



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

John 11:28-37 Commentary New Revised Standard Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse [*International Bible Study Commentary*](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [*International Bible Study Forum*](#).

(John 11:28) When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”

In John 11:27, Martha proclaimed her faith in Jesus as “the Messiah” (the Anointed One or Christ) that God promised to send to redeem His people and save them from their sins—God fulfilled His promise when He sent Jesus. She proclaimed her faith in Jesus as “the Son of God” as Jesus had taught in John 5:21 and other verses in the Bible. Jesus declared, “Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead

and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes.” Jesus would soon prove that statement to be true when He raised Lazarus from the dead and gave him life when He chose to do so. In John 5:23, Jesus also taught the importance of honoring Him as the Son of God, “Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.” Martha also proclaimed her faith in Jesus as “the one coming into the world,” coming from outside this world into this world. Jesus came from heaven to earth. As the Son of God, Jesus came from the Father into the world as “the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

After declaring her faith in Jesus, Martha went back and told Mary privately that Jesus wanted to speak to her (probably also privately, away from all the mourners in the home with her, for Jesus waited right outside Bethany for her to come). In speaking to her sister, Martha also called Jesus “The Teacher,” which reminds us that out of all teachers Jesus was the best teacher as the crowds who heard Him recognized: “He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes” (Matthew 7:29). In Jesus’ day, rabbis would not teach women, but Jesus would teach everyone: no wonder Mary sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what He was saying whenever He taught in her home (see Luke 10:39). As one who listened intently to whatever Jesus taught, Mary must have felt overwhelmed when she learned that the Teacher was calling specifically for her.

(John 11:29) And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

Mary responded immediately to the call of Jesus, just as the disciples that Jesus called responded immediately and followed Him—even leaving their occupations behind them to follow Jesus. Because Jesus is the Person that Martha described, those Jesus chose and called responded immediately and followed Him, though they did not always obey Jesus perfectly or know where He was eventually leading them. Both Mary and Martha serve as examples of those who try to learn all Jesus had to teach so they could do whatever Jesus asked of them. No wonder John makes it a point to reveal that Jesus loved them and they loved Him. Later, in John 14:15, Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments,” and in John 15:14, He said, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

(John 11:30) Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

John explained the situation in detail and emphasized that Jesus remained outside Bethany because He wanted to take the time to speak to both Mary and Martha directly, privately, and personally rather than before a crowd of mourners where they could not concentrate on His teaching. Jesus wants to communicate with all His followers directly, privately, and personally, especially as

the Holy Spirit helps them in their study of the Bible.

(John 11:31) The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Usually a crowd of mostly women would stay for seven days with a grieving family to console them at the loss of a loved one. In some cases, paid mourners would also loudly wail and weep when near the person who had died, when the dead body was being carried to their burial plot, or when family members were walking to and from a graveside to mourn. In a situation such as this, to talk quietly and comfort Martha and Mary, Jesus planned to wait outside the village and have Martha privately tell Mary to come to Him. She quickly went out to find Jesus but observing the custom of that day (a custom still practiced in some cultures) the mourners followed her. So, she would not have had much private time with Jesus.

(John 11:32) When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

To find Jesus quickly, Mary probably followed Martha. She probably had only enough time to tell Jesus what Martha had also told Jesus about wishing He had been there to heal their brother before he died. She too expressed her faith that Jesus had the power to heal her brother, and like

Martha, she had no expectation that Jesus would raise their brother from the dead that very day. She did not yet know that Jesus also had the power of resurrection as well as the power of healing and the power of raising those recently died. She probably held the same core beliefs about Jesus that Martha expressed to Jesus earlier.

