



3 Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. 4 When Jesus heard that, he said, *This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.* (John 11:3-4)

Four years ago, I wrote a poem for my older sister, Lynn, not knowing less than a month later I would be preaching her funeral as a result of an unexpected heart attack:

Fireside Solitude

*In the quiet and lonely moments
as I muse before the fire,
And the gales outside are blowing,
And there's winter in the air.*

*I am made to go a 'wandering
Down the amber mists of old,
And behold the flowers of summer
As my younger days unfold.*

*In the glimmer of the faces
Of my family, friends, and kin
Who have left for better pasture
And forgotten all that's been.*

*I see a light of mystery
Hidden deep behind the scene
Of a greater love and comfort
That for man has ever been.*

*The love of God caresses
Their weary heads and hearts
As they smile behind the vapors
At the love His Hand imparts.*

*In my solitude and wonder
My heart is made to know
That our Father has a purpose
though to us He may not show.*

*He makes our lives in patterns
Overlaid with points of light,
And all our memories precious
In His Gardens of Delight.*

*I know that life is fleeting
As the sands of time fall fast,
And yet we know not how much sand
Is in the upper glass.*

*The comfort that we gather,
Regardless day or clime,
Outlasts life's winter season –
And exceeds the bounds of TIME*

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What did Jesus mean when He uttered the leading text above after learning of the sickness of His friend, Lazarus? When I petition God over amendment of some debilitating and life-threatening illness of a loved one, these words of the Lord echo in resounding answer to my prayer. *“This sickness is not unto death!”* This response should be sufficient to the believer; however, it sometimes results in further doubt when we read the words of Jesus in the continuing narrative. *“5 Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. 6 When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was. 7 Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judaea again. 8 His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again? 9 Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. 10 But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him. 11 These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. 12 Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. 13 Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. 14 Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.”* (John 11:4-14)

Did you notice these last words of our Lord, *“Lazarus is dead?”* Does this not contradict His earlier statement, *“This sickness is not unto death?”* No, it does not if you understand the terms under which both statements were uttered – the first under the terms of the Spirit, the second under the terms of man’s understanding of mortality. On another occasion, in the account of the rich man and Lazarus, though he opened his eyes in Hell, the rich man had spiritual eyes (as do all who suffer their guilt in Hell). He could see Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham. He did not see a dead body, but rather a living spiritual body in Lazarus.

Our Lord spoke in the first instance of the eternal death to which all unbelievers are subject but to which believers are NOT are NOT subject. In the second instance, He made reference to that TEMPORARY AND TRANSITORY physical death to which all believers ARE subject. Yes, the body of Lazarus lay in the tomb for four days before the senses of that dead corpse were quickened to hear and respond to the Voice of Christ, *“Lazarus, come forth.”* Lazarus did come forth fully clothed in grave-wrappings that tightly bound his body and limited his freedom of movement. This is the meaning of our salvation unto life! When we were dead in trespasses and sins, unable to either hear, or respond, to any other voice, Jesus quickened (made alive) our senses to hear and respond. At that moment, we were drawn, as was Lazarus, out of the grave and into the Light of Knowledge and Understanding. Once quickened, the Lord set us free of our sins as He did Lazarus: *“And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.”* (John 11:44) He did the same for all of the Elect of God.

When we pray for God’s intercession in the illness of loved ones, of friends, and of neighbors, we are not praying AGAINST the will of God; but that our wills will comport with the His Will and Purpose. Though our tears are treasured by our Lord, they

will never avail against the Will of God Himself. However, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning!" (Psalms 30:5) His Angel of Death may bring an end to endless pain and suffering – perhaps the Lord has that will for the afflicted. Or, it may be the case that the Lord's will is to grant our prayer and heal the person. We should be satisfied with either answer since death is not a real power to the Elect of God, but only a "*shadow of death.*"

When our Lord first proclaimed the sickness of Lazarus to a "*sickness not unto death*" He made reference to the Divine definition of a temporary sleep which is as an instant or twinkling of the eyes. (1 Cor 15:52) In His second pronouncement of the death of Lazarus, He was speaking in term to which mortal man can most often identify – physical death. But the latter is only a sleep to those who die in faith. This beautiful truth is summarized by the words of Jesus outside the tomb of Lazarus:

"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:25-26)

Perhaps the great and profound question of your life, or that of any other, is this:

"Believest thou this?"