**THIS SICKNESS WILL NOT END IN DEATH**

April 9, 2017

John 11:1-16

Key Verse 11:4 “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.’”

Fear has always been a problem for mankind. Fear makes people cowardly and ungodly. Someone has counted 530 phobias. Included are cyberphobia, that is the fear of computers or working on computers, and decidophobia, that is the fear of making decisions, and ebephobia, that is fear of teenagers, gamophobia, that is fear of marriage, gynephobia, that is fear of women, hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia, that is fear of long words, petheraphobia, that is, fear of mother-in-law, and phobophobia, that is, fear of phobias. We probably know more about fear today than at any time in the past. But it has not helped us to overcome fear. Ultimately, fear is rooted in the power of death. The devil uses the power of death to terrify people and make them his prisoners (Heb 2:15). Why do we have fear? Because we are afraid that whatever problem we face will end in death. Death makes everything meaningless. Today Jesus declares, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”

Look at verse 1. “Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.” These two sisters lived together in the small community of Bethany with their brother Lazarus. We don’t know much about Lazarus except that he was sick. Probably he was somewhat weak as the only son among two sisters. But in the Jewish culture they lived in he was the leader of the family. He was everything to his sisters. When he became sick, they were very sorry. They tried everything they could, but he did not get better, he got worse. Now, he was near death. Mary and Martha felt that they were losing everything. They hugged each other and cried. Finally they sent word to Jesus, saying, “Lord, the one you love is sick.” They believed that Jesus could heal him. They were confident in Jesus’ love and they expected him to come soon.

When Jesus heard the message sent by the sisters, he 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.” Jesus immediately sensed the seriousness of the sickness. Jesus knew it was life-threatening. But Jesus did not say, “I understand. I will be there right away.” Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death.” Jesus saw this event as a struggle with the power of death. And Jesus declared victory from the beginning. Moreover, Jesus saw this event from God’s point of view. It was not a sorrowful tragedy. Jesus could find God’s good purpose in Lazarus’ sickness. It would be used for God’s great world salvation work. Those who live under the power of sin and death cannot see God’s glory. But those who have God in their hearts can see God’s glory revealed in even the most troubling circumstances.

Look at verses 5-6. “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.” Verse 5 clearly says that Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Jesus was like a father to the family. To a father, when his child is sick, his only thought is to heal him. Surely, Jesus wanted to heal Lazarus. Jesus knew Mary and Martha’s anguish of heart as they watched Lazarus die. To any man, bearing a grieving woman is very difficult. Bearing two grieving women is more difficult. Most men will do anything to comfort a grieving woman even for a few minutes. But Jesus was different. Jesus stayed where he was, causing great pain for the family. It was for God’s glory. The author John stated the purpose of his gospel in 20:31, “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” At that time, Jesus was on the other side of Jordan. It takes one day to go from where Jesus was to Bethany.

According to verse 17, Lazarus died soon after the messenger left. So when Jesus heard the news, Lazarus was already dead. At that time there was a traditional belief among the Jews that the spirit of a dead person would hover around the body for 3 days and leave for good after 3 days. If Jesus went back and raised Lazarus after 2 days, there may have been doubt about Jesus’ resurrection power. But after 4 days, Lazarus was really dead, and everyone who saw Lazarus’ resurrection was convinced of Jesus’ resurrection power. But to Mary and Martha, two days of waiting seemed like eternity. Why isn’t he coming? When Jesus was invited to dinner, he came immediately. But now why is he late?

To the family, Lazarus was the symbol of their security. But sick Lazarus could not be a source of everlasting security. They needed to know who Jesus really was. Jesus is the Son of God who gives life and raises the dead. They needed to see God in Jesus. That is why Jesus let them experience suffering. Jesus’ love led them to know God, find eternal life, and live for his glory. God’s love is different than sin-stained human feelings. God’s love is holy. God’s love is everlasting. People who have God’s love for others seek first to glorify God and next the good of others’ souls. God’s love is revealed clearly through Jesus’ death on the cross. God bore great pain to watch his precious Son Jesus be crucified by evil men. But it was the only way that God could maintain his justice and save mankind from sin. God’s love seeks to restore God’s righteous rule in creation order and to bring about man’s eternal salvation.

Look at verse 4 again. “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be gloried through it.” It means that death is not the end of this sickness. The reason we fear sickness is because it will end in death. Some people are afraid of going for a checkup because they are afraid of being diagnosed of terminal cancer. It seems meaningless to die of sickness such as cancer. But there are so many meaningless end in our lives. Even believers are not exempt from sickness, failures, and family troubles and financial troubles. When we face difficulties, we pray earnestly to Jesus, but Jesus does not seem to answer our prayers. In today’s passage, it was 2 days, but it could be 2 years or 20 years. We think that if we pray to God believing in Jesus’ power, God would solve the problem in an instant, but God does not seem to. Then we become fearful. We become fearful wondering whether it would end in meaningless struggles and “my life will be over.” Even after we struggle very hard to find a job, when we do not find a job, we become fearful, fearful that “I will end up in a temporary position all my life.” When I could not solve problems in my research, I felt like my research career was over, and I should live as an over-the-hill mathematician. J.K. Rowling said, “It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all, in which case you have failed by default.”

