

Glorified Through Illness

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[0 : 0 0] turned together now back to John's Gospel. And as I said, we're resuming our study in John tonight. Earlier this year, we worked our way through chapters 1 to 10. And one of the things that we saw, particularly, as was really in many ways from chapter 2 and 3 onwards, right through to chapter 10, one of the things that we saw was people interacting with Jesus. Some people were drawn to him, captivated by the things he was doing and saying. Other people were perplexed by him, trying to figure out what was going on, who he really was. And some people were becoming increasingly opposed to him. And in many ways, as the further you work through John, the more you see that opposition rising. And as we looked at that, we saw that all of that is teaching us more and more about who Jesus is, about what he's come to do, and about the fact that he's promised eternal life to all who put their trust in him. We're resuming our study in chapter 11. And as we move through the rest of this Gospel, John is taking us closer and closer to the great focal point and climax. He's taking us closer and closer to the cross. And we're picking it up again in John 11, which is one of the most famous, most fascinating, and most beautiful chapters in the whole of the Bible. And we're going to attempt the impossible, which is to look at it all in one go, well, or certainly verses 1 to 44, which means that we're missing out pretty much everything. But we'll try and focus on what we can in our time together.

And I'm going to read again these opening four verses. Now, a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha, was Martha who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. So the sister sent to him, saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill. 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 Man may be glorified through it. And especially I want to focus on what Jesus said there in the last part of verse four. He speaks about Lazarus' illness. And he explains that this illness is going to be a means by which the Son of God is going to be glorified. This illness is going to bring glory. It's going to reveal more and more about who Jesus is.

And so that's our title, glorified through illness. And we're going to look at five things in particular, all of which are revealing more and more of Jesus' glory. They are the fact that Jesus is glorified in his timing, glorified in his promises, glorified in his anger, glorified in his weeping, glorified in his words. Can you believe that? There's no capital letter. That's terrible. So my apologies. There should have been a capital letter. So let's work through these one by one. First of all, Jesus is glorified in his timing. And we see that in the kind of fascinating description of what takes place when Jesus hears about Lazarus' illness. We're told that he loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus.

He's heard that Lazarus is ill and you're expecting the very next line to say, so they immediately got up and left and went to Bethany as quickly as they possibly could. But of course that's not what it says. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was two days longer. And then the disciples, then after that, after the two days, he says, right, we're going to go to Jerusalem. And the disciples are saying, Rabbi, the Jews that's trying to kill you, why do you want to go there? And then you have these fascinating words of Jesus, either not 12 hours in the day, if anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him. Now, what's going on here and how do we understand all of this? Well, what I want us to see is that in these words, we see a fascinating combination of patience and urgency in Jesus. We see patience and urgency, patience, because when he heard about Lazarus, he waited. As we said, he stayed where he was for two days.

And that seems so surprising because if any of us got a message that a dear friend was ill, we would immediately think, well, we need to do something. We need to try and get there. We need to try and go and help. And the last thing that we would do is think, well, I think I just sit for two days before I do anything. We just wouldn't do that. And yet that's what Jesus does. He shows this fascinating, surprising patience. He's ready and willing to wait. And at this stage of the chapter, you're left thinking, why are you doing that?

[5 : 42] And as you read on, even Mary and Martha seemed to kind of, and Mary and Martha's words seem to kind of bring this issue up again, because they both say to Jesus, if you'd only been here, and we feel like, well, he could have been here, but he waited for two days and we're left a little bit more perplexed. But of course, by the time you reach the end of the passage, it all becomes perfectly clear. The delay makes the miracle all the more amazing.

