

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED:

**JOHN 11:1-27 WHEN SICKNESS STRIKES AT HOME**

*Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore, the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."*

*When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.*

*Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?" 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. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."*

*These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get well." However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless, let us go to him." Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."*

*So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.*

*Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Now Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."*

*Jesus said to her, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"*

*She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."*

Do Christians get sick? Yes, Christians get sick. Why?? Christians are sinners. But aren't the sins of Christians forgiven? Yes, in Jesus who took sin's punishment--death, and who defeated death as He demonstrated in His glorious resurrection, Christians' sins are forgiven. But Christians still are sinners in a sinful world. Sickness, like its cousin death, is part of our lot in this life. The bigger question is: How Does the Christian and the Christian Home Deal with Sickness and Death?

In our text, Jesus' friend Lazarus was sick. He was "without strength," weak—that's sickness all right. Do you suppose he went to a doctor? It doesn't say. But he wasn't getting better. Do you suppose he wondered why he was sick? Most people do. Sometimes it's easy to figure out, It's the latest "bug" and everybody gets it. Sometimes it takes more honesty, It's because I was careless around other sick people or did not get enough sleep. Sometimes it comes with more guilt, It's the result of my sinful choices, like abusing alcohol, or improper behavior—God is punishing me. Teaching you is more correct. Sometimes it just seems that God is being unfair, He is picking on me. And then one languishes in self-pity, feeling sorry for self, even thinking it would be better if God had given some other ailment. High blood pressure for arthritis, back pain for heart disease, anxiety/ depression for cancer, cancer for blindness. Oh, really? Each is a burden, some for one, some for another.

What do you do? No matter what the reason for the sickness, ask for God's forgiveness and mercy. We always err somewhere. Ask for His loving, healing hand. That's what Lazarus' two sisters did ---Mary and Martha—well known to many Christians. Martha was the one too busy with all the preparations, when Jesus was at their home, while Mary listened to Jesus' words of comfort, love, and instruction from God. Mary would soon anoint Jesus' feet with costly oil and wipe His feet with her hair—an act of faith, in preparation for His burial. These two sisters sent word for Jesus to come. When someone in your home is sick, do you ask for Jesus to come with His love, wisdom, and power? Does the whole family pull together in faith?

Why is it that sometimes turning to Jesus is the Christian's *last resort*! Turn to Him right away, even for little things. Actually, without His help, you can't even get over little sickness on your own. Without the Lord's healing hand, you won't get over a cold, a cut, or a stubbed toe.

The sisters sent for Jesus. His first words were: *This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.* His words are true. The purpose of this sickness was not death, although that would happen, but the purpose was that the Father and the Son would be glorified. Jesus uses sickness to draw Christians closer to Himself their Savior and Lord.

Sometimes the Lord's ways seem backwards to us. Here, John says Jesus loved the whole family which was suffering under Lazarus' sickness—sickness affects the whole family, doesn't it. But Jesus did nothing for two whole days! Were Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit ignoring Mary and Martha's plea for healing and help? Does it seem that way to you sometimes? Jesus' method and goal are not your method and goal. We want things fast, Right Now! The Lord knows best. He wants you to know that you are not in charge--that He is, and His ways are better for you and for your faith in His blood. He draws you closer to Himself. Jesus is never rude and uncaring.

Two days later when Jesus was ready to go to Bethany, the disciples were not. Perhaps they thought they had figured out why He delayed going--it was a matter of personal safety against the Jews' death threats. But don't ever think you have God figured out. His ways are not your ways. His ways are past finding out. Jesus answered their objections. He emphasized to His disciples that this was His time given to Him by God for His work. This was His "day," Nothing could happen to Him, or to them, to disturb God's mission of salvation for sinners. Those who go against God's plan are like a man trying to accomplish things in the dark of night. There is no light coming out of one's head to help. The disciples had so much to learn. So do we.

Jesus told the disciples that Lazarus was sleeping. He knew they would misunderstand. He wanted them to learn again that for the believer in Christ, sins forgiven means death is but a sleep! He finally told them straight out Lazarus was dead. It's good to remember Jesus' bluntness and directness. We repeatedly mask "death" by saying a loved has "passed away" or "departed." In truth, they have died. Ugh! Died. The wages of sin. It's not fun to think about it. Some avoid hospitals, nursing homes, funeral homes, etc., because it's too unpleasant to think of death. But sinners all are going to die! But Jesus also used the softer expression. A sleep. . In Him the harsh reality of death is overcome. It is just a sleep for the body. The body sleeps in the grave, awaiting resurrection from the grave and life forever! Jesus even said He was glad Lazarus died—for their sakes—to teach them.

Jesus was determined to go. Thomas resigned himself to going along and said He would die with Jesus---as if it were undesirable to go, but necessary. Do not simply resign yourself to situations in life--all of which God allows—as if they are doom and gloom. It becomes a habit to think the worst, to resign self to a lack of the Lord's blessings, when in reality, under the Savior's hands all events are for your benefit, growth, and strengthening. Whether it's the weather, the economy, national or world politics, or even attendance at church (natural negative reaction if there are only a few, and an unnatural negative reaction if there are many because somehow that means there won't be very many next Sunday!). Go forward in life with Christian joy in every circumstance, even sickness. Trust your Savior. He died to take away your guilt and rose for your glory. For every situation in life—and He has allowed them all--He stands at your side, your best friend.

When Jesus arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had been in the grave, the "memory place," four days. The grave is a memory place--remember the person, remember death is from sin, remember sin is overcome and life given in Jesus. From Jerusalem women came to comfort Mary and Martha. I wonder what sort of comfort they brought? What sort of comfort do you bring? Is it real comfort? Christian comfort? Or is it built only on the good things the deceased did in life? But what about the bad? Is it built only on the wonderful memories that all will have? What about the bad? Is it built only on the fact that things could have been worse? But could they have been better? What is it that comforts an aching Christian heart? Here is comfort: In Christ the crucified and risen Savior, we have eternal rescue, sins covered! Through faith in Christ the wages of sin are gone, and sting of death is turned into a victory.. At death the soul enters the peace and rest of heaven, and the body, though it decay and return to dust, sleeps in the grave. At the Last Day the body will be gloriously raised from the grave and re-united with the soul, to live in the mansions of heaven forever. Death is victory for the one who has died in Jesus. And for those left behind on earth with tear-filled hearts? Jesus never abandons them either. In Jesus is real comfort.

It is that real comfort that Jesus brought to Martha. She said, "If You had been here, my brother would not have died." Well, He could have been there and still allowed Lazarus to die. Jesus had something important to teach Martha and all. Martha already knew that Jesus would handle all things well. Jesus pointed her to the Resurrection, stating He was the Resurrection and the Life! When Christians are sick, and when sickness, even death, come to the Christian home, with Jesus all is well. Through Him the believer already lives forever. Not even sickness, death and the grave can interfere with that gift from God in Christ. *"I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."*

By faith Martha grasped His words. *"Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."* Ah! Peace and safety, confidence and strength, forgiveness and life, now and forever. When sickness and even death come to the Christian home, go to Jesus. Hold on to Him by faith. He is your Resurrection and Life each day and always..

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach---