

Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 12-9-18

To Adult Teachers:

December 2 we will study John 11:1-6, 30-45 Discussion questions are:

1. What causes people to say, "*Behold how he loved him.*"?
2. Take a moment and visualize Jesus sitting under a canopy in a cemetery where your body lies in a coffin, awaiting burial. See the tears on his face as he remembers you. How does that make you feel?
3. In vs. 3, Martha and Mary describe their brother as "*he whom you love.*" John describes himself as "*the one whom Jesus loved*" (13:23; 19:26).
 - a. What does that tell you about Jesus' relationship with people?
4. How does this story help us understand that just because Jesus loves you does not mean your life will be trouble free?
5. How was Lazarus' death "for God's glory?" (vs. 4)
 - a. What would be the value of seeing the death of a loved one as "for God's glory?"
6. Agree/disagree: "*You will die the way you live.*"
7. If it's true that life is like a grindstone and either grinds you down or polishes you, how do you opt to be polished rather than ground down?
8. Do you feel like God's favorite child?
9. How do you understand these 2 statements: "*I am going to judge my circumstances by Jesus' love. I am not going to judge Jesus' love by my circumstances.*"?

Sermon: *The Love of Christ* John 11:1-6, 30-45

This is the last of the 7 miracles John records in his gospel. It's the climax. It's the big one. In this miracle we see both the tremendous tender heart of Christ and the tremendous power of Christ. When Jesus expresses his emotions at the graveside of Lazarus, the people comment, "*Behold how he loved him.*" If you want to get over your fear of death, imagine Jesus sitting under a canopy in a cemetery where your body lies in a coffin, awaiting burial. See the tears on his face as he remembers you. Behold how he loved you!

There is one inaccuracy in that picture. Did you catch it? It is not grammatically correct to speak of how much Jesus loved you. The correct language has to be, "Behold how he loves you." Even when your body lies still in the coffin, behold how he loves you! As far as the love of Christ for you is concerned nothing changes when you die. Jesus' love is always present tense.

This great story of Lazarus tells us so much about the love of Christ. It tells us about the wisdom of Christ's love and the valor of Christ's love. When Lazarus was about to die his sisters sent a message to Jesus saying, "*The one you love is sick.*" Do you hear the

implication in that statement? Just because Jesus loves you does not mean your life will be trouble free. Jesus deeply loved Lazarus but Lazarus not only got sick and died, he did it twice! We aren't told about the second time he died but at some point later on in his life, Lazarus died again. That makes me wonder how a man who had died once would feel about his impending death the second time, but we won't go there this morning. When Jesus hears of Lazarus' terminal illness he comments, *"It is for God's glory."* That is very similar to Jesus' comment on the man born blind recorded in John 9. He said, *"This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."* Folks if you ever get that, your response to your own suffering and the suffering of people you love will change forever. Pick any tragedy you want, any illness you want, any heartache you encounter and ask "Why?" and the correct answer is always the same, "For the glory of God." The great question for all of us when we suffer is, "Am I seeking to glorify God through this or am I stubbornly demanding that God explain himself to me?" If you ever get it – that everything that happens to you in life, good and bad, is an opportunity for you to glorify God – you will abandon the foolish assumption that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people.

People die the way they live. Nobody decides at the last moment to do a "180" and start glorifying God as they die. People die the same way they live. If you live a negative, critical life you will die a negative, critical person. If you live an angry, cynical life you will die an angry, cynical person. If you live with guilt and fear you will die feeling guilty and afraid. If you live with faith and gratitude you will die believing and grateful. If you live finding ways to glorify God in everything that happens you will die glorifying God. You will die the same way you live. If you don't want to die the way you lived last week, change the way you are living starting right now.

I read somewhere that life is like a grindstone; it either wears you down or polishes you. The choice to be polished by life is best exemplified by finding ways to glorify God through the unpleasant things that come to you in life. You have an incurable illness? Glorify God! Your loved one died? Glorify God! You were hit by divorce? Glorify God! Your retirement funds disappeared? Glorify God! You lost your job? Glorify God! You woke up the other day and discovered you had gotten old? Glorify God!

