

*Nuggets and Gems from the Bible*

LIFE'S

ISSUE —

THE

CHURCH

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***Living Stream Ministry***  
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## LIFE'S ISSUE— THE CHURCH

In the Gospel of John [chapter one](#) we see an introduction to life and building. In [2:1-11](#) we find the principle of life—to change death into life, and in [2:12-22](#) is the purpose of life—to build the house of God. Beginning with [chapter three](#), we see nine cases which illustrate how Christ as life can meet mankind's every need for the fulfillment of God's purpose. This brings us to the end of [chapter eleven](#). After this, in [chapter twelve](#), this Gospel reveals the issue of Christ being life to man: the producing of the church. The church, a house of feasting, is the place where the Lord can rest and obtain His satisfaction. The issue of Christ being life to man is the church.

### LIFE'S ISSUE

[Chapter twelve](#) stands alone. It is not the continuation of the nine foregoing cases; it is the conclusion of all of them. The conclusion of the nine cases is that Christ as life issues in the church ([vv. 1-11](#)).

## A HOUSE OF FEAST

In chapter eleven the Lord raised Lazarus from the dead. That resurrection issued into the church life. We all were dead persons. After He resurrected us, we became the church. Thus, in chapter eleven, we see Lazarus resurrected and in chapter twelve we see that the resurrected person becomes the very place where the Lord can find rest and satisfaction. This is the church. Now we need to consider the church as the house of feast.

## OUTSIDE OF RELIGION

This house of feast is outside of religion. It was not in Jerusalem, the holy city, or in the holy temple. It was in a little house in Bethany, outside of Jerusalem and outside of religion.

The Lord being life to people to meet all of their needs brought about His rejection by the Jewish religion. Judaism could not tolerate seeing the Lord being life to so many kinds of people. So the religious ones rejected the Lord as life. This rejection began in chapter five (vv. 16, 18) and reached its climax in chapter ten (vv. 31, 39). In chapter eleven, the Jewish religionists even held a council on how to put the Lord to death because He had raised Lazarus from the dead (11:53, 57).

The Jewish leaders also plotted to put Lazarus to death for the same reason (12:10). This shows how much religion is against the Lord as life. It not only persecuted the Lord, but also tried to destroy those who participated in the Lord as life. Religion always renounces and rejects the Lord as life.

As we study the Gospel of John, we must see the difference between religion and Christ as life. The Lord Jesus came to earth in His incarnation not to be a religious leader but to come into man and to be man's life. From the first case of regeneration in [chapter three](#) to the last case of resurrection in [chapter eleven](#), all that the Lord did was to present Himself as life to people outside of the Jewish religion. If we look at religion, including Christianity, from a viewpoint other than that of life, we shall be easily cheated and misled, for religion teaches people how to know God and worship Him. It even teaches the Bible. It seems that there is nothing bad about it. However, if the Lord has mercy on us and if His Spirit opens our eyes, we shall see that what God is doing in the universe is not merely to make people worship Him or serve Him. In this age, God's desire and intention is to come into man in the Son, by His Spirit, and through His Word to be

man's life that man might live by Him. This is absolutely different from religion and altogether contrary to the religious concept. When the Lord came as life to man, He was rejected by the Jewish religion. Throughout all the succeeding centuries, He has been continually rejected by religion.

## A PLACE FOR FEAST, REST, AND SATISFACTION

The rejection of the Lord by Judaism was a negative issue. But there was also a positive issue brought forth by the Lord's being life to people—a home for Him in His rejection, a place where He could rest, feast, dwell, and be satisfied. In [chapter twelve](#) we see that the Lord has come out and has hid Himself from the religion that rejected Him and has come into a home of His Jewish believers in Bethany. By making Himself the resurrection life to His believers, He found a home. This home may be considered as a shadow of His church. On the one hand, He was rejected by Judaism and gave it up; on the other hand, He obtained a home where He could stay and rest. He had a place where He could feast and be satisfied. Formerly, the Lord had “nowhere that He may lay His head” ([Matt. 8:20](#)). But now, after raising Lazarus from the dead, He obtained a place

for resting and feasting. After the Jewish religion had rejected Him, He was no longer willing to stay in Jerusalem. He always went away to stay in Bethany ([Matt. 21:17-18](#)). There He could not only stay and rest but also feast and be satisfied. This spiritually signifies that He was absolutely separated from the Jewish religion of the Old Testament and was and still is dwelling in the church as His home wherein He can rest, feast, and be satisfied.

