

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

For The Glory of God John 11:4-6

Intro: One of the defining characteristics of a good story is: everyone wants to know how the story will end. When I was in 5th grade my teacher read one chapter a day to the class of J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Hobbit" and it was pretty nerve wracking. In my high school years, I lost a lot of sleep over some good books: "I'll just finish this page. Ok, let me get to the end of this scene. I've only got a couple more pages to the end of the chapter, I'll just finish it. Let me sneak a look at the next chapter..." People want to know what's going to happen, how it all going to end. They'll stay buried in a book until they finish it or binge-watch a TV series. They discover characters that they like, admire or even hate and they want to know what's going to happen to them.

People have this same desire where their own personal stories are concerned which accounts for the popularity of fortune tellers, palm readers, mystics and psychics in our modern, "science based" society. It's why so many people give heed to political pundits and poll results because they want to try and predict the outcome of some scandal or some election. Of course, sometimes the election is the scandal but...it usually doesn't take long to figure out that men don't know the future. It's impossible for us to determine what's going to happen to us tomorrow, let alone see the course of and ultimate end of our own lives. Since they don't know what's coming, many people dread the future.

Does anyone know how your life story will end? No human knows but there is One who does. God knows. In our text, Jesus comments on the news that a friend was dying and He announced the outcome – and it was good! Now, we'll find out in a little while that by the time Jesus got the message, Lazarus was probably already dead. So what is Jesus saying here? He's actually announcing the final outcome of the story would be a demonstration of God's glory.

4- The best way to approach this verse is with the fact that God does know the future and that only God knows it. Plus, because God knows the future and because He loves His people and is concerned for them, He delights in

revealing at least parts of the future to them. This truth is evidenced by the large section of Prophetic books in the OT and quite a bit of prophecy scattered all throughout the NT as well. In the middle of Isaiah, a group of chapters highlight the illegitimacy of the pagan gods (40-48) and the foolishness of those who worship them. At one point God delivers a challenge and an observation (Isa 41:21-24). The point is: no one but God can tell the future because no one but God controls it. The fact that God does tell the future is one of the proofs that He alone is the true God.

But, God doesn't just reveal the future to show that He is God. He also does it to warn the ungodly of judgment and to encourage the righteous. We see this dynamic as early as Gen 3 where, after the Fall, God came to man with words of judgment and words of promise (15). We can track this same dynamic through out the rest of Scripture. So, with these truths as our background: God foretells the future in order to 1) reveal His power to control it; 2) warn the unsaved and 3) encourage believers; let's consider vs4 once again.

glory- Jesus tells them the outcome would be glorifying to God. Now, we must recognize that while this was true, it was most certainly not true in the way the sisters were expecting. Note: when the sisters received this message from Jesus, their brother was already dead 2 days! Lazarus most likely died on the same day they sent their message to Jesus. Now He says the sickness is not unto death – what? “If He'd been here, He could have healed Lazarus and that would have been glorifying to God but it's much too late for that now.” God may be glorified by all this in the final resurrection but we'll all be gone then. It's too late for us now.” If that's what they were thinking, it would have been understandable, even logical but it would have been wrong. Truth is, the outcome, though different from their plans, was actually going to result in far more glory to God than they could ever have imagined!

Lazarus' resurrection was glorifying to God. To glorify God means to acknowledge Him as being who He truly is. That's what worship is all about. It's not about speed of the songs, or singing with perfect pitch. It's about lifting our hearts and minds in concert and seeing God for who He is and praising Him for it. Since one of God's attributes is omnipotence, Lazarus' resurrection clearly caused many to recognize this great power and glorify Him for it.

God's glory was also seen in a greater way in the changed lives of those who took part in or witnessed the miracle. It changed Lazarus! He became a great witness for Jesus. He'd experienced a profound transformation and showed it by his demeanor. We saw last week how it affected his sisters but the resurrection of Lazarus also had an affect on the disciples and this was certainly God-glorifying (14-15). Glad? He's saying, "Don't be surprised at My words and don't be dismayed at the circumstances. Nothing ever happens to you that I've not approved and nothing's approved that I've not already appointed good results from. Lazarus is dead and his sisters are mourning, yes; but the end will be good, even for you. For your faith in Me will be strengthened by this and you all will influence multitudes." Learn from this for the times when trouble enters your life. Don't complain – look for how it will glorify God.