Look in this text at how Mary and Martha handle the suffering of their brother – they pray and they wait. They pray. They send a message to Jesus, *"Lord, the one you love is sick."* That's the first thing they do. Have you ever heard anyone say, "Well, there is nothing left to do but pray."? That is not a very God-honoring comment is it? "We've tried everything else, now I guess we will give prayer a shot." The first thing Mary and Martha do is send a message to Jesus. You have to love their prayer. *"Lord, the one you love is sick."* "The one you love" - I don't think Jesus loved Lazarus more than he did anyone else. But his effect on people was to make them feel especially loved. Remember the apostle John describing himself as the one whom Jesus loved? After my mother died I asked each of my 3 siblings if they felt like they were mother's favorite child. They each answered, "Yes." I couldn't help but be amused at their answers because there was never any doubt who mother's favorite child was - me! Jesus seemed to have that effect on lots of people. *"Lord, the one whom you love is sick."* It's a

wonder Jesus didn't send back a message saying, "Which person that I love?" Do you understand you are not only God's child, you are his favorite child?

Martha and Mary prayed and they waited. I find their waiting is inspirational to me. They send a message that Lazarus is sick. Jesus sends a message back, "*This is not a sickness that will end in death.*" So they wait and Lazarus gets sicker and sicker. Undoubtedly they must have kept reminding each other, "He said this won't end in death." They wait and Lazarus gets sicker and sicker and dies. When Jesus finally arrives Martha simply says, "I wish you'd been here." The translation of John 11:6 is very important. The NIV dodges what the text actually says. It actually says, "*Jesus loved Lazarus therefore he stayed where he was until Lazarus died.*" That is an absolutely startling statement. Jesus loves Lazarus therefore, rather than going and healing him, he stays put. Rather than healing him long distance, he lets Lazarus die. What that event teaches us is extremely important. Jesus delays to the point that the human mind can no longer comprehend how he could ever fulfill his promises.

I know there are people here today who struggle with the promises of God that seem to have vanished from your life. Promises like, "*Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.*" Some of you hear that and say, "There is no way that will ever be true for me. The desires of my heart have long since gone away." You are exactly where Martha and Mary were. He promised, "*This sickness will not end in death.*" and Lazarus is dead. To wait on the Lord is to decide, "I am going to judge my circumstances by Jesus' love. I am not going to judge Jesus' love by my circumstances."

So, there is great wisdom in the way Jesus loves us. There is also great valor in the way Jesus loves us. Imagine you are watching that episode at Lazarus' tomb through a pair of binoculars as you stand on a hillside some distance away. Watch how Jesus strides up to that grave. Raise the binoculars to his face. Look at his eyes. See his eyes blur and tears well up. Look at his chest as his breathing quickens with the emotion he feels. Look at his lips as they quiver when he speaks. Then jump 2000 years into the future and see him expressing the same intense emotion at your graveside. Watch him answer the question the old funeral hymn asks, "Does Jesus care when my heart is pained to deeply for mirth and song? Does Jesus care when I've said 'good-by' to the dearest on earth to me and my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks, is it aught to him? Does he see?" Why is Jesus standing at Lazarus' tomb weeping? Why doesn't he march up to the tomb with a big smile on his face and say to the crowd, "Wait till you see this!" If you look at the text it's abundantly clear that he weeps because he intensely identifies with the grief of Martha and Mary. It's right there in vs. 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....Jesus wept.*"

There is such valor in the way Jesus loves those who are hurting at the graveside of Lazarus. Vs. 33 says he was not only deeply moved in spirit but was also troubled. What was he troubled about? He knows that with this miracle of resurrecting Lazarus from the dead the Sanhedrin will begin plotting his death. Vs. 53 says that from that day on they

plotted to take his life. He knows that if he raises Lazarus he is burying himself. That is the valor of Jesus love.

Behold how he loved him! Behold how he loves you!