

The Word Became Flesh
Week 32
John 11:1-16 CSB
“I AM The Resurrection and The Life (Part 1)”

Introduction

So the sisters sent a message to Him: “LORD, the one You love is sick.” John 11:3

A famous country singer once recorded a big hit song simply entitled, “*Unanswered Prayers*”. The message of that song, that was “supposed” to be encouraging, said that, “Some of God’s greatest gifts... are unanswered prayers.” Personally, I find no encouragement in that sentiment at all! When we pray, we desperately long for an answer to our prayer. We need to know that The God that we know and trust is listening. We are commanded in The Scriptures to “*pray without ceasing*”.

Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in everything; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

So, have you ever prayed earnestly to The LORD for something specific, and you felt that He wasn’t listening? Did you ever feel that God didn’t care about the difficulties that you were going through? If we are being completely honest, we have all felt this way at one time or another. All of us have gone through periods in our lives, when we felt abandoned. We pray, and we pray, and it seems that nothing is happening. And we are left feeling helpless and alone as a result.

But I would like to remind us all that God does in fact always hear the prayers of His children. However, it is also vital that we are willing to accept God’s answer. And His answer will always be in accordance with His will. So, I say to you today: If you are a Believer in Christ Jesus, there is no such thing as an “unanswered prayer”.

The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous. **Proverbs 15:29**

So there will always be an answer to the prayers of those who belong to Christ! That being said, sometimes... the answer is “No”. And why would the God Who loves His children so much that He was willing to die for us (**John 3:16**) ever say no to our request? Because His will is better than our will. We often times think that we know the best course of action to take. But how many times has “doing it our way” led us into some really bad situations? Again, if we’re being honest here, we must admit, that many times, we get ourselves into real trouble doing what *we think* is best. Can I get a witness?

For the next few weeks, we will be doing a thorough examination of the story of Lazarus in the **Eleventh Chapter of John**. It is in this passage that we find the fifth of seven “I AM” statements of Christ; **“I AM The Resurrection and The Life” (John 11:25)**. Also, we will witness the raising of Lazarus from the dead. This is the seventh “sign miracle” of Jesus in John’s Gospel. What an incredible re-assuring message we find in this one chapter! It serves as a reminder to us that The One in Whom we have placed our faith is able to conquer even death. He is able to bring hope to the hopeless! But if Jesus had done as His followers had asked of Him in this text, then we would have missed out on the most miraculous sign miracle in all of John’s Gospel! So you see, God knows what we really need far more than that we ever could! This is the reason, that sometimes the answer to our prayers is “No”! It isn’t because God doesn’t care. It is because He has something far greater in store.

In the first section of this passage that we are studying today, there are three “prayer requests” offered up to The Savior. And at first glance, He seems to ignore every one of them. He did, in fact, hear them and was moved by them, but what Jesus wanted for His followers was far more important than what they were asking. Oh, He answered their prayers in a big way! But not in the way that they had hoped. And the result was an amazing testimony to the glory of God! So let us not be discouraged when God doesn’t do things the way that we think He should. Let us wait upon the LORD and see that His ways are far beyond what we could ever imagine. The message today, is about “*Three Unanswered Prayers*”.

“Unanswered” Prayer # 1. (vs. 1-7)

Now a man was sick, Lazarus from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair, and it was her brother Lazarus who was sick. So the sisters sent a message to him: “Lord, the one you love is sick.” When Jesus heard it, he said, “This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Now Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was sick, he stayed two more days in the place where he was. Then after that, he said to the disciples, “Let’s go to Judea again.”

Bethany, where Lazarus lived with his two sisters, is on the east side of The Mount of Olives, approximately two miles from Jerusalem. Jesus had left the region after His encounter with the Pharisees that occurred during the feast of Hanukkah (late December). He had returned to the place where His earthly ministry had begun some twenty-five miles away across the Jordan River. There He had remained for the rest of the winter, along with His disciples.

In the following springtime, leading up to His return to Jerusalem, a messenger was sent from Mary and Martha to inform Jesus that their brother and His friend, Lazarus, was deathly ill. The sisters did not ask Jesus to return to Bethany, they simply wanted Jesus to know that Lazarus was very sick. Perhaps they did not dare ask Jesus to come, for they were aware that the Pharisees had tried to kill Him just a few months prior, and they did not want Him to risk His life by returning to the region.

More than likely, the two sisters wanted Jesus to simply speak the word, and Lazarus would be made well. After all, He had performed miracles such as this before (**John 4:46-54**). This was their prayer, that Jesus would heal their brother. They did not presume to tell Jesus how to do it, but make no mistake, this is what they were praying for. They did what any of us would do when we see a loved one suffering. They wanted them to get well, and were praying to Jesus for a healing miracle. It is perfectly natural to ask God to ease the suffering of those we love.

