

Martha and Mary

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn this evening to consider the words, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the event took place at the end of chapter 10, Luke's Gospel. Chapter 10, verse 38 to the end, the last portion of God's Word that we read.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

But Martha was distracted by all the preparation that had to be made. She came to him and asked, Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me.

Martha, Martha, the Lord answered, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and I shall not be taken away from her.

We often find that in our own churches, possibly in other churches as well, there tends to be an almost divergence of opinion throughout different congregations with regard to our practical Christianity and our devotional living.

[1 : 16] Or, in other sense, we could speak of it as those who are more aggressive with evangelistic outreach. And then there's another side which seems to be more mystical.

And we often find that these are somehow or other regarded as opposite, distinct, and very often opposing forces within our own church even.

I think it would be true to say, as far as geographical locations are concerned, that if you were to look at the churches, you would think that probably the west and the northwest of Scotland is more concerned with a more mystical approach to the things of God, whereas the south is much more, what we would say, practical.

And that may or may not be true to a certain extent in different places. But as we turn to Mary and Martha, we might see possibly some reasons for recognizing that such a distinction is not necessary to be there.

It is not necessary that we should have such a divergence of approach towards the things of God and towards practical Christian living. For we have two people, Mary and Martha, almost, we might tend to think, opposites.

[2 : 40] But that's maybe sometimes because of or fail to read what the Scripture tells us. We have various characters in the Scriptures who are obviously opposites.

We think of David and Goliath. Quite clearly, there's no resemblance and character and outlook in these two. But when we come to Mary and Martha, it would be wrong to think that they're quite different people.

At least, basically, we would have to confess and admit that they are genuine believers and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's an important starting point. But I want us to spend some time in just thinking particularly about Martha, first of all.

First of all, to consider Martha's protestation. And I'm sure many of us would find a certain sympathy with Martha, especially those who have to work hard at the kitchen sink and who are aware that Martha's task was no easy task.

And remember what was happening here. Jesus and his disciples were on their way. He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. So it wasn't just Jesus that was arriving at Martha's doorstep.

[3 : 52] It was Jesus and the number of disciples. So this is quite an onrush into the home. Quite a disturbance to the normal routine of life which demanded that certain preparations be made that there be great and fervent activity in order that when these visitors come they might be duly given the hospitality that they deserve.

And that indeed is a very praiseworthy attitude to have. This idea of people coming and making sure that when they do come there's the very best things for them. Full in agreement with the scripture teaching about hospitality.

But obviously if we see it Martha has found some problems in the situation because she had a sister called Mary who was not to be found at this particular time.

And Martha herself was finding herself to be greatly under pressure. Frustrated. Because there was so much to be done. There was all these people in the house and there she was sweating, literally sweating it out.

Trying to get things ready, trying to get whatever meals we were going to have. And the activity, on the frustrations of mind and body were bringing to this state where she just couldn't cope with the situation.

[5 : 17] She had to do something about it. She couldn't keep this to herself and the best person to aim her complaints at or towards was the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And so we're told that she was distracted by all the preparation that had to be made. She just couldn't get out of her mind and she couldn't cope with it. And so we find her protestation.

But although we can sympathize with it, once we begin to see what she does with her protest, we realize that whatever legitimate reason she might have had, she was going the wrong way about it. Because what does she do? She first of all doesn't begin to criticize Mary so much as the Lord Jesus himself. For the first criticism is towards the Lord.

Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Suggesting the Lord Jesus Christ was so intent in his own work, his own business, that he would have no time to think about her and her struggle, her frustrations, and the problem that he himself by coming to her home had brought with him.

[6 : 31] Perhaps she was saying to him, it's all your fault. If you hadn't come here, I wouldn't have this problem. And so he said, don't you care? Now it wasn't just a matter of saying what you see that something is done, but don't you care?

There's a very personal thing in her mind now. Suggesting you don't really care what happens to me. You're quite happy if I go through this fearful problems I've got here and you just seem to ignore me.

