

# GOSPEL OF JOHN

## Encounter Jesus – The Son of the Living God

### *Dealing With Divine Delays*

We are currently living in a time of a ‘divine delay’. As our country went into a shutdown due to the Covid pandemic most of us assumed (especially me) that after a few weeks or in a couple of months everything would return to normal but it has not. Even as God’s children are praying for healing and divine intervention to heal our nation, instead a divine delay has settled upon us. Most of the time when we experience divine delays they are in our personal lives. However, we are currently experiencing a global divine delay together. **2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)** <sup>14</sup> *if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

The Bible provides examples of how people in the past have responded to delay. Not all responded well, and the results are sobering. Moses, the leader of the children of Israel, went up to the mountain of the LORD and was there for 40 days and 40 nights. The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai as Moses received the Ten Commandments. However, Moses’ delay in returning to the people caused them to become ‘antsy’ instead of prayerful and humble. The people demanded that Aaron the priest make them gods (idols made out of gold) to follow and the result was horrific. If you want to read what happened check out **Exodus 32**.

Then, there’s the story of King Saul’s response to a divine delay. In **1 Samuel 13**, Saul and his army were waiting for Samuel to arrive to offer a sacrifice before going to war. Samuel had not yet come, and the soldiers were getting ‘antsy’ preparing to flee rather than fight the Philistines. Growing impatient, Saul chose to offer a sacrifice on his own and his disobedience would eventually cost him his kingdom. How we respond to delays in our lives matters to God.

One of the most powerful and positive biblical examples of a divine delay is the story of Jesus and Lazarus. This Lazarus should not be confused with the beggar Lazarus.

**Read John 11:1-6 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.* <sup>2</sup> *It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.* <sup>3</sup> *So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”* <sup>4</sup> *But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”* <sup>5</sup> *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.* <sup>6</sup> *So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*

When we pray, we often wonder why the Lord does not answer immediately. Undoubtedly, Mary and Martha, wondered why Jesus did not rush to Bethany? It is a natural question – a human one. However, someone has said that rather than ask, “Why?” a better question is, “What?” What can I learn from this

trial? Or, to ask, “How?” How does God want to use this trial in my life? We cannot always know the answer to these questions and we may never know on this side of eternity since God often works in ways that are not revealed to our finite perspective. But consider the following:

(1) The delay may be to display God’s glory. Jesus sent this message: *This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.* We saw the same thing with the man born blind in **John 9:3 (ESV)**<sup>3</sup> *Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.* Bible.org asks, “Does it shock you that God would allow a man to be born blind and live many years in that condition so that God would receive glory through his eventual healing? What about God taking all ten of a man’s children, all of his material possessions, and his health, so that God would be vindicated before Satan and the angels? That’s the story of Job. If that sort of thing bothers you, then you don’t have a big enough view of God. That was the answer that God finally gave to Job.” **Job 38:4 (ESV)**<sup>4</sup> *“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.*

(2) The delay may be either constructive or corrective. To give a personal example, I was born with a vision defect which made me legally blind. I was 48 before a surgery was performed that dramatically corrected my vision. I could have asked, “Why didn’t that surgery happen earlier?” ‘Or, “Why was my vision defective in the first place?” I don’t ask why. This I know: That delay in healing played a dramatic part of forming me into who I am today. **Isaiah 55:8 (ESV)**<sup>8</sup> *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.*

(3) The suffering may be to bring comfort to other Christians or to be a witness to non-Christians. Paul explained in **2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (ESV)**<sup>3</sup> *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,*<sup>4</sup> *who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.* We have seen this up close and personal in people who have suffered greatly physically and then gone on to comfort others.

### **We can always take our troubles to Jesus.**

Mary and Martha did not **demand** that Jesus come and heal their brother. They just sent word to Jesus about their need. Also, the sisters did not say, “Lord, he who loves you is sick.” That was true but rather they said *Lord, he whom you love is ill.* They didn’t appeal to the Lord on the basis of anything in them or in Lazarus, but on the basis of His great love. **1 John 4:19 (ESV)**<sup>19</sup> *We love because he first loved us.*

**Read John 11:7-9 (ESV)**<sup>7</sup> *Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.”*<sup>8</sup> *The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?”*<sup>9</sup> *Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.”*<sup>10</sup> *But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.”*

Most likely the disciples had not been very concerned over the message concerning Lazarus since Jesus had said: *This illness does not lead to death.* Jesus' words were a 'red flag' to the disciples because they knew that Jesus' life had already been threatened. Of course, they had 'overlooked' the obvious! Jesus had walked away from those who would harm him on more than one occasion. Jesus' life was not destined to be taken. His destiny was to freely lay down His life for them and for us and for all of those who went behind and all of those who will come after.