At first glance, it would appear that Jesus simply ignored their request and had simply allowed Lazarus die. But a careful reading of the text will reveal something entirely different. Jesus was some 25 miles away, when the messenger was sent to deliver Mary and Martha’s urgent message. It would have taken the messenger a whole day’s journey on foot to get to where Jesus was staying. The passage also tells us that Jesus waited an additional two days, before He made the day long journey to the home of Lazarus. And when He arrived, the sisters informed Him that Lazarus had been dead for four days. A simple calculation will, therefore, show us that by the time the messenger from Bethany had made it across the Jordan, Lazarus was already dead.

Of course, Christ in His omniscience knew perfectly well that Lazarus was already dead when the messenger arrived, and He could very well have healed Lazarus from afar even before the messenger had been sent. But He knew that God had a bigger and better plan. This is why He sent the messenger back to Bethany with a message of His own.

...“This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God, so that The Son of God may be glorified through it.” **John 11:4b**

Now don’t miss this! When the messenger returned to the home of Mary and Martha with Jesus’ response to their prayers, they had already buried Lazarus! So, how could Jesus say that this sickness would not end in death? To their way of thinking, it already had. How could Jesus have been so wrong? The problem was... they had misunderstood His Words. He did not say, that Lazarus would not die. He simply said that death would not be the end of the story! Something wondrous was about to happen. And that miraculous “something” would show those who believe in Jesus, once and for all, that He has the power over death and the grave. For you see, Jesus wanted His followers to know for certain, that those who place their faith in Him are guaranteed to pass from death to everlasting *life!* And He was about to prove this fact, once and for all.

I absolutely **love** what it says next about Jesus’ response to Mary and Martha’s prayer request. Let’s look at it carefully.

Now Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. So when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. Then after that, He said to the disciples, "Let's go to Judea again." **John 11:5-7**

Do you see it? Can you see how these two sentences go together? Allow me to help you out a little if you cannot. In essence, this is the message here. It says, Jesus did not do what they asked... **because** He LOVED THEM! You see, if He had simply healed Lazarus with a spoken word, then that would have been the end of it. Mary, Martha, and all of the disciples would not have gotten to witness one of the most wondrous miracles in all of recorded history. And they would **need** to see this miracle, for Jesus would soon be leaving them on to carry out His mission on this earth. They ALL needed to see first hand that He truly is The Resurrection and The Life. This wasn't just about Lazarus anymore, it was about the faith that His people would need in order to carry out the great commission. Mary and Martha thought they knew what was best, but God knew what was truly needed here, which was so much more than they could ever imagine.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways." **Isaiah 55:8**
This is The LORD'S declaration.

So, the first "unanswered" prayer of this passage shows us that God says "No" sometimes, because He loves us and has so much more to offer than what we think we need! Do you believe this truth? Do you believe that God loves you enough to withhold the things that you desire, in order to bless you even more. There is no such thing as an "unanswered prayer". But sometimes, thank God, the answer is... just wait and see!

"Unanswered" Prayer #2. (vs. 8-11)

"Rabbi," the disciples told him, "just now the Jews tried to stone you, and you're going there again?" "Aren't there twelve hours in a day?" Jesus answered. "If anyone walks during the day, he doesn't stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks during the night, he does stumble, because the light is not in him." He said this, and then he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm on my way to wake him up."

When Jesus told His disciples that it was time to return to Judea, they were absolutely terrified! They had witnessed for themselves how the religious leaders had taken up stones to kill their Master just a few months prior. They weren't exactly sure how He had managed to elude their grasp then, but they were fairly certain that they wouldn't be so "lucky" the next time! Little did they know, that luck had absolutely nothing to do with it. Jesus was on a schedule. The Father's timetable had already been established, and nothing, absolutely nothing, could alter His timing.

The second "unanswered" prayer was from the disciples, begging Jesus to reconsider. Once again, these mere mortal men were convinced that they knew what was best. Surely, He would listen to reason this time. It was far too dangerous to return to Judea! Why didn't Jesus just do what He had done before? He could have simply spoken the Word and healed Lazarus. They too, had seen Him do this before. So, why not play it safe, by staying where they were, and healing their friend with another of His famous "long distance miracles?"

Jesus explained to His followers that He was in fact on a schedule. He viewed His time on earth as merely a single day. He knew exactly how much time He had left before the darkness would come. This is the reason that He had no fear of death. There was nothing that *anyone* could do to Him, before His allotted time was come. Let this be a lesson for us all, living in these trying times. If you belong to God, then nothing can hinder you from the purpose that God has ordained for you. Don't be afraid to follow Christ. There is no safer place to be than in the center of God's will!