(John 11:33) When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

Some scholars teach that the word weeping includes feelings of sorrow and some feelings of anger at death. Jesus was angry at death and the sorrow death brings, but He was not angry with himself as the Creator and the Giver of life. Jesus' humanity moved Him to feel deeply the sorrow that humans feel, especially what His beloved friends felt when facing death. Jesus knows exactly, from personal human experience, the feelings humans have when death separates them from a loved one. Jesus may also have been greatly disturbed in spirit (not in the Holy Spirit) because He knew that He would soon die as He hanged on a cross as a substitutionary sacrifice in our behalf to mercifully, justly, and lovingly forgive us for our sins; therefore, believers in Jesus do not need to suffer eternal death. He may have been deeply moved thinking of the everlasting good and life that His death for our sins would bring to all His followers and the world.

**(John 11:34) He said, “Where have you laid him?”
They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”**

Jesus knew where Lazarus lay in the tomb, but with all the weeping Jews present, He was not going to walk directly to the tomb and leave them wondering how He knew where Lazarus was buried. No, having just arrived, Jesus asked a perfectly natural, human question that anyone would have asked in this situation. So, they led Him to the tomb.

(John 11:35) Jesus began to weep.

Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (see Isaiah 53:3). Jesus loved Lazarus and He wept that the one He loved needed to go through the process of dying to go to heaven, the kingdom not of this world. He wept for those who had suffered during their separation from Lazarus over the past four days because of his death. Paul wrote, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep,” and Jesus wept as He walked toward Lazarus’ tomb (Romans 12:15). Perhaps Jesus wept because He knew that to glorify God and answer the prayers of Martha and Mary He would need to bring Lazarus back from the glories of heaven and return him to Earth where he would suffer and die once again (we do not learn when Lazarus died again, but the enemies of Jesus plotted his death: John 12:10). To protect Lazarus from an untimely death, perhaps John only wrote about how Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead because Lazarus had already died again. Surely, Lazarus would have wanted to go back to

paradise after telling his family and others about all his experiences.

(John 11:36) So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

Jesus loved Lazarus (John 11:3). Jesus loved Martha and Mary (John 11:5). He loved them and wept over their suffering, but He also knew that by their suffering and Lazarus' death, God the Father and the Son of God would be glorified as they deserved and be honored in ways that would draw sinners to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus for salvation from sin (John 11:4). He knew that many would come to believe in Him as the resurrection and the life and they would come to Him to receive the gift of eternal life. If we and those we love must suffer and die in this world before the last day, we can pray that God our Father and Jesus, the Son of God, will be glorified because of or despite suffering and death. Jesus loves all who follow Him even as He loved Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, and He will do what is best for us and all those concerned as we approach death.

(John 11:37) But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Those who were mourning with Martha and Mary knew that they believed Jesus would have healed Lazarus before he died if Jesus had been there. They all had probably discussed the many miracles of Jesus, such as Jesus

healing the man born blind (see John 9). As a way of consoling one another, they may have discussed many of Jesus' teachings, for Mary and Martha along with Lazarus were Jesus' disciples (students). During the four days Lazarus lay in his tomb and they were consoling one another, Jesus and what He could do and taught would have been a focus of conversation and comfort. Everyone knew that messengers had been sent to Jesus to tell Jesus of Lazarus' illness, so many of them may have looked expectantly for Jesus to come any day before Lazarus died, and they may have wondered why He was taking so long to get to Bethany. Knowing His life was in danger in Jerusalem, did some of those grieving think Jesus would not dare come so close to Jerusalem as Bethany? Their four days of waiting were probably well used by Martha and Mary to talk about Jesus and declare their faith in His love and power. They would have discussed whether Jesus was the Messiah or not. In their discussions, Martha and Mary planted seeds of faith that did take root in the lives of some of their listeners who came to believe in Jesus after He raised Lazarus from the dead.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why do you think it might be important to Martha and Mary to call Jesus "The Teacher"?

2. Why do you think Jesus stayed outside the village and Martha told Mary privately that the Teacher was calling for her?
3. Why do you think Jesus wept? Is weeping a sign of lack of faith?
4. What did Mary say that expressed her faith in Jesus?
5. What did the crowd say that expressed their faith or lack of faith in Jesus? What was the foundation for their faith?

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Contact: P.O. Box 1052, Edmond, Oklahoma, 73083 and lgp@theiblf.com.