Although there was nothing outwardly attractive about that little house, inwardly it was filled with feasting, resting, and satisfaction. Not only the Lord Jesus was feasting and resting, but so was everyone else who was there. It must be this way in the church life. When you look at the church life outwardly, nothing is attractive. The building, the chairs, nothing may seem to be very good. Outwardly, everything may be poor; inwardly, however, everything is precious, sweet, and dear. We have the sweet sensation that we are with the Lord and that the Lord is with us.

## A MINIATURE OF THE CHURCH LIFE PRODUCED BY THE RESURRECTION LIFE

Let us now consider several points concerning

the miniature of the church life found in John 12. Firstly, it was produced by resurrection life. Lazarus was present as a sign that the church is produced by resurrection life. The church does not come into being by man's organization, man's wisdom, man's work, or man's teaching.

Bethany was the place where the Lord accomplished His last sign—the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Therefore, Bethany is the place where the Lord raised up the dead. The believers there issued from the Lord's resurrection life. This is exactly where the church is—in the place of resurrection where the Lord as resurrection life raises people from the dead. Originally, we were dead, for we were dead in sins (Col. 2:13). But the Lord has raised us up from the dead; He has quickened and regenerated us. The issue of this is that we who have shared in His resurrection life have become the church. In the natural life there is no church. The church can only come into being through the Lord's resurrection life. Such a church in resurrection life is the place where the Lord can find rest and satisfaction with us and where we can feast with the Lord.

## COMPOSED OF CLEANSED SINNERS

The church is composed of cleansed sinners

as represented by Simon the leper ([Mark 14:3](#)). When I was young, I thought that the house there in Bethany where they were feasting with the Lord was the home of Lazarus. Eventually I learned that it was not the home of Lazarus, but the house of a leper who must have been healed by the Lord ([Mark 14:3](#)). The house of Simon, a cleansed leper, became the meeting place of the church. This is very meaningful. On the one hand, we all were dead; on the other hand, we all were lepers. Originally, the members of the church were both dead and leprous (sinful) people. In a sense we, like Lazarus, were dead and have been resurrected. In another sense, we, like Simon, were contaminated lepers and have been cleansed. Hallelujah, the Lord has raised us from the dead and cleansed us from our leprosy, our sins! Now where we are becomes the meeting place of the church.

[John 12](#) is silent about Simon's doing anything. The feast was prepared in Simon's house, but everything was done by two sisters and one brother. In Bethany, in the house of a leper, everything was done by Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Although the church is the place where the Lord quickens and regenerates the dead and cleanses the leper, the service in the church is not done

by the lepers. This is the meaning behind the fact that Simon was absent from serving in John 12.

## **OUTWARDLY POOR AND AFFLICTED**

Bethany means house of the poor or house of affliction. Outwardly, the church may be poor and afflicted. The church on earth may not be rich in material things; it should be rich with the enjoyment of the Lord in His presence. The outward people will always look down on the church, saying that it is poor and full of affliction. They do not have a spirit to realize how rich we are in the enjoyment of all that the Lord is to us.

## **INWARDLY FEASTING IN AND WITH THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD**

Inwardly, the church life is a life of feasting in and with the presence of the Lord (12:2). The Lord came to that house, and His presence was there. In the church life, the first thing we need is the Lord's presence. We must be a people in such a position and with such a condition that the Lord can come and be with us. His presence means very much to the church life. The church life is a life that absolutely depends upon the Lord's presence. Without the Lord's presence, the church life is empty.

Inwardly, the church life is a feast. In the church life, there should always be a feast that the Lord can enjoy by Himself and with His people. It is in the church that the Lord has rest, enjoyment, and satisfaction. Here there is always a feast prepared for the Lord and His people. Not only the Lord Himself enjoys it, but all the people who are with Him enjoy it as well. The church is a place where the Lord can enjoy Himself with His people and where His people can enjoy being with Him.

## **HAVING MORE SISTERS THAN BROTHERS**

As it was there in Bethany, it is better for a church to have more sisters than brothers ([12:2-3](#)). Whenever the number of sisters in a church is smaller than the number of brothers, that church may not be so living. A living church needs to have more sisters, the more the better. If you look into a situation where the number of sisters is greater than the number of brothers, you will find that that church is living.

