

Martha

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[0 : 00] The Gospel according to Luke chapter 10 and we shall read verses 38 to 42. Luke 10 at verse 38.

Now it came to pass as they went that he entered into a certain village. And a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard his words.

But Martha was cumbered about much saving and came to him and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?

Did her therefore that she help me? And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art fearful and troubled about many things.

But one thing is needful. And Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her. Now, as the Lord will enable us over the next two or three Thursdays, I want us to have a series of meditations on the family at Bethany.

[1 : 22] And particularly the character of Mary of Bethany. Although obviously when we deal with Mary of Bethany, it will mean touching on the characters of the other two members of that family.

Now, this is one of three scriptures where Mary of Bethany is brought to our attention.

And obviously this is the first incident which is brought before us in regard to Mary of Bethany.

Some people would like to think sentimentally that the Lord Jesus knew the family of Bethany for a long time.

Now, that may or may not be true. Because scripture is silent on that question. And where scripture is silent on any question, we must be silent on it too.

[2 : 39] And however sentimental it might be to think that there had been a long association, as some have said, between the family of Bethany and Jesus, this is the very first scripture where the family are brought before us.

And yet, it's significant that Jesus turns aside at Bethany and he goes in with that family. So, let me try to think in this context what was happening here.

Jesus and his disciples were making their way up to Jerusalem to the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of the Dedication.

And that feast, as you know, lasted for a period of eight days. And obviously, the early days of the Feast of Tabernacles were here, they had come.

And Jesus, with his disciples, are making their way to Jerusalem. Now, someone, I think it was the Yiddish Shrine, who said that Bethany was really like a suburb of Jerusalem.

[3 : 52] It was almost like a village tagged on to the end of Jerusalem. And there, it would appear that Jesus turns aside from the disciples and he goes into this family home, to the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

And it's interesting that in the Gospel of John, we read these words that Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

Jesus loved all of these people. All of these people were converted people. However hard we have to speak about Martha in this chapter, these were three people whom the Lord loved.

And Martha seems to have been the head of this household. All the three incidents give us that impression. Martha was the head of the home.

And there's another character who features in the story of the home of Bethany. And that's the shady character. I don't mean that in a bad way, but the character is called Simon the leper.

[5 : 27] And the question has often been asked was Mary and Martha and Lazarus the family of Simon the leper. Or was it that Simon the leper was the husband, the deceased husband in all probability of Martha.

These are all very interesting questions. But you know, dealing sometimes with background questions in scriptures, it's almost as though you are invited to a meal, and you spend your time at the meal admiring the cutlery.

And we have to go in, not to the background, but we've got to go into the meat of this path. Now, there are four thoughts that I want to bring before you tonight.

First of all, I would like us to look at Martha's condition and her concern in this incident. Martha, as she appears in this precious incident that we have here, Martha received Jesus into her home and she proceeds to make a meal for him.

That's the story we have here. Martha invites Jesus into her house and then she begins to make a meal for him. And that's surely all very legitimate. In fact, it would seem to me that we should be praising Martha, because it was she who threw her home open to Jesus and it was she who showed such hospitality to Christ.

[7 : 07] Do you remember what the scripture says to us? Martha says, Not to be slow to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels on a ways.

And you know friends, if ever there was one entertained an angel, it was Martha, because the angel of the covenant came to dwell in her home. Just imagine that. She had the privilege of entertaining the angel of the covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came from heaven and he came into that home in Bethany.

Some people have said about the home of Bethany that it was the home of a rich family. And it would appear in some ways that that's the case. And it might well be that since this was the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, that in the courtyard of the home there was a booth built, where the family of Bethany would sit together in the shade.

I don't know if you've noticed, one of the families living in this incident. There's no mention of Lazarus here. Only mention made of Martha and his sister Mary.

Where was Lazarus? Well, Edersheim makes the conjecture, rightly or wrongly, that along with the males of Israel, Lazarus had already gone up to the Feast of Tabernacles of Jerusalem, as he ought to do if he was obedient to the law of Moses.

[8 : 46] And it might well be that that's where Lazarus was, when Jesus turned aside and went into this home. And there he was, sitting in the home, and Martha begins to make provision for him.