Jesus told His disciples that, ***“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I’m on my way to wake him up.”*** This is, once again, proof that The LORD was fully aware of Lazarus’ condition. He knew that Lazarus had already died, even before the messenger from Bethany had arrived. There is nothing in the universe that catches our God by surprise.

I love how He refers to Lazarus as “our friend”. There is comfort in this for me. For whether we are alive or dead, if we are in Christ, He is still in complete charge of our welfare. Lazarus had not stopped being a friend of God in death. In fact, death only brings us closer to the best friend we can ever have in our LORD Jesus Christ. As the hymn-writer has so eloquently said, *“What a Friend We Have in Jesus!”*

The disciples still had not figured out all that was going on. But Jesus knows the whereabouts of His own at all times. And Lazarus had never left His sight.

Where can I go to escape your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol (the grave) You are there. If I fly on the wings of the dawn and settle down on the western horizon, even there Your hand will lead me; Your right hand will hold on to me. Psalm 139:7-10

Lazarus was in his grave, but the time had come to go and wake him from his slumber. Jesus is... The Resurrection and The Life! He has the power of over life and death itself. So, would you rather play it safe? Or would you be willing to risk everything in order to follow Him? The only fear that we should ever have as Believers is the fear of missing out on what He has in store for us.

“Unanswered” Prayer #3. (vs. 12-16)

Then the disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will get well.” Jesus, however, was speaking about his death, but they thought he was speaking about natural sleep. So Jesus then told them plainly, “Lazarus has died. I’m glad for you that I wasn’t there so that you may believe. But let’s go to him.” Then Thomas (called “Twin”) said to his fellow disciples, “Let’s go too so that we may die with him.”

I think it would be rather naive for us to assume that the disciples’ “sole concern” was whether or not Lazarus was able to get some rest! Even though they didn’t understand that Jesus was telling them that Lazarus had died, it is quite clear that they are still trying to talk Him out of returning to Judea. “Maybe it would be better for all of us if we stayed here,” they were pleading. “And it would probably be better for Lazarus too, if we just stay here and let him sleep!” This is another way that we sometimes pray isn’t it? We rationalize what we want God to do for us. Because after all, isn’t it better for everyone if we get *our way*?!

Don’t think for a moment that The LORD didn’t see right through to the motives behind this particular prayer. The book of *James* tells us that very often we do not get the answers we desire to our prayers, because we ask with the wrong motives (***James 4:3***). The disciples weren’t all that concerned that Lazarus might end up “sleep deprived”! They were simply trying to save their own skin.

Jesus then told them plainly, that Lazarus was dead. He went on to say that for their sakes, ***“I’m glad for you that I wasn’t there*** (when it happened).” Note that He did not say that He was happy that Lazarus had died. Rather, He said that He was happy that He was not there. Why? Because these fearful disciples needed to see a display of God’s resurrection power, so that they would no longer be afraid. The LORD would be sending them out into the world very soon to give testimony to the Gospel of Christ. There is no place for the timid upon the battlefield, only for the courageous. Lazarus’ death and resurrection would bring glory to The Son, and also, empower these disciples to truly believe that nothing is impossible for God (***Matthew 19:26; Luke 1:37; Philippians 2:3***).

After this third and final prayer request is denied, Thomas at least, had decided to accept the inevitable. **“Let’s go too so that we may die with him.”** Now Thomas gets beat up a lot by a whole

bunch of preachers. And yes, He is the ever doubtful “Eeyore” disciple! (Can’t you just hear Eeyore’s voice in his response?) But I will tell you this one thing about Thomas: you cannot question his loyalty to Jesus! He may have predicted gloom and doom by returning to Judea, but he was willing to go and die by his Savior’s side. Not too shabby in my opinion. How many of us would be willing to go and die for the sake of Christ?

You see, we have the advantage of knowing how this story ends. We have the written Word. No one in this story knew what was about to happen except Jesus. Mary and Martha didn’t know. They thought The LORD had let them down. The disciples didn’t know. They thought that Jesus was recklessly leading them into peril. No one knew the outcome except God The Father and God The Son. And what *They* knew, was that everything that was soon to take place would be the best possible outcome for everyone involved. And why did The Trinity allow things to transpire as They did? Because God loved every single person mentioned in this story. He knew that what they asked of Him was not what was the very best for them. And That is why we are called to trust Him, my friends. He loves us, and His will is always best.

So, the next time you ask God for something, and you do not think that He is listening, trust His Word. If you belong to Christ, there is no such thing as an “unanswered prayer”. There is only God’s perfect will for His children. So submit yourself to God, trusting that His will is best. And pray without ceasing, knowing that whatever the answer may be, it is the best possible outcome... for you!

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:1-2

And let the all who call on His Name say... TRUTH!!!