

A summary of John 11:1-27

- 1. A family is mentioned for the first time in the New Testament (v.1).** In John, chapter 11, a family is mentioned for the first time in the New Testament: Lazarus (brother) and Mary and Martha (two sisters). This family can also be taken to represent a church or a family in the church life. In this family, there are three names which have significant meaning. "Lazarus" means "whom God helps," thus referring to someone who is weak. "Mary" and "Martha" mean "rebellious" or "rebellion." This is a picture of the church life. Who are we? Those who are weak, who need God to help us. Who are we? Those that are rebellious, full of opinions, not willing to take God's way, not coming to His word. Even if we hear His word, we still like to do our own thing, or interpret God's word according to our taste and preference. Yet God still loves us (His family), but with His divine (**agape**) love (v.5). God loves us, the rebellious ones, with His divine love. Ironically, the "rebellious" ones loved and served the Lord so much. Martha, we know from the Gospel of Luke (10:38-42) received the Lord into her home, and served. Mary, according to verse 2 of John 11, and also chapter 12, loved the Lord so much, to the point that she was willing to offer a pound of ointment (basically her life-savings) and pour it on the feet of Jesus, and then wipe the Lord's feet with her tears. Such a heart and exercise to serve and love the Lord are so inspiring, and yet in the midst of pouring out for the Lord, how much did Martha and Mary know the Lord? Verse 27 indicates that Martha acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. However, neither she nor her sister Mary had the revelation that Jesus was the resurrection and the life (v.25). This means that we may be very much involved in the church life, taking care of several services (for example, serving the children, taking care of the translation service, the meal service), and consecrating ourselves, but we may lack a higher revelation of who Jesus is. The revelation of Jesus in chapter 11 is higher than in all the preceding chapters.
- 2. Grab every opportunity, while it is still day (v.9-10. See also 9:4).** Jesus knew that He could only carry out His earthly ministry while He was alive. Likewise, we can only know and serve the Lord while we are alive on this earth. Therefore, it behooves us to grab the time today to come to the Lord, to know Him and to serve Him. No matter the difficult situations we may find ourselves in, even in death, we still need to serve. Jesus risked His life to serve the family of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, which is a picture of the church. He was willing to return to Judea, despite the remonstrance of His disciples (v.7-8). What about us? Are we willing? Thomas consented to go back with Jesus to Judea, along with the other disciples, in order to die with Him. Was this a noble or bold decision? Perhaps, but another way of looking at it is that Thomas, in deciding not to abandon Jesus, reluctantly reconciled himself to the inevitable consequence of being found with Jesus, that is death. We may follow the Lord, but it may be in a reluctant or gloomy way, as a martyr, rather than joyfully and enthusiastically. If we do not have a job, if we do not have money, if we fall sick, we easily abandon Jesus. We may not be willing to follow Him at the risk of our "life."
- 3. We must bring people to Christ as the light of the world (V.10).** Many people stop short of knowing Christ, or having a revelation of Christ Himself. We are generally satisfied to have our needs met, or to be a Sunday goer, or, if we are more serious, to engage in some kind of spiritual activity in the church life. How many are actually willing to pursue Christ? How many are willing to pursue the Bible? How many are willing to attend the pursuing gatherings? We may like to speak on Sunday morning, but if we do not pursue, we will express a lot of opinions, just like Martha and Mary. Without pursuing, our gatherings will become gatherings of opinions. What is the remedy? We need to preach the gospel so that some may be raised up to pursue the word, to pursue the saints, and to pursue people so they can get saved. The gospel should be preached so people can know that Jesus Christ is eternal life. Eternal life is the best gift. If people do not know Christ as life, our serving is in vain.

4. We need to come to Jesus (v.20). Martha, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him. Mary, when told by her sister Martha that Jesus was calling her, rose quickly and came to Him (v.29). In both cases, both sisters expressed their opinions. Martha rebuked the Lord for not being there. So did Mary. Neither knew the Lord according to what the Lord wanted to reveal to them. They still came to Jesus. This is our salvation. If we come to Jesus and hear Him, we have a chance to know Him more. Never stop coming to Him. To know the Lord is not automatic. It does not happen by osmosis. We may think that the longer we are in the church life, and that the longer we serve faithfully in a certain capacity, the more we will know Christ and have revelation. This is not the case. Statistics and data show us that many saints come to the church life, stay in the church life, even serve in the church life, and then leave. Why? Because they did not come to the Lord in all their serving and living. They were not willing to go higher, to be elevated. For example, they may have stopped attending conferences and trainings, or stopped attending the local pursuing gatherings, or prayer meeting of the church. Yet they still are faithful in certain respects. However, they may have stopped growing, and they may remain in the revelation that they received ten years ago. In John 11, the revelation of Jesus as the resurrection and the life is higher than that of Him as the bread of life in John 6, or of Him as the light of the world in John 8. This means that we must never stop growing in our receiving of revelations. Once we stop, the church will suffer and several may leave. We may have a heart to pursue, but a good heart is not enough. May we continually come to the Lord again and again, even in our opinions. The Lord will have a way to perfect us and cause us to go higher in knowing Him according to His current need and speaking.

5. All the negative situations are arranged by the Lord for us so the Son and the Father can obtain the glory (vv4,15). Jesus knows exactly what we lack. He knows that we are short of revelation. He knows that through situations of weakness and even spiritual death (v.4), we will know Him a little more so He can gain the glory. It is indeed so difficult to receive revelation from Christ. Again, we are just like Lazarus (weak), and Martha and Mary (rebellious), living in the church life in Bethany (meaning “house of misery”). In one sense, we are miserable, and even hopeless! Why do so many saints leave the church life? They have a heart to love the Lord, but so many other things come in, especially the negative situations, to draw them away. Therefore, we need a pure heart to pursue the Lord and the Bible with the saints. Otherwise, the Bible is so hard to understand, and may become a closed book to us. We need to preach the gospel, to resurrect us from our death situation, and impart life to us, that we may grow.

6. Mary offered to the Lord, not to meet a need, but to be a blessing to the church, and a testimony of the Lord (v.2). In chapters 2 through 10, Jesus addressed many human needs, and met them all. In chapter 11, there is another need, that is, the sickness and ultimate death of Lazarus. Yes, Jesus meets this need, but by revealing Himself as the resurrection and the life, not just physically, but also spiritually, to be enjoyed by us today. This was to the glory of the Father. Mary’s offering reflects this principle. Her financial offering (represented by the pound of ointment in chapter 12), stems not from a need that she observed, but rather from her consecration to the Lord and to the church, and her desire to bless the church. Her offering became a testimony. Do we have such a testimony? Are we willing to offer our financial offering to the Lord? Or do we wait for a special need? Mary “broke” her alabaster flask and “wasted” it on the Lord. This was not a requirement. She did not do so out of obligation. Rather, it was voluntary. Are we willing to bless the church in such a way? We may want higher revelation of the Lord, but if our financial offering remains in our pocket or our bank account, it is very doubtful how much more revelation we will receive. Mary’s offering afforded her the opportunity to come to the Lord, to listen to Him, and to know Him more. Without our offering, all our declarations, our desires (however sincere), and our expectations to grow in our Christian life, may be dreams.