So, let's be fair to Martha. Why did she begin to make provision for Jesus? Because, you see, as Martha saw it, this was the way in which she must minister to the Lord.

She had to know that the whole of her religion was to be tied up in service to the Master. But remember, my friends, the key to fairness to the Master, is the key of the Master's own head.

I am come not to be ministered after, but to minister. You see, Martha, with all the good intentions in the world, she had lost sight of the great spiritual reality of her Savior.

She said that he came not to be ministered after, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for them. She thought that she had to do everything.

[10 : 13] She thought because her thinking was so carnal at this time in her life, that she must do everything. And you know there are people like that.

There are people in the world, and if I read the religion, I write, the religion is made up of going from one activity to another, and being so wrapped up in so many activities.

And that's what the religion consists of, being said about so many activities. But you see, Jesus is teaching Martha a lesson in this incident, that her religion isn't to be made up of this activity, and that activity, and the next activity.

But true religion is the secret of our life, that is taken up with adoration, and worship, and praise of the Master.

And you know, my friends, the key to all our activities in the spiritual life, the main spring of all our activities in spirituality, must be a heart that has learned adoration, a heart that has learned devotion, a heart that has been caught up in the majesty of a man.

[11 : 40] And Martha, for all your service, there was something lacking in your service. And it's this, you were more concerned with the porcelain plans, you were more concerned with the minutiae of everyday living, than you were of being caught up with the wonder, and the glory, and the majesty of the one who had come to dwell under you.

My friends, is that not the case with so many of us so often? We become so caught up in the minutiae of courage, in the activities that are out and must be out, such spiritual beings, that we lose sight of what it is to be lost in wonder, love, and praise.

I think it was A.W. Toad for somewhere in his writing, who said, that there is a missing jewel in the worship of so much of 20th century Christianity.

What is it, he said? Worship. The missing jewel of so much of 20th century Christianity is this. Worship. A sense of worship.

And dear friends, if our congregation would ever reach that place of high spirituality, you must reach it as a company of worshipping people, not a company of active people.

[13 : 20] We can have all the activity in the world, but if the jewel of worship is missing, if the jewel of adoration, if the sense of majesty has gone from our church, then everything will go.

Oh, do everything as Christians, do everything in your power, to reclaim for Christianity in the 20th century, the sense of majesty, and the sense of worship.

Because if that's there, everything will be there, in its due place, and in its due order. Martha was clumbered about her much sadness, and her tear led her to complain about her sister.

You see, she was saying about her sister, she's left me alone to prayer. You know, that's what carnal activity always does.

It leads us to complain about this one, or that one, or another one in the Christian life. They're not doing what they should be.

[14 : 32] They're not acting as they ought to be. They're not as devoted to me as they should be. And you start to complain about this one, or that one, or the next one in the Christian life.

Why? Because you see, your perspectives are wrong. You're living life under the Martha perspective. And you fail to grasp the Mary perspective that learned to live, and to lean on Jesus.

And she starts to complain about Martha, about Mary. But she starts to complain about one that was greater than me.

You know, when you get a complaining spirit in your Christian life, when you get a complaining spirit, war in your Christian living, you don't end up just complaining about your sister or your brother in the Lord, like Martha did about Mary.

No, no. Lord, she said, do you not change? Lord, do you not change? And you know, when your Christianity comes down to the level of one round of activity, you'll be sure that this is what will come out of it.

[15 : 47] You'll be complaining about your brethren and your sisters. But you'll be doing far more than that. You'll be going to the Lord and you'll be saying to him, Lord, get down on your chair.

You see, there was a veiled criticism here in Martha's life for the Lord's help. And you know, I think that we can safely say that one token, and one sign of our life that is out of tune in the spiritual world, out of tune with your spiritual life.

One sign of being out of tune is this, when you begin to say, Lord, do you not care? How often in your own providence have you come to the point where you've said, Lord, do you not care?

Well, you've had to look your providence in the face, and you've had to say, the Lord has forgotten. And that's the outcome of all of Martha's activity, and all of Martha's field.

And field it was, and Christianity it was, and she was that foe who loved her Lord. She was all of that. And yet, the whole round of activity, from a carnal field, led her to the point where she was saying, Lord, do you not care?