This miracle also had an effect on the close friends of the family. These are described in vs19. But, vs45 gives the end result: they came to sympathize and stayed to believe! There were also sight-seers (rubberneckers); a circle of people just standing around. They knew Lazarus had died and that Jesus had arrived and they just came for the show (41-42). Did these believe? Some did, some didn't (46). To these unbelievers, this miracle was really more of a condemnation; for, even though it irrefutable evidence of Jesus' divine power, they wouldn't accept it, so it actually increased their guilt before God. But even in this, God was glorified because He has been so faithful and patient in demonstrating His great love and power to sinners.

Jesus also says that not only will this glorify God but Himself as well. How was Jesus glorified by Lazarus' death?

- 1) Jesus is God so anything that brings honor to the Father brings honor to Him also. Their glory is the same.
- 2) This revealed Jesus as One who's able to deal with any situation. Jesus delayed His return to Bethany until Lazarus had died and had been buried 4 days. This means Jesus got Himself into a predicament. But, He got Himself into that predicament just so He could get Himself out of it! You know what? God does the same thing for all of His children - all the time! That's God's way. If God wants you to trust Him, He puts you in a difficult spot. If He wants you to trust Him greatly, He puts you in an impossible spot. When

something's impossible, we are forced to rely on Him. The difficulties in our lives are for our betterment and His glory.

3) Not so obvious, but Jesus would be glorified by what was to come; not just Lazarus' resurrection but the cross. The raising of Lazarus would directly lead to Christ's death. This was the final spark needed to ignite all the pent-up hostility of the religious leaders against Jesus and drive them towards the ultimate sacrilege. Even though Jesus foresaw this outcome, He still moved steadily towards it.

God's love for us is not a pampering love, it's a perfecting love. God's love for us is no guarantee of shelter from the problems and pains of this life. God the Father loves Jesus the Son yet; He permitted His beloved Son to drink the cup of sorrow and experience the shame and pain of the cross. We must never think God's love is incompatible with our suffering. These 2 were certainly united in Jesus Christ. It's not important that Christians are comfortable but it is important that we glorify God in all that we do (1 Cor 10:31).

With His message to the sisters, the message that appeared to come too late; Jesus was urging Martha and Mary to believe His word no matter how discouraging the circumstances might appear. His Word was true and He wanted them to lay hold to this promise. When we find ourselves confronted by sickness, disappointment or even death, our only encouragement is in God's Word. It tells us what happened in the past – that Jesus went through it all before us. It tells us about the present – that Jesus promises to go with us through the trials and testing. It also tells us about the future – that we will one day see Jesus for who He is and we will be like Him! Jesus suffered greatly and He triumphed gloriously – and so shall we. Whatever we are going through is for the glory of God – Believe it!

5-6- It's interesting the John emphasizes the love Jesus had for each individual member of this family because what he says in vs6 might cause you to doubt that love – if you didn't know any better. Lazarus was sick despite the fact that Jesus loved him and could heal him. On the surface, this seems strange but we've already seen that sickness and death are still compatible with Christ's love. Beyond this, upon hearing that Lazarus was sick, Jesus delayed His return to Bethany for 2 days rather than immediately rushing to help Lazarus or comfort the sisters. The juxtaposition of **5-6**

causes us to see that this delay was in some way connected to His love for these friends and flowed from it.

How can this be? If we were in a similar situation, we'd immediately try to help to the extent of our ability or at least like to think we would. But Jesus doesn't. He stays where He is and continues His ministry work for 2 more days. This is an important text that deserves careful study – especially for those who've experienced God's delay – in answering prayers, giving direction or removing difficulties. Does God delay? Yes, but it's always for a purpose.

First thing we should understand is that Jesus stayed where He was for 2 days because He loved them. This was a delay of love. We might not understand this but we also can't see the end from the beginning, like God can; so, we can't see how God's delays contribute to an overall plan. Besides, in the midst of trials we usually don't see clearly, even though God might have made His plan clear. It's hard to see through tear-filled eyes. But, even though we can't see how the situation will end or why it has come to us, we can know that it flows from Christ's love and is controlled by it. Christ's delays are the delays of love. Thus, His delays are to be interpreted in the light of His love.