You're not interested. And so it's towards the Lord Jesus Christ her first attack came. And then it was towards Mary because through him she was trying to get at Mary herself.

He says, she's left me to do the work all by myself. And then she gives this command, tell her to help me. As if because of the build up of frustration she's got the strength and this courage to actually address the Lord Jesus Christ and tell her, to give him a command.

Tell her. That's the command she gives. We can sympathize with her, the pressures, the problems, but how far can that sympathy go?

[7 : 38] Well we must remember that it was generally Christ's pattern of work that when he went anywhere as we were told at the beginning of the chapter when he sent his disciples out and when he went himself he sent them out two by two ahead of him to every town.

So there's good reason to believe that Martha was not caught unawares by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. So there was time for preparation before he came.

And something else we ought to notice. What she admits herself, my sister has left me. Now her criticism of Mary would appear to be first of all she's not doing anything.

But that's not true. Mary had left her. Mary was helping her. But when it came to a particular time Mary stopped helping and decided I'm going to sit here and listen to what Jesus has got to say. So then why we sympathize with Martha to a certain extent we can see that she was not just altogether true to the situation.

[8 : 50] She wasn't under such severe pressure as she probably ought to have been. But we know what was building up was first of all frustration then it was brought to resentment bitterness and probably even jealousy itself.

And I think we might learn something about Martha even at a very practical level. The way things can go in life. The frustrations of life. That's how often they can begin with one basic sense of inadequacy.

And the frustration arises in our minds and our hearts and we find ourselves struggling to cope. Sometimes of course we're trying too hard which is the case with Martha clearly. And then we want

to find fault with somebody else for our own personal problems.

And of course sometimes this argument is not only directed towards people it's directed towards the Lord himself. And so while we might have sympathy we also must be on the guard to make sure we don't commit the same sort of sin that she was committing here.

But what was it that Mary was doing then? We've considered something of Martha's protestation but let us now consider for a moment Mary's position. What was she doing then that caused such resentment?

[10:17] Well she'd left off serving. That was obvious but she did something else. She was to be found as we're told in verse 39 she sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

Now this seems like a very lazy person. Here is Martha then struggling as the New English Bible has it you are fretting and fearful about many things.

Now this was Martha fretful and fearing about all the different things that were happening and were going to happen and there was Mary sitting down listening.

Not sitting down just relaxing but sitting down listening but of course the impression might be that she would do nothing else but just sitting relaxing where Martha was struggling and laboring.

But of course we know that she was not just sitting doing nothing. She was active active in the position of being at Jesus feet. Think for a few moments then about this position she was in.

[11:32] We would say one or two things about it. First of all we would say it was a becoming posture she was in. Who was it that had come to her house? This wasn't just a relation or a visitor.

This was the Lord Jesus Christ. For no other reason than the fact that he was divine would have been the right reason to sit before his feet.

When someone of such nature would come into our homes the obvious thing to do would be to stop everything and to sit that he was going to see. But not only was he divine but also because of the fact that when Jesus came into this home he was coming into a home of sinners.

People who were not divine. another reason why we say this is a becoming posture appropriate position to be in in the presence and the company of one who is so holy.

But not only was he just a God as you might say he wasn't just divine he was the Lord himself. The living almighty God was coming into that home. He was clothed in human flesh but he was God and the rightful position and posture to be in in the presence of such a holy one is at his feet nowhere else.

[12:55] Also we could say because he was infinitely wise. Remember we're told that Paul sat at the feet of Gamaliel. This is a place of schooling or of real learning and she was coming before the master the one who got his real MA the master of all arts.

The one who had shown and who was indeed by very creation itself that he was a master craftsman. All wisdom was found in him all power and all grace.

So what else could we do in the presence of one who is so holy? Doesn't it also remind us sometimes of what we are doing when we're coming into the company of the Lord's people?

The place that he has promised to be particularly present how do we respond when we come into that place? Just how much thought do we give to it? Or do we take it?