[17 : 13] Let me stop for a moment. Let me speak to you, Mr. Martha and me. I remember hearing this story about them. There was once a conference of ministers over in these states.

And during their break at lunch, they had a time of fellowship together, maybe a bit lighter than what had been going on during the rest of their fellowship.

They were talking about these two sisters. And they were saying, Well, which of these two would you like to have married yourself? And everyone was giving its own view, one after another.

And then, finally, there was one old minister who said, Ah, well, he said, I think I would like Martha before my dinner and Mary after. I think I would like Martha before and Mary after.

But you see, he had lost sight of something here. Here was a woman who was open to the rebuke of the Lord for all her seeing, for all her service, for all her activity.

[18 : 19] She was open to the Lord's rebuke. Now we'll move on to Mary. What does it say about her? And notice verse 39. She had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word.

You know, it's really interesting. There are three incidents in the Bible where Mary of Bethany is mentioned. There's this one. There's the death of her brother Lazarus.

And there's the time when she anointed the feet of Jesus. And in every single one of these incidents, Mary of Bethany is found sitting at the feet of Jesus.

I'll tell you all this is. That's her character. But what was the place at the feet of the teacher? This was the place of humiliation.

This was the place of learning. This was the place that belonged to Mary. She was sharing the place of lowliness at his feet. The place of meekness.

[19 : 25] The place where he would teach her. And that's where she was always found. In every... What a lovely character she must have been. In every single incident where she's mentioned in scriptures.

She's found at the feet of her Lord. Every time. Every single time at the feet of Jesus. What's she doing?

She's a quiet listener. Oh, you say, what is worship? What is worship? Had Mary discovered the real secret of worship by one day?

Maybe the quiet listener that found her way to the feet of her Lord. Had found the absolute secret of worship. She's passed at the feet of Jesus.

She's passed at the feet of Jesus. And she heard his word. My friend, you couldn't get a place on earth better than the place that Mary had.

[20 : 28] She's passed at the feet of Jesus. And she heard his word. And she heard his word. That's all it thinks. She was in the place of meekness. In the place of humility.

She was in the place of discipleship. Listening to the word of Jesus. There's a psalm there. Psalm 123.

I love these words. Do you remember the way discipleship is brought before us in Psalm 123? It's brought before us like this.

Behold, as servants eyes do look their master's hand to see. As handmaid's eye, her mistress hand, so do our eyes attend upon the Lord.

Do you know the picture? The picture is that there's a company gathered around a table. Feasting at a table. And the master sits at the table.

[21 : 27] And the servants and the handmaidens of the master, they're pushed to the side. They're standing at the door. The way you see waitresses sometimes. And all the master has to do is wag his little finger and ask them to come.

And so they're looking to the hand of the master. And that's the kind of Christian service that Mary engaged in. The service that looked always to the eye and to the word of her master as she waited at his feet.

And notice, the Lord rebuked one sister. And the Lord commended the other sister. And I want us first to look at the rebuke that he gave to Martha here.

First of all, notice this. The tenderness of the Lord's rebuke. My friend, have you been filled with wonder as you've experienced the rebuke of your own Lord in your own soul?

Have you been filled with wonder at the tenderness of your Savior's rebuke? Do you notice the way he speaks here? He says, Martha, Martha.

[22 : 47] It's almost as if he's saying to her, look, I'm amazed at you Martha. I'm overcome that you should be so given over to the carnal aspects of serving me.

That you're more concerned and clumbered about the pots and pans of your service to me than you are with myself. That's the difference, you see.

Martha, Martha. Oh, I'm amazed at you. I'm amazed at you. And yet, in that Martha, Martha, there's almost a word that says, I really love you.

I really love you. And yet, my love for you doesn't make me any less amazed that you should be so cumbered to the extent that you're making veiled criticisms of me and saying concerning me, Lord, dost thou not care?

I'm amazed at you saying. But then he points his finger and he acknowledges in his rebuke that care and trouble.

[23 : 59] Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled. Thou art careful and troubled about many things.

You see, that's one of the great contrasts between Martha and Mary. Martha's care and trouble and anxiety is about many things.

And you look at your own life. And look at your own life, especially when you fall into that kind of anxiety and care.

