

## 63 - Dangerous Places

John 11:7-16

Anyone who serves God effectively has to have two important qualities: courage and caution. They have to be willing to die for Jesus but determined not to do anything careless that might end their ministry early. Without courage a person won't follow where God leads; without caution a person will create so much trouble for themselves that they have to stop. Caution is the careful analysis of a situation before taking the first step, and for a disciple of Jesus Christ that means earnestly seeking God's will and listening to the guidance of His Spirit. It means not acting until He says it's time and not holding back when He tells us to move forward. Everything depends upon hearing God clearly and refusing to move until we have.

This combination of courage and caution is what Jesus was modeling for us when He decided to return to a dangerous place. That trip to Bethany could easily have been His last. If we look only at the outward circumstances, He was being reckless. And that's exactly what His disciples were trying to tell Him. He had barely escaped with His life only months earlier. Why, they asked, would He go back to a place where His enemies were waiting to arrest Him? He would not likely escape being stoned this time. Yet He went back to Bethany, and His disciples, gloomily deciding to die with Him, followed along. Why did He deliberately go into danger? We need to understand, because He still leads us into dangerous places.

Returning to Bethany (Jn 11:7-16)

• DBS (Wed-Sat)

The lighted path

Jesus tried to explain to His disciples why He was certain that they would be safe. He said,

“Are there not twelve hours in a day? If someone walks in the day he does not stumble because he sees the light of this world. But if someone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him” (Jn 11:9-10).

They didn't understand what He meant because they didn't know how to do what He was doing. He was following the guidance of the Holy Spirit. God had already shown Him what was going to happen. He knew God was going to protect them. He knew He could walk into a funeral, filled with many of the nation's religious leaders, only two miles from Jerusalem, and walk out again. How did He know that? He knew it because He was “cautious” and had sought carefully for God's guidance. He knew it because the Holy Spirit had shown Him what He would do and what God would do. Yet even with that information, it required courage. Bethany was a dangerous place. If God didn't do a miracle they would be trapped.

Danger

Winning souls is a rescue mission. We have to enter the “strongman's” house and plunder his treasure (Mt 12:29). His “treasure” are people, and he guards them fiercely. So it's seldom easy. There's usually some type of danger involved. In order to rescue someone we will have to leave the comfortable for the uncomfortable, the safe for the unsafe, approval for disapproval, abundance for enough and rest for weariness.

When people teach us about how to share Jesus Christ with others, this element of danger is often overlooked or minimized. To hear some tell it, our greatest obstacle is shyness and once we move past that we're on our way. And shyness is a real obstacle. But there are often greater obstacles than that. For some strange reason, most effective ministry involves an element of danger. A challenge always seems to rise up from some source to frighten us; we're forced to risk something in order to gain something. In the passage we're reading today Jesus was risking physical harm. To rescue Lazarus from death and make it possible for many attending the funeral to believe in Him, He would have to put His life in jeopardy. And if you and I are going to be used by God to rescue people, we must face the fact that we too will encounter some sort of danger. Every form of mission, sooner or later, involves going someplace that's not safe because that's where the person who needs to be rescued lives. And we will face relational danger as well. God may ask us to share Jesus with a dying family member, or a valued friend, or someone at work or at school, leaving us very vulnerable to rejection or ridicule. We may risk losing cherished relationships, respect, jobs or promotions.



# LIFE LESSONS

## WITH DR. STEVE SCHELL

Teaching the Bible  
practically & understandably  
and seeing lives changed by  
the truth of the Gospel

### Caution

Some people may assume that in order to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ a person must throw caution to the wind and share their faith regardless of the danger involved. They assume that if someone really loves Jesus, that person won't care what happens. And people who function that way can be very courageous, and I'm sure the Lord recognizes that their courage comes from the fact that they are devoted to Him. But courage without caution is likely to lead to a lot of conflict, and the most significant argument against this approach is that Jesus didn't minister that way. He was amazingly courageous, but only when the Father specifically sent Him into a dangerous situation. Think about it. For the past two to three months Jesus had been staying out of trouble. He had left Jerusalem for the safety of the eastern bank of the Jordan River. He didn't stay in Jerusalem and continue to provoke the religious leaders until they finally caught Him. He returned to Bethany only because the Father had instructed Him to do so.

### Guided by God

How Jesus knew He was to go to Bethany isn't said in this passage, but on many other occasions He explained how He functioned in ministry. He said He would always do what He "saw" the Father do and speak only what He heard the Father say. In other words He continually let the Father guide Him. Listen:

- John 5:19-20 "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless [it is] something He sees the Father doing, for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing."
- John 12:49-50 "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment [as to] what to say and what to speak."

Jesus didn't decide what He was going to do for God. He didn't form a plan and charge ahead. He listened carefully and then did and said only what God prophetically showed Him. That doesn't mean a person has to ask God what to eat for breakfast or wear for the day. Being Spirit-led doesn't turn us into robots that can't think for themselves, but it does mean we stay "tender" to His voice and stop before we make important decisions or engage in some form of ministry. Asking for His help and depending on His guidance becomes a normal part of life. It's a "skill" that matures as we put it to use. This is what Jesus meant by walking on a lighted path; that's why He was so sure He and His disciples would be safe. Someone once said, "The safest place in the world is in the middle of the will of God" (Brother Andrew).

### The miracle

Who could have imagined that Jesus could walk into a funeral, filled with hostile religious leaders and leave unharmed? Who could have imagined that He would shout at an open tomb, and a man who had been dead for four days would walk out? Without that miracle, Jesus, almost certainly, would have been arrested. Without that miracle none of the watching crowd would have believed; without that miracle Mary and Martha would have been left confused, if not disillusioned. But Jesus saw that miracle before He left for Bethany. That's why the trip wasn't foolhardy, but without that guidance it would have been. That's the lesson we must learn today. Jesus is showing us how important it is to learn how to hear from God. He's teaching us by His example that caution must carefully direct where we show courage.

### Fearful disciples

If it had been up to the disciples Lazarus would have remained in the tomb, and many would never have believed in Jesus. They were afraid and would not have gone to Bethany. But what really mattered was why they were afraid. They didn't know how to communicate with God. That's why they lacked the assurance that this assignment was ordained by God; that's why they had no idea what to expect once they got there; that's why they weren't convinced that God was about to plunder Satan's treasure. But thankfully, after the Day of Pentecost, they would. The baptism with the Holy Spirit made it possible for them to communicate with God the way Jesus did.

### Communicating with God

How do you teach someone else how to hear from God? You can explain how you do it, but most of their learning will occur when they step out and discover the process for themselves. And that only happens when a person really wants to learn. They must have an inner motivation: a hunger to be who God has called them to be; a compassion that is frustrated, even miserable, watching people live and die without Jesus; and a weariness with this world that's left them willing to risk everything to lay up treasure in the next. No one can choose such a life for someone else. It's too hard. It demands that we surrender everything and spend time listening for His will.



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Following Jesus still leads us into dangerous places, because that's where people who need to be rescued live. But He warned us that would happen. He said if we wanted to be His disciples, this would become a way of life. He said:

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it” (Lk 9:23-24).

He's headed for Bethany; let's go with Him!

### Questions

- 1) Describe a time when God told you to do something dangerous. What did He say to you? What did you do? What happened?
- 2) Are you personally able to communicate with God? How does He normally guide you? If such guidance is difficult, what step might you take to learn more about it?
- 3) How would you explain this statement to a child: “The safest place in the world is in the middle of the will of God.”