We must also know that if Christ's delays flow from His love then they're never delays of indifference. Jesus never delays because He doesn't care. It's easy to think this because delays often come from indifference in human affairs. Service is often slow or shoddy because someone doesn't care to do a good job. Traffic is slow and hazardous because people are busy checking email or posting on Facebook instead of just driving. The vast majority of delays we suffer in life are caused by human indifference but the Bible teaches indifference is never a characteristic of God.

Also, Christ's delays are never because of preoccupation on His part. Jesus never delays His answer because He's too busy to deal with our problem. This was the accusation Elijah threw at the priests of Baal when he had that big showdown on top of Mt. Carmel. They were trying to get Baal to light a fire under their prepared sacrifice but nothing was happening. Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry louder, maybe he's deep in thought, or busy, or traveling or taking a nap" ([1 Kings 18:27](#)). Of course, nothing happened. Baal was unable to respond to his worshippers. But, as soon as Elijah

prayed to Jehovah, who is never preoccupied, fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice and the wood, the stones of the altar and the 12 barrels of water Elijah had poured over it all.

God's delays are never from indifference or preoccupation. They're delays of love; which means they're purposeful. Love always has a purpose. Thus, we're right to seek purposes in God's delays. That doesn't mean we'll always be able to say in detail what God's purposes are. His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. We can't see the end from the beginning, as He can. Still, we can look for purposes. What might some of them be?

Sometimes God delays in order 1) to mold our wills to conform to His perfect will. It's not so much that we don't want God's will, it's that we desire our own will over His most of the time. God kept Israel in the wilderness 40 years to teach them obedience; until they became the disciplined fighting force He'd some day use to conquer Canaan.

2) to strengthen our faith. Our faith doesn't grow much if we always get an immediate response. No, our faith grows when we're forced to wait, trusting that God knows what He's doing and that He'll fulfill His promises to us eventually and in the proper time. Abraham's faith grew this way. God had promised Abram descendents but it wasn't until he and his wife were too old to have children that this promise was fulfilled. The years of delay were the years in which Abraham's faith grew the most.

3) to honor His own name and to honor Jesus (4). Some may find this puzzling or offensive but only among those who don't know Jesus. Jesus is glorious so to honor Him is the only proper and desirable thing any of us can do.

In light of all this, we need to interpret circumstances by the love of Christ and not Christ's love by circumstances. If we fail to do this, we'll be farther from understanding the circumstances and we may begin to question the love. But, if we do this, if we begin to interpret our circumstance in the light of divine love; then, as God gives light, we'll begin to see how He's using those circumstance to perfect our will, strengthen our faith and bring glory to His own name.

Another thing to consider – delayed help always comes at the right time. Remember, heaven’s clock is different from ours. Our day has 24 hrs but God’s has 1000 years. We must not judge God’s actions by our conception of time. We should know that God always acts immediately and decisively when the time is right. God is never too early or too late. His delay makes the deliverance more poignant and joyous when it is granted.

The last thing we should understand is that the best help is never delayed. If we pray for guidance, healing or a change in circumstances, these answers are often delayed. But in the most important things; those that concern spiritual help, growth and salvation - there is no delay. In these, the help comes instantly. [Isa 65:24](#) says, “It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.” If you’re praying for spiritual help, spiritual insight, salvation, or a deeper relationship with God, then you can be sure that God hears you and He is moving even now to meet your need.

When Peter stepped out of the boat, he quickly became distracted by the difficult circumstances around him and he began to sink. He cried out, “Lord, save me.” the Bible then says that, “Immediately, Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him” ([Mt 14:30-31](#)). Immediately! This was no time for delays. Help was needed and help came instantly.

It’s quite possible that in our own lives, God delays in the former areas because we pray so little about the important things, the more needful things. I challenge all believers to focus our prayers more on spiritual growth and a closer relationship with the Lord. If we do, I can’t promise that we’ll never experience difficult circumstances but, you will have a better understanding of those circumstances and your suffering will be lessened as you seek to glorify God in them.

God will be glorified in all things.☺