Because preventing Lazarus's death would have been impressive. Reversing Lazarus's death is mind blowing. And the patience that Jesus showed meant that you have the most amazing miracle, whereby the man who's been in the tomb for four days is called out. But alongside that patience, there's also urgency. And you see that in verses nine and 10, this little section here, because the disciples are nervous and wary about going up to Jerusalem. And you'll maybe remember from, many of you will remember from chapters five to 10, you think, well, no wonder, because opposition to Jesus is increasing. And in many ways, Jerusalem's the last place that they want to go, because it's now becoming a very dangerous thing to do. And so for the disciples, the instinctive mindset is to keep a low profile. They want to avoid danger. They want to keep their head down. Except for Thomas, who is just mistered depressing, and is like, well, let's go and we'll just die, because they're convinced that that's what's going to happen. Jesus, though, he pushes back against all of that mindset, the mindset that says, let's keep away from there. And he says, there's no time for that. We need to walk while it is the day. In other words, he is recognizing that his time is limited. His mission is reaching its climax. And for that reason, it's not a time to hide. It's a time for urgency. And there's such a beautiful balance here. Jesus waits patiently so that this heartbreaking situation can become one of the most famous and most beautiful miracles in all of history. But Jesus is also urgent. He might have delayed two days, but that was not in order to hide. It was actually in order to make the revelation of his glory even more mind blowing for everyone to see. And so in that balance of patience and urgency, in Jesus' timing, we see more of his glory. And as we see that, it challenges us. It challenges all of us because so often our patience and our urgency are misplaced.

In other words, we're patient about the wrong things and we're urgent about the wrong things. Very often, all of us and the world around us is patient about stuff that has no eternal consequences whatsoever. It's urgent, sorry, I think I said patient, I meant urgent. We're urgent about stuff that has no eternal consequences. So we're urgent about getting home in time for the football or for Strictly or for Britain's Got Talent. We're urgent about checking the news on Facebook. We're urgent about getting new clothes. We're urgent about hearing the latest piece of news. And I'm just as guilty of that myself. So often there's a sense of urgency to find out sports news. I'm very guilty of that. But at the same time, alongside that urgency about stuff that doesn't matter, when it comes to the stuff that really does matter, when we talk about Jesus, when we talk about salvation, when we talk about how we're going to respond to the gospel, when we talk about what our next step might be in our journey of faith, what do we do? We think, I'll leave it a couple of days. I'll just leave that for now. And do you see what we're doing there? We're urgent about the wrong things. We're patient about the wrong things. Jesus shows His glory in that His timing is never misplaced.

Secondly, Jesus is glorified in His promises. We see that set before us beautifully in the conversation with Martha. She came to meet Him. She said, Lord, if you'd been here, my brother wouldn't have died. But even now, I know that whatever you ask of God, He'll give it to you. Jesus said, your brother will rise again. Martha said, I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? She says, yes, Lord, I believe you, you're the Christ, the Son of God, who's coming into the world. Now, this statement here where Jesus says, I'm the resurrection and the life, that's one of the famous I am statements that we have in John's Gospel and that we've seen. We've seen some of them already as we've been working through the Gospel. Here, Jesus is standing before a dear friend who's been confronted by the awful reality of death. And he says these magnificent words, I am the resurrection and the life. And with those words come the promise that you can see there in verse 29, whoever believes, though they may die, yet they shall live.

Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Now, there's so much that we could say about that. There's 10 sermons in that one verse. What I want to think about is the fact that what Jesus promises here at the start of his meeting with Mary and Martha is verifying everything, is verified by everything that happens at the end. In other words, when Jesus performs the miracle of calling Lazarus out of the grave, that is just confirming everything that he's already promised. And that's so powerful in revealing his glory. Jesus' actions, in other words, verify his promises. And that's an incredibly important thing that we see running through the Gospels. You see Jesus saying, this is going to happen. And then later on, it happens. And so the two fit together. And in fact, it's also a really important concept for understanding how the whole Bible works. Because sometimes you can find yourself.

[13:20] Sometimes I think some people, maybe you felt like this as well, you look at the Bible and you kind of think, why did God bother with the Old Testament? Because in so many ways, the New Testament is the fulfillment of everything. That's where everything becomes clear. That's where Jesus comes. And you think, why did we have to have this big bit at the start?