You'll find that anxiety and care always have this associated with them. The many things. Many things. Anxiety and care will always be concerned about the many things.

You know the way it is when you go to bed sometimes and you're tossing and turning and you're worrying about things. Just the way some of us might be at times, worrying about this and worrying about that.

[25 : 05] And you'll always find that anxiety and care will have many things to feed on. But look at the way in which the Lord rebukes Martha.

Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but Mary. And the way he uses to rebuke this dear child of soul is this.

He goes to her and he contrasts her many things with Mary's one all-absorbing object of her devotion.

And I wonder tonight, if we stand under that same rebuke, the rebuke that would say to us, you're concerned and you're anxious and you're troubled about the many things.

But there's one thing needful. One thing needful. You know, Christianity always reaches its height.

[26 : 12] It always reaches its zenith. It always reaches its acme. And it reaches the point where it says one thing, I of the Lord desired.

And all your desires can be gathered up in one. And that one thing is this. Christ in you. The hope of glory.

And the one thing that concerns you is Jesus. And when he becomes your all-absorbing object of devotion, and when he becomes everything to you, and when you say to him, Thou art mine all in all, then my friend, you've reached the point where Mary reached when she came to his feet.

But one thing is needful. What was the one thing needful? What was it? Well, I think it was this.

An all-absorbing devotion to Christ. That's what it was. You see, there was one thing absorbed this woman's life.

[27 : 28] Jesus. She was a Jesus woman. I don't know. Some of you will remember in the 60s, you know, over in California, there were these people that used to go around and they were called Jesus freaks.

Jesus freaks, they were called. They were hippies that had somehow or other latched on to the Christian message. And the rest of the world called them Jesus freaks.

But you see, that's in a sense what Martha became. She was a Jesus woman. What Mary became. She was a Jesus woman.

She was all absorbed with her master. He was enough to fill her every day, her portion every day.

He was enough to fill the whole cosmos in which Mary lived. He was her world. He was her world.

[28 : 29] And the rest of the world could fade away because she had got a glimpse now of the king. She had got a glimpse of her master.

She had come to see him as the one who her soul needed. And the one thing that her soul needed was a personal experience of this Lord.

Do you know something of that in your own soul? Do you know something of that in your own soul? With all the cares and the anxieties of the world pushed behind you.

And there's only one that you want to live for. And there's only one that you want to serve. And there's only one that you want to worship. And the one whom you worship now is Jesus.

Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful. And Mary has chosen that good part.

[29 : 38] Mary's wise choice. Mary's choice was of the one thing needful. Mary's choice was of that good part. And oh friend, if you and I would be so caught up with this rare jewel of worship to Christ.

We too would be full of it. And for us it would be the good part. But notice what Jesus says about Mary's choice.

He says this. Mary has chosen that good part which shall not be taken from it.

Some people debate this text, you know. Some people say that the one thing needful. When Jesus says one thing is needful.

Some people say that what he meant was that one course of a dinner would have been enough. And that Martha was making far too much fuss. And that she was making two or three different courses.

[30 : 45] Rubbish. That's not what he's saying. What he's saying here is this. Mary made choice of that one all-absorbing desire.

Mary made choice of me as her savior. Mary made choice of me as the one and the object of her worship. Mary made choice of me as the one and the other. And she discovered the key to real Christianity.

I am come not to be ministered unto, but to minister. And to give my life a ransom for Mary. What did she discover?

What did you discover, Mary? You discovered this. That time was precious. And time had to be redeemed. And that you only had a little while in this world to follow at the feet of your savior.

And there to worship. And that will not be taken from you. What a word of comfort to us. As we come down from the Mount of Ordinance.

[31 : 55] And as we've no doubt met difficulties and anxieties and uncares this week. If our all-absorbing desire is Jesus.

We have one who will not be taken from us. Let us pray. Gracious God, on this evening hour of worship we adore thee.

We realize that thou art the one who claims our all and our everything. We realize that Christ himself and his worship is the one thing needful.

Because everything else in this world is going to fade and vanish away. But Jesus, Jesus the word of the living God will abide forever.

Blessed be thy name that thy people are a people who will be fed by thee. And that people who will know what it is to worship thee.

[33 : 04] Enable us to do so with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. For Jesus sake. Amen.