Savior's power than would have been possible at an earlier stage. To bring Lazarus out of death is infinitely more wonderful than to heal Lazarus' sickness. That's the point.

When sickness has done its wretched worst, the Savior comes and calls him out of death itself, then there is a greater glory manifest. And He is seen to be infinitely greater than He would have been seen to be had He healed Lazarus whilst he was still sick. The eventual miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead betoken the high water mark in the self-revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ up to that point in time.

His disciples had already seen Him heal all kinds of sicknesses. They knew He could heal diseases. They had even seen Him raise Jairus' daughter from the dead and retrieve the widow's son of Nain.

You remember, the funeral was in process. The procession was on the way to the cemetery. And had it been five minutes later, the boy would have been buried.

And Jesus stopped the procession and said, what on earth is going on here? And He called the boy and gave him back to his mother. And men and women didn't know what was happening. They'd seen all that.

Involved in all this is the evident revelation of our Lord's sympathy with men and women in their problems and afflictions, as well as of His capacity to intervene for our salvation and assistance. At this point, however, Jesus was planning something beyond anything they'd seen before. He wanted to allow disease and death to go as far as they could.

He wanted Lazarus not only to be dead when he arrived, but to have been buried. And so buried that he was in process of physical decomposition. And He wanted to allow the passage of time to take place in order for the reality of His miracle, of His divine power, to be absolutely evident.

One, for the glory of God and of His Son. Two, for the establishing of the faith of His servants. Those to whom He will say at last, go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, will be men who will have seen Lazarus come out from the dead, buried for days.

That's the kind of men that can go into Greece and Rome, as well as Jerusalem, and summon men from spiritual slumber into new life. Men who've seen the reality of the incarnate Lord about His Father's business. He therefore allowed the sickness of Lazarus to result in death and burial and all that followed.

And at last He approached the graveside and called him by name. You have heard it said, haven't you? I have many a time, why did He mention Lazarus by name? Somebody, isn't it? Matthew Henry, I'm not sure, says if He hadn't, the whole cemetery would have come to life. Now, that of course is apocryphal.

But you know, I have a feeling, I have a feeling I know what He meant who said that. Lazarus, He says, I love you and I have a purpose for you, and I want to reveal my glory in you. Come out, Lazarus.

And the dead came forth. Forgive me a moment, will you? In my early Christian life, I remember going to an open air meeting with very rough customers, rough jewels in the kingdom of our Lord. I hadn't been to

your university and I got their degrees and postgraduate work and all that kind of thing.

I remember one dear old fellow, but a very rough jewel. He was preaching and he was preaching about Jesus raising the dead. He said, Jesus, Jesus, he says, raised Jairus's daughter.

She was dead. Jesus raised the woman, the widow's son of Nain. He was dead.

And Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Now notice, he said, the first was dead. The widow's son of Nain was deader than the first, but the deadest of the three, he says, was Lazarus.

Now, I know enough about English grammar to know there's something wrong there somewhere. But I think, I think you see with me his point, don't you? Death had reached its extreme, and Jesus allowed it to happen. Why? For the glory of God, the manifestation of his own glory as God incarnate, and the faith of his people.

And that's why he delayed. And he may be that he's delaying in answering some of your prayers, because he's got some gracious purpose. Maybe not of that order, but who knows? Can I add another? God and his Son were the more surely glorified because of the Savior's delay, because it led to the cultivation of a greater, firmer faith in himself.

It did that. He said it would. It actually did.

Whereas we are justified, I believe, in concluding that Mary, Lazarus, and his disciples generally saw how this act indicated Jesus to be deserving of greater faith. The passage itself stresses the fact that Jesus used the occasion very especially to deepen Martha's faith. Now, upon our Lord's arrival at Bethany, Martha met the Savior, and she greeted him with words that involved some faith, along with some measure of doubt and disappointment.

This is what she said. Her sister said the same, by the way, later on. This is what she said.

Her sister had said it before. Lord, Martha said to Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. If you had been here, my brother would not have died.

You have the power, you have the capacity to keep death at bay, but you were not here. You had left us, and you had gone somewhere. And you see, she's almost putting the blame, not quite, don't let's read too much in, but she's almost about to put half the blame on the Savior.

He should have been so far away. If only he had been there, then all would have been well. But he wasn't there.

That reflects a confidence in his capacity to keep his own, whilst he is close at hand. It's good as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. And then along with that, there is some disappointment that he was not near when Lazarus was taken sick.