Like maybe Martha took it to a certain extent. Forgetting just who exactly he was and what really was happening because the mechanics had to be worked the way through. When we come into the church sometimes we have to do certain things.

[14:06] We have to sit in certain seats and we have to pick up our psalm books and we have to pick up our bibles and we might have a look around and see who's here but we forget that God has promised to be present with us here.

And what we ought to be doing is to be sitting at his feet and that is the appropriate posture. It's not only becoming posture we would say also it's a very helpful posture.

If you read through Luke's gospel you find a remarkable number of instances in which men and women sat at Jesus' feet. For the weeping penitent Mary herself Mary Magdalene the one who burst the jar of ointment spiking her that precious ointment where was she found at his feet and if we are weeping and if our hearts are broken over our own need of Christ then we can go to his feet and find that he will welcome us.

There's also a good place for the resting convert the new convert the gathering demoniac who had been struggling with himself with his chains and with everything else around him in the world what happened when he was set free from the literal chains and then the chains of sin and of Satan he

sat at Jesus' feet a place of rest after all the disturbing effect and power of sin upon his life then there was also we think of Jairus the pleading intercessor where was he found?

He was found sitting at Jesus' feet too and also we have the willing learners we have it here in the case of Mary that's where she was found willing to learn where else can we go the feet of Jesus Christ remember too the grateful worshipper the leper the one leper who came back who recognized by Jesus Christ he served worship and he knew where to go to worship to the feet of Jesus Christ finally outside the book of Luke but in the very last book in the Bible Revelation chapter 1 verse 17 remember how John turned round saw the Lord and he fell or he sat at Jesus' feet and that is what the true worshipper the true penitent and those who know anything about where we ought to be in life where we ought to be at the feet of Jesus Christ there's not only a helpful posture it's also a safe posture a great place to be in in a world that is so insecure and so uncertain so violent and so aggressive yet here's a place where we can know stillness and quietness aren't we thankful or are we thankful enough for the heritage we have or at least for the gospel that we have we don't have to go to Mecca to find our God we don't have to go to the temple we don't have to go to the chapel to find the priest to find our God we can sit at his feet wherever we are even at work we can be found in that posture just sitting at his feet it's a safe place to be there's no better place to be and what we're reminded of in this instance is also the fact that

[17 : 38] Mary was never deprived of that position whatever outward activities must be involved and were necessary to be undertaken she was not going to be deprived of this so Christ said later on there it will not be taken from her and shouldn't be thankful this evening that no matter what condition we might feel our hearts to be in no matter how hard we might have found things to be whatever problems are bothering us and seeping into our spiritual freshness our spiritual vitality there's a place that we can come to the feet of Jesus Christ a place where we'll be welcome no matter what others might say no matter what feelings might have about other people but ourselves we'll always find a welcome there and always find it will be received and will not only be received but will be blessed and that was a great thing for Mary not just that she stopped working but she was blessed and so we say that indeed was a helpful posture but you know

Mary had to make time to sit to Jesus feet and this is what we've got to do we've got to make time oh Martha was busy and Mary was busy too but she had to make a specific time she had to set that time aside and even though everything else seemed to clamber around her she had to shut out the sound of the dishes as the case might be shut out the sound maybe of in our own lives of children and of the problems of life shut them all out and shut ourselves in with the Lord Jesus Christ and the quietness of our own hearts even if we haven't got a room that requires discipline and effort but we have to take time and we have to make time time will never be found it doesn't fall in our laps I'm sure all of us find that but we're still going to make time and then take time but what about the Lord's pronouncement in this situation because the

Lord has been asked to judge this event and most of all he's been told to judge Mary for her failings her slackness what the Lord said to her after this great command that she was giving her she was giving him verse 41 tells us Martha Martha you can almost hear the Lord sign over Martha he could understand the problem he could see her frustrations as clear as she could herself and she could see what he could see what lay behind the bitterness brothers couldn't perhaps and the anger and resentment held against Mary Martha Martha I can see right through you but he's not been superior in this particular thing he's not been particularly harsh on her as you might think she might deserve but he's most tender and most gentle with her and he shows her you are worried and upset about many things or you're fretting and you're fearful about everything really uptight as we would say or hassled as some of us would use this word things are really getting you down but only one thing is needed not just his pronouncement one basic thing what is being said is not that all these things were totally unimportant but there's one thing above all other things that's important the same with remember when the disciples

