

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS
HHHH. Accepting God's Unusual Expressions Of His Love
(John 11:1-16)

I. Introduction

- A. God's thoughts and ways are infinitely far above our thoughts and ways (cf. Isaiah 55:8-9), so when God allows unusual trials to enter our lives, we can be tempted to doubt the goodness and love of God for us.
- B. Actually, the Lord can let unusually unsettling events occur in our lives to reveal how great His goodness and love is toward us. John 11:1-16 reveals this truth, so we view it for our insight, application and edification:

II. Accepting God's Unusual Expressions Of His Love, John 11:1-16.

- A. Jesus allowed people he loved to face a serious trial that He only let become more intense, John 11:1-5:
 - 1. When Lazarus the brother of Martha and Mary of Bethany near Jerusalem became ill, his sisters sent word through a messenger to Jesus saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill," John 11:1-3 ESV. "They made no specific request. They trusted the Lord to meet the need in response to the message." (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 343)
 - 2. However, when Jesus heard this message, He did just the opposite of what Martha and Mary expected: 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" (John 11:4) and He stayed two days longer where he was, John 11:6. Significantly, John 11:5 explains that Jesus loved Martha Mary and Lazarus, people who believed that he was Messiah and Son of God, cf. John 11:27. Nevertheless, He did what initially appeared to be an unloving thing to do by stalling in traveling to heal Lazarus, risking the ill man's deteriorating into worse health and dying!
 - 3. [Incidentally, John 11:4 is one of Christ's clearest claims to be the Son of God, and hence deity! (Ibid.)]
- B. Jesus then let His disciples face the trial of returning to a hostile environment in Jerusalem, John 11:7-16:
 - 1. After the two days of waiting, Jesus told His disciples, "Let us go to Judea again," John 11:7.
 - 2. This seemed like the wrong move to the disciples, for they replied that the Jews were recently seeking an opportunity to execute Jesus by stoning, so returning to such a hot spot seemed unwise, John 11:8.
 - 3. Jesus replied that if one walked in the day, he did not stumble because he saw the light of this world. However, if he walked in the night, he would stumble because the light was not in him, John 11:9. What He meant by this figurative statement was that as long as He was walking in the light of God the Father's revealed will, He could safely return to Judea where if He did not walk in the Father's revealed will, he would fall into great trouble. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to John 11:8-10)
- C. Jesus then combined the trial He allowed Martha and Mary to face with His delay of coming to heal Lazarus with the disciple's concern about returning to Judea to reveal the will of God in both parties, John 11:11-15:
 - 1. Christ said that He wanted to return to Judea to wake their friend Lazarus since he was asleep, John 11:11.
 - 2. The disciples thought Jesus spoke of literal sleep and they believed that sleep would be good for Lazarus in helping him to get better so they gave their opinion that Jesus should let Lazarus sleep, John 11:12.
 - 3. Jesus then explained that He had spoken figuratively of physical death, so He stated plainly that Lazarus had died, John 11:13-14.
 - 4. Nevertheless, Christ added that He was glad for His disciples' sake, and for that matter, for the sake of disciples Martha and Mary, that He had not been in Bethany to heal Lazarus, that they might come to believe to a much greater degree that He was the Messiah and Son of God, John 11:15a with 11:4.
 - 5. Accordingly, Jesus urged His disciples to come with Him as He returned in the Father's will to Bethany of Judea to raise Lazarus from the dead, John 11:15b.
 - 6. At that point, Thomas Didymus told his fellow disciples to go with Jesus that they might die with Him, John 11:16. He obviously doubted that they would safely return to Judea as Jesus said, and this same Thomas Didymus would later doubt that Jesus had risen from the dead in John 20:24-25. In both cases, he would have to witness great events in the resurrection of Lazarus and see the risen Christ to believe!

Lesson: *The Lord used the unsettling event of letting Lazarus physically die and the other unsettling event of returning to the humanly dangerous environment of Judea to reveal to believers to a greater degree the certainty of His identity as Israel's Messiah and Son of God.*

Application: *If we face the unusual trials where we doubt the goodness and love of God, may we trust that He is using these circumstances to deepen our faith in Him for our own spiritual growth!*