And sometimes people will say, why didn't God just fix everything? If everything went wrong in Genesis 3, why didn't He just fix it in Genesis 4? Well, one of the key points which answers that kind of questioning is to recognize that the Old Testament is laying a foundation of promises that the New Testament then verifies. And you don't need to think about that for very long to realize that that's absolutely crucial if the Gospel is going to be persuasive. It makes it so much more persuasive the fact that what Jesus does confirms a whole set of promises that have been laid out over centuries in the Old Testament and even laid out in His own ministry. This is perhaps a terrible illustration and forgive me if it is. But I don't know if any of you have ever played darts. Darts is one of the many sports I wish I was good at, but I'm actually rubbish at. Occasionally you throw it and you hit table 20 or you hit bullseye and it's great. And you think, well that's quite impressive. You throw it and it hits bullseye. But what's even more impressive is the person who can stand up and they'll say, I'm going to hit bullseye. And then that's exactly what they do. The action and the promise combined together to make you think, wow, that guy's either very, very lucky or he's very good at darts. And that's maybe a not brilliant illustration of what I'm trying to explain here about the New Testament. The fact that it carries so much more weight because there's this connection between the promises laid down in the Old Testament fulfilled in the New. And what that means for Jesus is another crucial point. It means that the promises that Jesus makes like this and the promises he makes about his death and resurrection as we look towards the cross, all of these mean that his mission is exposed to public scrutiny right the way through. So he's saying stuff. He's saying, Lazarus is going to rise again. And he's saying, I'm going to go to

Jerusalem and I'm going to be betrayed and I'm going to be killed and I'm going to rise again. And he's saying that to people and that means that his claims are then exposed to public scrutiny. And what that means is that that if he's wrong, then he's a madman.

He's talking nonsense. But if these things actually happen, the Son of God has come. Jesus's words are verified and all of it is showing us his glory. And that balance of promise and fulfillment together is teaching us a crucial lesson about how we can be able to respond to the gospel and Martha illustrates exemplifies it for us magnificently. What does Martha do in these verses? She does something so crucial. She believes before she sees. Martha believes before she sees. And that is so crucial because so many people, maybe even some of you, maybe some people watching at home, the thing that you are desperate for is to be able to be able to be an hua, hua. hospital. And hope that someone comes to see. And then you'll believe. As you think of if God would just do this that would confirm things. For me, If God would show me this sort of T this would happen- then I would believe. If I see this, then I will believe. And so many people wanted to be that way around, that we will see. And then if we see, then we will believe. But that's not how the Gospel works. The Gospel works the other way around. If you believe, then you will see. And the truth is, that's actually how life works. We tend to think that life is based on this, you know, if you see it, then you should believe it. But really life doesn't really work like that very often. And in so many situations we have the same pattern where you actually have to believe long before you see. For example, India just landed on the moon. Did they start by seeing that it could be done? Or did they start by believing it could be done? And it's the same in much less spectacular ways. When you plant a seed in the garden, it's not because you've seen that it's already grown. It's because you believe it's going to grow. And then you will see the plant come up. When you sit your exams, you don't go into your exam room because you've seen that you've already passed. You go into your exam room because you believe that you will pass. And all being well, that's exactly what you will see. And it's telling us that if you expect to see everything before you can believe it, you're looking for something that life can't actually give you. It's only by believing that you will see. And that is absolutely true of the gospel. It's by believing in the Lord. It's by taking that step. It's by not waiting until you're ready. Then you will see God doing amazing things. And what you will see is amazing, not just in this life, but in eternity, what he's promised for us, what our eyes will see is incredible.

Jesus is glorified in his promises. Third thing we see is that Jesus is glorified in his anger. That's set before us in verse 24, 28 to 34, but it's actually very, very easy to miss because it's not translated very well in English. Jesus spoke to Martha, then Mary came and the Jews watched her go then for verse 32. Now Mary came to where Jesus was, saw him. She fell at his feet, saying to him, Lord, if you've been here, my brother would not have died when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, wait, have you laid him? And they said, come and see. Now that phrase I've underlined there is the phrase that's not translated as well as I think it could have been because the word that's been translated, the word in Greek that's been translated deeply moved is a word that means outraged. It's a word describing anger. And so Jesus wasn't moved in the sense of, you know, I feel so sorry for you. He was moved in the sense that he was outraged by what was in front of him. And that's the amazing thing that we see in these verses. You see

[21 : 02] Jesus is angry and you think what's made him angry? And the answer is the reality of grief and loss and death. He sees a friend in front of him who's broken because her brother died and it makes him so angry at what death does to people. And that shows us his glory. And that is so crucial for us to think about because so often our anger shames us. So often our anger is when we say and do the things that we regret the most. So often our anger is where people get a glimpse of the worst aspects of our character. And it can happen so easily.

You can overreact to something whether that's at work, something goes wrong and you get angry with a colleague or with a customer. It can happen at home. Sometimes we find it really easy to be well behaved when we're out and about in public but then at home we can be cranky and easily angered. Sometimes it can happen in the car. You're driving along and somebody does something that you think is ridiculous, instantly fires up anger.

Sometimes it can be watching question time. I think definitely when you're watching question time but I don't watch it anymore. Sometimes it's when you're watching football, especially VAR, you can see it just now. Every weekend there's frustrations for people. Sometimes we can, sometimes it can be more serious. Sometimes we can hold a grudge against someone for years all because we're angry with them. Sometimes we get angry because we see people succeeding in ways that make us covetous and jealous. Or sometimes people can just get on our nerves and they're just annoying. In all of these ways, very, very often, our anger is something to be ashamed of, not with Jesus, never with Jesus. His anger glorifies him. It shows us how amazing he is because he is outraged that death is causing so much pain and sorrow to this family and to the whole of humanity. This is really important for us to recognize because our negative experiences of anger as a human race and as a society can often leave people wanting a God who is never angry. You've seen that particularly over the last hundred years or so. People have tried to move away from any idea that God might be angry because they think, well, anger is a negative thing and

I don't want God to be associated with that sort of thing. But the danger of doing that is that what it does is it leaves us with a God who's numb. What we need is not a God who never gets angry and is all just sort of like floaty, nicey, nicey. We don't need that at all. But what we need instead is a God whose anger is never stupid. We need a Savior whose anger is consistently directed to all the horror and brutality of sin and in Jesus, that's what we have. And it's glorious. His glory is revealed in his anger. Fourth, he's glorified in his weeping. That's captured in the shortest verse of the Bible. Jesus wept. So the Jews said, see how he loved him. That verse there is only two verses long, shortest verse in the Bible, but if that verse wasn't there, there will be such a huge gap in our knowledge and understanding of Jesus. He wept as he stood with Mary and Martha.

And does that make him weak or soft? Of course it doesn't. It actually teaches us something so beautiful about Jesus. You know, you ask the question, what do you look for in a hero?

[26 : 01] You think, well, somebody who'll fight for you, somebody who'll be strong for you, somebody who will protect you, someone who'll teach you, somebody who will inspire you, and Jesus does all of these things. But you know, one of the biggest things that we need in life is somebody who will weep with us and somebody who will weep for us. And that's what we have in Jesus. And that's why every tear that Jesus shed is a droplet of glory. It's showing us how much he cares. It's showing us the depth of his compassion. It's showing us the strength of his bond and connection to his people. And all of it is reminding us that you cannot love without being exposed. You cannot love somebody without that making you vulnerable. In fact, only the strongest love can leave you weak enough to weep. And that's exactly what we see in Jesus. And if Jesus was always just strong and always just holding it everything together, he would have a love that never cries. But every one of you knows that love cries. And that's what we see in Jesus. He's glorified in his weeping. And then last of all, he's glorified in his words. We see that as everything comes to a climax.

Some of them were saying, could he not have opened the eyes of the blind? Could he who could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying? Then Jesus deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave and a stone lay against it.

Jesus said, take away the stone. Martha, the sister of the dead man said to him, Lord, by this time there will be an odor for he's been dead for four days. Jesus said to her, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you've heard me. I knew that you always hear me. But I said this on account of the people standing at home that they may believe that you sent me. When he'd said these things, he cried out with a loud voice. Lazarus come out. The man who had died came out. His hands and feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, unbind him and let him go. Now again, there's loads to see here. Time's running out as it always does. I want to focus on two things that Jesus says, both of which reveal his power. Jesus is glorified in his words here and in particular, his words reveal his power. And that power is revealed in two amazing statements. He says, Lazarus come out. And then he says, unbind him and let him go. And these two phrases captured two great magnificent truths that lie at the heart of Christianity. You have Jesus calling Lazarus out of the grave. And that's speaking to us so powerfully about the fact that Jesus has come to save us from death to give us eternal life. And so Lazarus is rescued from that grave, saved. But then

Jesus as he comes out wrapped in the grave clothes, covered in the cloths, Jesus then says unbind him and let him go. And that is just as important because it's telling us that Jesus doesn't save Lazarus and then leave him kind of bound with all the shackles and marks of death. He saves Lazarus and he says, get all that stuff off him. Loosen.