Jesus was speaking to them we read together earlier about seeking the kingdom of God it's not so sharp in the NIV but the authorised version remember gives this but seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you there are necessary things and important things in life but this is absolutely important this must have priority and that's what Martha was being reminded there are mechanics there are things we have to go through we must go through the practical things in life Mary would not be encouraged because of what she was doing to not do anything at all about the home no this is not the point that was being made the point was being

made that Mary had made the choice Mary has chosen she had the choice and Martha you were the choice too surely that's been what's been suggested to you both had the same choice you had the choice Martha to go on with your work or you had the choice to come and listen to what had to be said of course the pressure of work and Martha was maybe very conscientious it was very tempting to be over conscientious in one area but not in the most important area and this was the important area the spiritual one the place to be then was to be found at Jesus' feet and sometimes we have to remember this even in terms of practical things even in theological things those who study theology must never lose sight of what it is they're supposed to be doing that is that we're to be in one thing needful we're to be found at his feet whatever else we read and we understand of theology we must be at his feet and whatever mechanics you might go through with regard to evangelism and all the different practical things that are involved we must still be found at his feet and must never neglect this thing because this is the one thing that really is needful all the rest will become rather useless and rather vain rather worthless without this needful thing

Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her what you do might be taken away from you true but what she has done will not be taken from her Mary has made the choice this is not just a one off thing we know that but this choice has been sort of been brought to our minds on different occasions and we can't begin to number perhaps or begin to recognize them because we become so familiar with the pattern routine of life and we fail to notice the different times we must make the choice between sitting at Jesus' feet and going through the necessary mechanics of life well Martha was a practical person but she was a believer and she needed to remember that was a place where she ought to be at the feet of Jesus Christ Mary too had to carry on our practical work but this was a time for spiritual life not for practical necessities and when these things are to be weighed up and they need to be weighed up sometimes then one must take priority over the other our spiritual necessities must take priority over our practical necessities in order that we might have the strength to carry out those practical things those daily things that we have to do in order that we might be able to cope with life and his increasing pressures and tensions what way do we look then at

[25 : 00] Mary and Martha where do we see ourselves can we see ourselves anywhere in this picture I'm sure we can if we look properly but remember that the main lesson is not so much the failures of Mary or Martha but rather the grace and the love of the Lord Jesus Christ in that when Martha failed he was there to help her too Mary knew what she needed and she did the right thing she needed to hear Christ she needed to be with him hers was an act of devotion and that's where we ought to be in this act of devotion before his feet especially as we come to remember his death we might go through the mechanics of carrying out the various duties expected of us either in dispensing or in partaking of the Lord's supper but we ought to be at Jesus' feet even through this in order that these things might be done in spirit and in truth and in order that the Lord

Jesus Christ will have the glory collectively and individually and in order that we too might be richly and personally blessed at his feet maybe then we will be found at his feet let us pray our Lord we thank thee that we can turn to this place that is a place that is not far away from any of us that we can find a place where we are fully understood where every feeling every frustration and every problem in life is known and recognised and we thank the one who has feelings for us who not only sees our problems who not only can have a knowledge of them but who has a sympathy for us because he himself was in this world and we pray that we might be found more often at his feet that we might be found worshipping and adoring the Lord of glory and may we never begin to remove ourselves from that position may we be constantly drawn to his feet and may we not be so conscious of the draws and the pulls of the problems and the necessities of life so much as a desire to know him to know him who is the resurrection and the life that I might know him and so be with us as we continue together to praise thy name and to meet with thee and to be drawn closer to thee for

Jesus sake amen and to und and