## **WITH DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS SERVING**

In the church life there are different functions. There are three kinds of functions in the service

of the church represented by the three persons in the house. Firstly is the serving function represented by Martha (12:2). Throughout history, Christians have looked down on her. Do not condemn Martha. It is unfair to condemn her. Martha's serving is very good, for, in the church service, the business affairs of the church must be taken care of. How could we have the food taken care of without Martha? We need her to prepare the food. I appreciate Martha's service. We all must change our concept about her and not look down on her. We should encourage the sisters to be Marthas. Perhaps you sisters are still quite spiritual and religious, but I am rather practical. I do not want to be that spiritual. Suppose all the sisters are Marys sitting there quietly being spiritual. Who is going to prepare the meal? We must have some Marthas who are diligent, capable, active, living, and practical. Although we are spiritual, we must still serve practically.

## TESTIFYING

The second kind of function in the service of the church is represented by Lazarus. It appears as if Lazarus did nothing. He just sat there at the table with the Lord, enjoying the feast with Him. But we must remember that Lazarus was

the living testimony of the resurrection life. He did not testify by doing but by living in the resurrection life. His testimony was not in labor or in works; it was in the enjoyment of the resurrection life. He was a witness to the power of the Lord's resurrection life. Wherever he was, the testimony of resurrection life was there.

Martha's service was good, but it did not attract people. It was the testimony of Lazarus that attracted them. This does not mean that Martha's service was not good and was not needed, for certain things had to be taken care of. Even Lazarus had to be served by Martha. Therefore, we must realize that even when we have a good testimony of life, we still need the service of Martha.

The testimony of life is not by doing but by living. It is not a kind of work; it is a kind of life. It is not by laboring; it is by enjoying the Lord. It gives people the feeling of resurrection power, the manifestation of resurrection life, and the enjoyment of the Lord as life. This is a strong testimony that the Lord can make a dead person so living and enable him to feast with Him. In the church there must be such a living testimony, such a function of life. Martha's service is necessary, but Lazarus' ministry is even more necessary.

## LOVING

Mary represents the third kind of function (12:2-3). She represents the dear ones who love the Lord very much and who pour out what they hold most precious upon the Lord. They love the Lord so much that they give the best to the Lord. This is what Mary did. She poured the costly ointment upon the feet of the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair. In her heart, nothing was so dear, so precious, and so costly as the Lord. She, along with many others like her, loved the Lord with the best she had. Her estimate of the Lord was that He was more valuable and lovable than anything else.

Mary's pouring the precious ointment upon the Lord Jesus is a sign of the proper church life. Although you may realize that Mary anointed the Lord Jesus with the best ointment, perhaps you have not seen that this is a sign of the church life. The main characteristic of the church life is anointing the Lord with our best love. The main expression, aspect, and characteristic of the church life is that we pour out our ointment upon Him. The church here is likened to a house that is filled with the preciousness, the sweetness, and the pleasantness of the aroma of the ointment

poured out upon the Lord Jesus. This ought to be the main expression of a local church. When you come into a local church, the first thing that you should smell is the loving ointment poured out upon the Lord Jesus. It is not simply that Mary loved the Lord, but that she poured out her best upon the Lord, and this becomes a sign of the proper church life. In the proper church life we all must love the Lord to such an extent.

These three items must be found in the church life. Whenever people come to us, they must realize that among us is the service for the Lord, the testimony of the Lord, and the love poured out upon the Lord. These three items are a must. We must have the service, serving all the time. Even more, we must have the testimony, testifying that the Lord is the resurrection life to us. There is no need for us to labor in this aspect of the testimony. We simply need resurrection life. After we have been resurrected with Him, it is unnecessary for us to labor. We simply sit with Him, go along with Him, and enjoy the feast with Him. This is the real, living testimony that the church must have, and this is the very expression of the Lord. Moreover, we must also have the absolute love shown to the Lord. When people come into our midst, they should say, "Oh,

these people love the Lord at any cost. They will pay any price in loving the Lord. In their hearts nothing is so costly, so valuable, so lovable, and so precious as the Lord Himself.” We must give people this kind of impression.

We all must be a triangular member of the church. We must have three corners. We all must be Martha, Lazarus, and Mary. When someone asks you your name, you should reply, “My name is Martha-Lazarus-Mary.” This is the proper name for us all to have.

