

A summary of John 11:17-57

- 1. Do we know Jesus as the life (v.25)?** Jesus says that He is the “life.” The Greek word for “life” in this verse is **zoe**, which refers to the eternal or divine life. This is the first time, in the Gospel of John, that Jesus refers to Himself as the “life.” In 3:16, Jesus says that whoever believes in Him will receive eternal life, and in 6:47, He says that he who believes in Him has eternal life. However, at this juncture in chapter 11, the Lord wants to bring two of His disciples (and us) higher. Both Martha and Mary loved the Lord very much. Martha went outside the village to come to Jesus (v.20). Mary, upon hearing that Jesus was calling for her, hastened to meet Jesus in the same place where her sister had met Him, that is, outside the village. This shows that both of them were consecrated and pursued Jesus. Moreover, Martha knew the “Bible” very well. She had attended Jesus’ “conferences and trainings,” and had a heart to pursue the word. She knew that her brother would rise again in the resurrection at the last day (v.24). She also knew that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world, interestingly echoing Peter’s declaration in Matthew 16:16. Yet, strangely enough, her realization does not elicit the same excited reaction from Jesus that Peter’s did. This shows that we may love the Lord, attend the meetings, pursue the word, and even attend conferences and trainings, and yet lack the knowledge of the deeper and more profound meaning that lies behind the fact that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Martha and Mary, even though they loved the Lord so much, still longed for their brother to be raised from the dead by a miracle, and even rebuked Jesus for not coming sooner (vv.21,32). However, even though Lazarus was raised up, he still would eventually die (physically) later on. Eternal life, however, is different. For us to receive eternal life is the greatest miracle of all, far transcending the physical raising up of Lazarus. Often, we focus on the so-called “wonderful” miracles, such as getting good grades, finding a job, or finding the “perfect spouse.” Indeed, these are human needs which should be met, and to which we should pay attention. Yet, we must realize how much more precious is the miracle of eternal life. If we realized this, our lives would change. We would become so joyful to preach the gospel, to sow the seed of eternal life to our friends, family, classmates, neighbors, coworkers and strangers. We would treasure the gospel and exercise to speak to people so they can receive the wonderful, eternal life, and experience the greatest miracle on earth.
- 2. Jesus is the resurrection (v.25).** The Greek word, **anastasis**, denotes “a standing up again, from death, being raised from the dead.” It is an overcoming of death. The Bible reveals that death is the consequence of sin (Romans 6:23). Death and Hades (the kingdom of death) are the last obstacles to be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). Jesus overcame death through His death and resurrection (Hebrews 2:14; Ephesians 1:19-21). This same resurrection power is towards us who believe. Who are we? We are weak in the divine life, weak in our desire for the Lord, we do not know the Bible that well, we may not be gifted, and our operation in the church life may be weak. We may even serve the Lord, and people, but in our serving, we may become discouraged, and we may not even see much fruit. Do we give up? Do we abandon people because not that many people seem to be believing in or following the Lord? What do we need? We need resurrection. Resurrection will overcome every barrier, every obstacle, every frustration, every weakness, in our lives. Problems may not necessarily vanish, but resurrection will cause us to be above them, and not be controlled by them. The condition of the church may not seem that hopeful. New people come, but people also leave. Many attend the Sunday morning, but so many may seem to be content with just being part of the “crowd.” They enjoy a happy church life, they can come and go as they please, but few seem willing to pursue the Lord, to know Him, and to know His word. How many are willing to be perfected? If, on the other hand, we experience the Lord as resurrection, we will be joyful and encouraged to accompany people, to preach the gospel, to serve the church, and to pursue the Bible, not looking at ourselves or our achievements. or lack thereof. and focusing rather on Christ and His eternal purpose.

- 3. Through death and resurrection, we will enter into and gain Christ as the glory (vv.4,40).** If we desire to know Christ as the resurrection, we must know the death of Christ (see Philippians 3:10-11). We need to appreciate the weak situations we may find ourselves in our daily life and in our church life. We would like to overcome our weaknesses, and we long that the resurrection life would swallow up our death and weakness. However, for that to happen, are we willing to deny our soul life, to pick up and carry our cross, and follow Jesus by way of the cross? We may desire glory, but the Lord would tell us that we first need death. Death always precedes resurrection. Without death, there is no resurrection. Jesus is the best pattern. He was crucified in weakness, but lives through the power of God (2 Corinthians 13:4). If we think we are strong or prevailing, we may think we are in resurrection, and therefore in glory. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is precisely when we are weak, hopeless, with no way out, and we realize our true condition, that we experience the death or termination of our self efforts to be a good brother or sister, to try to meet certain standards. Eventually, we are brought into resurrection, and we become joyful and released from any religious laws, to pursue the Lord in spirit and with the brothers and sisters, to know Christ and to gain Christ. We realize that it is not how much I serve or how much I do for the Lord, but rather how much Christ I gain as the glory. Hebrews 2:10 tells us that God's goal is to bring many sons into glory. However, Jesus, the founder of our salvation, took the lead to be made perfect through sufferings. We cannot take a different path. Glory is God's final goal, but there is a process to go through, and not one step of that process can be bypassed (Romans 8:29-30).
- 4. Is our love for Jesus and the brothers and sisters a human love, or a divine love (vv.5,36).** In verse 5, Jesus loved Lazarus. This love is **agape** love, in Greek, that is, a divine love. However, the Jews, when Jesus wept, marveled at how much Jesus loved Lazarus (v.36). The Greek word used there is **phileo**, denoting human or brotherly love, the love of a friend, bespeaking human affection or personal attachment. We may love the Lord because He has met our human needs, or because He has given us some joy and peace in our lives. However, do we love the Lord because of who He is? Do we know Him? Do we know His heart's desire? Do we know His burden and what He wants? Are we willing to carry our cross and deny ourselves for His sake and for His interests? This is the **agape** (divine) love. We need to grow from **phileo** to **agape** love in our church life.
- 5. Do we have a testimony that will cause others to believe (v.45)?** Many Jews believed because they saw the things that Jesus had done. Do we have such a testimony? In our weak situations (typified by Lazarus' death), if we are willing to die and resurrect, people may believe into Jesus. However, if we forsake Christ in our negative situations, and we are not willing to come to Him, we may think that we are serving the saints and the church. Our poor condition may cause Jesus to weep or shed tears silently, according to the Greek word (v.35). May we be willing to speak out (testify) for the Lord in our weakness so others can see our testimony of death and resurrection, and believe in Him.
- 6. God is in control despite our tendency to be religious (v.49).** Because of the religious people, Jesus could no longer walk publicly (v.54). He had to withdraw near the wilderness and continue with His disciples. If we are religious, the Lord will not bless the church life. Do we continue to come to the Lord and to His word? Or do we seek to "put Him to death" (v.53)? However, God is still in control. Many believed through the high priest Caiaphas who declared that it was expedient that one person die for the people so the whole nation would not perish (v.50). This word or prophecy was actually true and according to the scripture and God's plan, yet it was not pronounced of his own accord (v.51). This may mean that we may say something, but we may not gain eternal life. People may even get helped through our speaking, but if our speaking was not one with Christ, and did not pass through death and resurrection, we may not gain much Christ. This indicates how important it is to know Christ and to know eternal life. At the same time, God is sovereignly still in control of everything, and people may still be blessed with eternal life through channels that may not be one with Him.