Let him go. And it's teaching us the twofold aspects of what it means to be a Christian, the fact that we are saved from death and then we are freed, unbound to have new life serving Jesus. And so you've got, if you like justification and sanctification where we're saved and then we're being transformed, you've got evangelism and discipleship coming to faith, growing in faith, living for Jesus. You've got rescue and restoration. You've got the fact that in the gospel we are saved from and saved for. Saved from sin and saved for a new life.

[31 : 19] And that's such an important balance that's presented to us in the gospel. We're taken from death to life. Jesus says, come out and then we're freed from the binding chains of death. We're free to live for Jesus. And it's all by his grace. We're saved by grace and we're transformed by grace. And you may have come across this phrase if you've read theology books. John Calvin and others spoke of that in terms of duplex gratia, which makes me sound so clever. I'm really not. It's just, it's Latin for double grace. Grace to come out and then grace to be loosed and unbound. Grace to be saved and then grace to live for Jesus. And all of that relies completely on him. Lazarus does nothing except respond to Jesus's word. And all of that is showing us Jesus is glory. He tells us all to come out and he frees us, unbinds us and by his grace enables us to live for him. And all of these things combine to show us that what Jesus said in verse four is so magnificently through this illness does not lead to death. It's for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it. In John 11, Jesus is glorified through Lazarus's illness. As we close, there's two things I want us to say and I'd love for you to go home and think about. The first is the fact that many of you are sick. And I don't necessarily mean like, like seriously sick needing to stay at home sick. What I mean is just the fact that many of you carry long term illnesses. And that's true for many people in our community.

And for some of you, people might not know that. And you might carry a long standing chronic condition that only a few people are aware of. Some people, some of you have had big ups and downs in terms of your health. And maybe some of you right now, maybe there's some people at home who aren't able to come because of your health. And so some of you are here today and you're ill. And for some of you, those illnesses may never go away.

You just have to live with them. And maybe if that's not directly true of you, I'm 99.9 percent certain it'll be true of somebody in your family, of somebody that you love and care about. Many, many of us are ill. This chapter tells you that Jesus can be glorified through your illness. And that is something that we have seen thousands of times over since John 11. For people who have been ill, that illness has actually been an amazing channel through which Jesus has shown his glory. As people persevere in faith, as prayers are answered, as people approach, as people are given amazing courage and strength to deal with illness that they would never have on their own, all of these things glorify

Jesus. And so whilst I long for the day when you are in the new creation and there are never any illnesses again, the illnesses you face now, they are something through which Jesus can be glorified in such a beautiful way. And we see that again and again. And it is amazing how Jesus does that. But the second thing I want to highlight is the most important of all. Jesus has come to change the ultimate outcome of illness. Because ultimately all of our bodies are going to fail, ultimately. And none of us can escape the fact that our lives are limited and they are going to come to an end sometime. Jesus has come to fix that. That is the thing that Jesus has come to fix. He has not actually come to cure all our diseases now. He has come to change what that disease could do to you. He has come to change the outcome, in other words. And he can do that because he is the resurrection and the life. And his resurrection, the fact that he rules again, tells us that the pathway that illness and weakness and aging places us on is not our final destiny. That for everyone who trusts in him, one day, one day we will never get old again. One day we will never be in pain again. One day we will never be separated from each other again. One day we will enjoy the fullness of the eternal life that Jesus has come to give us. And in order to have that, all we have to do is trust in him. I close my Bible. I need to open it again.

Because when I was reading, there was something I hadn't really noticed before. But it stuck with me just as I was reading it earlier. In verse 28, I don't think I've got it on any of my slides. Do I? Let me just check. There we go. I do. As I was reading it, I hadn't noticed this when I was studying, but I noticed it while I was reading it. These words here, Martha tells her sister, the teacher here is calling for you. Anybody here who's maybe not yet a Christian, anyone at home who's maybe not yet a Christian, these are the words I want to leave you with. The teacher here, he's calling for you.

[38 : 53] Thank you.