Jesus says, “This sickness will not end in death.” Jesus says, “This problem, this misfortune and this sickness will not end in a meaningless struggle.” It will not end in death. It will end in glorifying God. We need to believe. Then we can endure any kinds of difficult circumstances. Under the very difficult situation, we do not lose hope but live in victory. Let’s believe that the present sufferings are not going to end in death, but end in God’s glory. I pray that you may overcome any kinds of difficulties by faith.

After two days passed, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” It was not the news they wanted to hear. Look at verse 8. “‘But Rabbi,’ they said, ‘a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?’” To the disciples, the memory of the religious leaders standing around Jesus with stones in their hands and murder on their faces was all too vivid. They thought Jesus should lay low for a while and stay away from Jerusalem, perhaps for ten or fifteen years. When Jesus said with determination, “Let us go back to Judea,” they should have said, “Yes sir, Master.” Instead, they were shocked. The problem was fear in their hearts. Fear made them rebellious. It was the devil whispering in the ears of the disciples that worked up the fear that was in their hearts.

How did Jesus deal with his disciples? Look at verses 9-10. “Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. It is when a person walks by night that they stumble, for they have no light.’” Twelve hours of daylight refers to the portion of time God has given for man to work. Allegorically, it refers to man’s span of life. Jesus knew he was on God’s time schedule. God had a definite mission for Jesus. Until that mission was completed Jesus could not die. With this faith, Jesus had boldly entered the synagogue time and again and confronted the religious leaders. They wanted to kill Jesus, but Jesus knew it was impossible for them to do so before God’s time came. Jesus wanted his disciples to have the same faith. Their lives were in the hand of God. They had a definite mission and purpose in God. By faith they could do the work of God boldly until they finished their mission. The disciples should have seen Jesus’ example. They also should have listened to Jesus’ words. Jesus is the light of the world. When we follow Jesus, we never walk in darkness and we have nothing to fear.

David Livingstone was a missionary-explorer of Africa. His tombstone reads, “David Livingstone: missionary, traveler, philanthropist. For 30 years his life was spent in an unwearied effort to evangelize the native races, to explore the undiscovered secrets, and to abolish the slave trade.” When Livingstone had arrived in Africa in 1841, it was as exotic as outer space, called the “Dark Continent” and the “White Man’s Graveyard.” although the Portuguese, Dutch, and English were pushing into the interior, African maps had blank unexplored areas—no roads, no countries, no landmarks. Livingstone helped redraw the maps, exploring what are now a dozen countries, including South Africa, Rwanda, Angola, and Congo. And he made the West aware of the continuing evil of African slavery, which led to its being eventually outlawed. David Livingstone said, “I am immortal till my work is accomplished.”

Look at verses 9-10 again. “Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world’s light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light.’” What is the difference between walking in the light and walking at night? When we walk in the light, we do not stumble. “Stumble” means we fall down. When we walk in the light, we can see any obstacles and get around them clearly. Hence we do not stumble.

Jesus went on to tell his disciples, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.” This reveals Jesus’ view of death. To Jesus, death is like a sweet sleep. How nice it is to sleep well after a day of hard work. Likewise, when our mission is completed in this world, we will lay down to sleep in everlasting rest with our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we do not need to be afraid of death.

The disciples did not understand what Jesus was talking about. They said, “Lord if he sleeps he will get better.” So Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.” Jesus’ greater purpose in allowing Lazarus to die was to plant resurrection faith in his disciples. Soon Jesus would die on the cross as a ransom for sinners. Jesus would rise again and go to the Father in heaven. It would be up to his disciples to carry on the gospel ministry. If they were slaves to fear they could do nothing. It was most urgent for them to learn resurrection faith. Once they had resurrection faith, they could go throughout the whole world and preach the gospel boldly. God’s glory would be revealed and creation order would be restored through them. Slaves of fear cannot glorify God. But bold resurrection witnesses can glorify God. We must know that what Jesus wants most for each of us is to learn resurrection faith. The problems and difficulties that exist in our lives have a godly purpose. There is no tragedy in Jesus. Everything is an opportunity to learn resurrection faith and give glory to God.

Jesus concluded, “But let us go to him.” For the disciples to have resurrection faith, they had to take Jesus at his word, overcome their fear and go back to Jerusalem. Though Jesus said, “Let us go,” no one was moving. Then Thomas said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” Thomas did not really understand Jesus. Thomas thought he was going to die with Jesus in Jerusalem. Still, he was ready to follow Jesus. His loyalty is remarkable. But without resurrection faith he was useless.

Finally between the death of Lazarus and his resurrection four days later, his family could not see how God would be glorified in it. That would be revealed at his resurrection. Therefore, if that is where you stand today — and all of us do, in some sense, not seeing clearly how God is glorified in the death of our beloved — do not judge before the resurrection. God is doing more than you can know. And the resurrection will bring it all to light. In the meantime, trust him, and treasure him above all things. Let’s remember Jesus’ promise, “This sickness will not end in death.”