The Jewish day was from sunrise to sunset, and night was from sunset to sunrise. Jesus regarded the period of His ministry as the day the time to be working. He had said in **John 9:4 (ESV)** <sup>4</sup> *We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.*

**Read John 11:11-16 (ESV)** <sup>11</sup> *After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him."*<sup>12</sup> *The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover."*<sup>13</sup> *Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.*<sup>14</sup> *Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died,"<sup>15</sup> and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."*<sup>16</sup> *So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."*

Sleep was a figure of speech for having died but Jesus had to tell the disciples out right that Lazarus was dead. If Jesus had been present to prevent the death of Lazarus, it would not have been as powerful a display of His miraculous power. The things that they experienced during Jesus' ministry and after His death and resurrection would bolster their faith to tell the world about Jesus.

Thomas is most remembered for his doubting that Jesus was alive after the crucifixion. He just could not take the other disciples word for it that Jesus was alive. However, on this particular day he was fearless and said: *Let us also go, that we may die with him.*

**Read John 11:17-22 (ESV)** <sup>17</sup> *Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.*<sup>18</sup> *Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off,*<sup>19</sup> *and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.*<sup>20</sup> *So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.*<sup>21</sup> *Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."<sup>22</sup> *But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."**

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she rushed out to meet Him. Mary stayed inside. Maybe Mary did not get the word as quickly as Martha. We also know that people handle grief in many different ways. Recall that Martha is the one who worked in the kitchen when Jesus visited and Mary stayed at His feet. Probably for Martha, knowing what we know of her personality, she was keeping "busy" and "trying not to think." Funerals involve mourners, preparations and meals to be made. Those are physical things that help at the moment to drown out sorrow. Mary, on the other hand, may have needed solitude - a time to cry and grieve in private. Different personalities handle grief in different ways – that is not to say that one person's way is better than the other.

Some see Martha's words: *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died* as blaming Jesus for not being present when Lazarus died. Mary would echo those same words when she came to Jesus. But, Martha was not blaming Jesus because in the same breath, she said – *I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.*

**Read John 11:23-26 (ESV)** <sup>23</sup> *Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."* <sup>24</sup> *Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."* <sup>25</sup> *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,* <sup>26</sup> *and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"*

Jesus responded to Martha's faith by promising her that her brother would rise again. He was speaking of the immediate situation, but she naturally interpreted His words to mean the future resurrection in the last day.

Martha was the first of the sisters to have a conversation with Jesus concerning Lazarus. Jesus revealed something very important to this woman who is usually pictured as not being particularly "spiritual." It was His fifth "I AM" statement recorded in the gospel of **John**. *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live"* Never think that you are not 'spiritual enough' for the Lord to reveal His Word and His Will to you. Jesus has something special to say to each of His children even when we are busy and mostly concerned with earthly things.

Martha was on the road to coming to a fuller knowledge of what life is about. Are you facing an area of doubt in your life? Have you come like Martha to a crossroads of overwhelming circumstances where your theology is about to get personal? Let the words of Jesus, *I am the resurrection and the life* ring in your ears. This declaration by Jesus once again revealed His deity. It has been said that those who are born only once (meaning physically) die twice (physically and spiritually). Those who are born twice (meaning physically and spiritually) die only once (meaning physically). Those who die physically without faith in Jesus the Savior will experience eternal spiritual death and separation from God forever.

Jesus who is the Resurrection and the Life has the power to raise the dead. The Apostle Paul will later explain in **1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup> *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.* <sup>17</sup> *Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.* <sup>18</sup> *Therefore encourage one another with these words.* This why Jesus' declaration *I AM the Resurrection and the Life* has such significance for us. We will rise again. We will close this lesson while Martha is standing in faith still facing a delay. Remember when we look at the 'big picture', none of the delays of this world really matter. What matters is do you believe Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life?