Then she added, but I know now, you see, faith is mounting now, but I know, she says, that even now, God will give you whatever you ask. I know enough about you to know that. Jesus reassured her, your brother, Martha, your brother will rise again.

To which she replied, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection of the last day. That's verse 24. In other words, Martha believed in the Orthodox Jewish teaching about the resurrection and went a little bit

further, it would seem.

I know, she says, that my brother will rise in the general resurrection of the last day. I know that. This is not the end of it.

I believe that. Then came the imponderable great disclosure. Said Jesus to her in verse 25, didn't you know, he said, I am the resurrection and the life.

He shall rise at the last day. Whenever the last day is to come, millennia hence may be. Martha, Martha, says Jesus, the resurrection and I are so intimately bound together.

I am the resurrection, the resurrection and I are all one. We're one. We're integrally bound together.

I am the resurrection so that because of that, he can rise now for I'm here. And that which you can conceive of only in the distant future is possible now because I am ego amy. I am the resurrection.

Oh, brother, I am the resurrection. I am the resurrection. Brothers and sisters, there's something wonderful here.

There is something wonderful to get hold of here. God and his son are the more surely glorified because of the savior's delay, because it led to the cultivation of a greater, firmer faith in him. You see, out of this came the faith of the whole family, enriched and enlarged.

And especially we are given to understand, I believe, reading between the lines of Martha. I conclude with this. Lastly, last but not least, God and his son were the more evidently glorified by our Lord's delay because it resulted in the revelation of his unlimited capacity to comfort and to save whether he was present or whether he was absent.

His word has power, not only to heal, but to raise from the dead those whom death has claimed. Jesus had claimed to be the author and the donor of eternal life. And he had said a very daring thing.

He said, my sheep shall never perish. Neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand. Doesn't death do that? What is death? Is it not a baby snatcher and a neighbor snatcher and a snatcher of your relations, of your loved ones? What is death? Is it not a beast coming into your homes and taking away your loved one out of the hands of the Savior, as well as of your own arms? Oh, no, no.

Let's go back to our Lord. Death may be allowed to come in, but death can only make his loved one sleep in himself until he sounds revelry again. And what's more, whom he allows to fall asleep in death, he is able to call back from death.

Now, I think that at this point, this message is most relevant to every one of us. You have loved ones that have died. Some of you have recently gone the way of mourning, and all of us have loved ones who are in their graves.

Listen, my friend, listen, get hold of this. The Christ of the Bible is a Christ, is a God incarnate, who can summon our dead, believing brothers and sisters and children and grandparents from the grave, out of the process of decomposition, back into life and impart to them, in his own good time, a new body likened to his own glorious body. He is able.

Now this, you see, this adds gold to the gospel. This makes the gospel something altogether unique and glorious. You do not have this anywhere else, but this is the gospel that is committed to us.

I haven't said a word about the way in which all this reflected on the development of the disciples' faith. My time is gone. But you see, his delays are purposeful.

And I ask you, as we conclude tonight, I ask you, rather than fret and frown and get angry, when the Lord Jesus Christ does not give you what you want and do what you want him to do, when he doesn't come quickly and suddenly, as it were, just at your beck and call, listen, listen, give him the credit to have a little wisdom. Give him the credit that he loves you. Believe that he is worthy of your faith.

Trust him when you cannot trace him, and believe that when he sees that it is wise to act, he will. Oh, for a faith that will not shrink, though precious, will not be touched by many a foe, that will not tremble on the brink of poverty or woe. That's the kind of faith you and I need.

And brothers and sisters, if there's one solitary passage in Scripture that ought to encourage such faith, this is the one. Go and read it before you go to sleep tonight. Ponder its words and let its message penetrate your souls, as I need to let it penetrate mine, that we may manifest to an unbelieving world what it means to have faith in a faithful and altogether able Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord.

Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God and Father, we sang as we began our service this evening unto the hills around, do I lift up my longing eyes? Oh, whence for me shall my salvation come? Oh, whence arise? And we've in some measure seen the answer to our questions. From the hills of eternity you sent forth your Son, and behold, said John the Baptist, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

We thank you for His coming. We thank you for His birth, His lowly life. We thank you for His obedience to the law, though Himself above the law in another sense.

We thank you for His life and for His death. We thank you for the authority given Him to do your will and to bring grace into a graceless world and life to the dead. Oh God, increase our faith.

Enlarge our vision and our scanty thoughts of Him that we may think truly and live believingly and die, if necessary, triumphantly in Him. Let your words, therefore, bring grace to our hearts in this evening hour. In Jesus's precious name, Amen.

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