If we are truly practicing the church life, we must have the service, the testimony, and the love toward the Lord. We all must be Martha, Lazarus, and Mary. Such a church is the result and issue of the Lord being life to us. [Chapter twelve](#) is the issue of [chapter eleven](#). This kind of service, testimony, and love comes out of the Lord being resurrection life to us. With these functions, there is the genuine church life. In the real church life, the service to the Lord is rendered, the testimony of the Lord is seen, and the love toward the Lord is poured out. Here we can enjoy the Lord with other saints, and the Lord Himself can dwell, rest, and feast in satisfaction. This is the real expression of the Body of the Lord, which is a vessel to contain the Lord and to express Him.

## SPOTTED BY THE FALSE ONE

However, in the picture of the church life portrayed here, there is something negative—the black spot of Judas (12:4). Even among the twelve apostles chosen by the Lord Jesus, there was Judas, who was a black spot. Throughout all the centuries, there has always been a black spot in the churches. The glorious church life is always spotted by some false one. Nevertheless, it is quite comforting that even in the little church established directly by the Lord Jesus Himself, there was such a black spot.

Judas cared for money; he loved money much more than he loved the Lord. Therefore, he did not appreciate what Mary did to the Lord. He thought that it was a waste. Judas pretended that he cared for the poor. Actually that was not true. He only cared for money. In the church life there is almost always such a black spot. Mammon, the embodiment of the evil one, is the real rival of the Lord. The failure to overcome mammon is so often seen in the church life. Judas' love of mammon gave Satan the ground to enter into him and take him over (13:2). Instead of loving the Lord, he betrayed Him! It is a shame that this is often repeated in the church life.

## **PERSECUTED BY RELIGION**

The church life is persecuted by religion. The Jewish priests took counsel that they might kill Lazarus (12:10) who testified to the resurrection power of the Lord. He was an evident and strong testimony of the Lord's resurrection power. This stirred up the religious people's hatred and persecution. It is the same today. The stronger we are in bearing testimony of the Lord as life to us, the more the religious people will be provoked to anger with us.

## **BEING A TEST AND EXPOSING PEOPLE**

The church life is a test. It exposes people (12:6, 10). It exposes where a person's heart is and what his attitude is toward the Lord. Without the church, the people's heart and attitude toward the Lord could never be exposed. As long as there is a church, everything comes to the surface. If there were no church in your locality, the hearts and the attitudes of men toward the Lord would be hidden and concealed. However, in the church life, every man's heart is exposed.

## **BRINGING IN MANY BELIEVERS**

In verse 11 we see that many believed because

of the testimony of Lazarus. The living testimony of the church always causes people to believe in the Lord and brings people into the church life. The increase of the church must depend upon the church's living testimony, not only upon the preaching of the gospel. The best preaching of the gospel that makes the church to increase is our living testimony of experiencing the Lord as our life.

When we consider all of these aspects of the church life, it is not too much to say that the house at Bethany was an early figure of the church. We do see the church life there.

## THE LORD BEING A TEST TO PEOPLE

Not only is the church a test and an exposure of people, but the Lord Himself is a test to all the people around Him. The chief priests and the Pharisees conspired to kill Him ([11:47, 53, 57](#)). We see a different attitude in Simon the leper, for he prepared the house for Him ([Matt. 26:6](#)). Martha served Him, Lazarus testified of Him, Mary loved Him, and Judas was about to betray Him. Many others believed in Him. All of these varying attitudes were shown toward the same Jesus. Where are you? (Are you trying to kill Him, or are you serving Him, testifying of Him,

loving Him, or being seduced to betray Him?) You can never be neutral. You must do something. The very Lord in His church is a test to everyone around Him.

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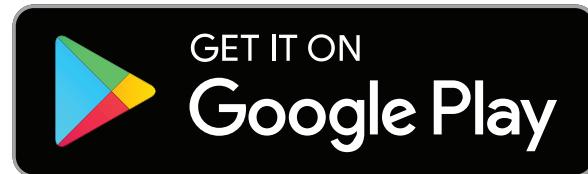
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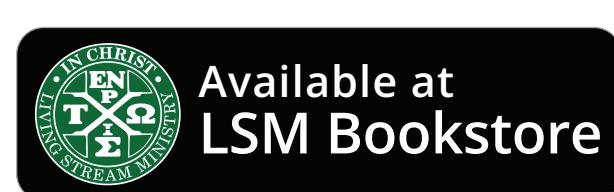


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