

The 'Martha, Martha' Story

The Good Part Mary Chose

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Please turn to Luke 10, verses 41-42.

Luke 10:41-42 And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”

Now you recognize this as the conclusion of the “Martha, Martha” story and the question I want you to think about is, what was that one thing that was needful, that “good part” that Mary chose? The purpose of this sermonette is to answer this question. So to begin here we will read the story, starting with verses 38-40.

Luke 10:38-40 Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.”

I am going to make some comments to fill in extra information that I learned from reading John 11—the account of Lazarus' resurrection. Mary was Lazarus' and Martha's sister, and it tells about some of their attitudes and their faithfulness, but it also tells us that they loved Jesus and that Jesus loved them. So it was not just a casual relationship, a drop-in visit, it was a visit between good friends.

It also says that Mary was the one that washed Jesus' feet with the precious ointment and wiped it with her hair. In the account it shows that Martha owned the house and evidently Mary lived with her, but she took a leadership role. Verse 39 says,

Luke 10:39 And she had a sister called Mary, who also [the term “also” indicates that both of them] sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word.

In my first account I had a picture of Martha just running around and Mary sitting there and Martha not even paying much attention but doing all the serving. But I think we need to understand that Martha was a disciple of Jesus, and she sat at His feet, and she did hear the Word. So the word “also” indicates that both of them were there.

Now the expression “sit at someone's feet” is used to indicate being an ardent disciple of a teacher. Paul used it in a defense he made found in Acts 22:3. He was defending himself before a group of people, most of whom were Pharisees and he said:

Acts 22:3 “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.”

So he was saying, “I was taught just like you at the feet of Gamaliel, I was one of his disciples. I was zealous and embraced what he said.” In the same manner, when it was Mary and Martha that sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word, it is not indicating just a physical position, it is an indication of spiritual embracement of what Jesus was teaching. And hearing the word is not just a physical hearing, it is hearing with intent to act on it and make it a part of your life. So this expression means more than just a physical position.

Now from Jesus' point of view, here was the Son of God, the Creator of the universe, the God that had come as a man to teach God the Father's truth and

give a witness about God to the world. He was excited about being in the presence of a receptive audience, so this was something that He had a lot of things to say.

And earlier in this chapter it gives an account saying that He sent seventy people out and gave them powers over demons; powers to heal; preach; teach. They came back and He was explaining to them, “I have given you special power and nothing can harm you.”

So no doubt Jesus was eager to tell these ladies about what had happened. Mary was very desirous to hear every word, while Martha was encumbered with much serving. Now let us look at verse 24. Jesus made it plain to the seventy and to the others that He had given them special information.

Luke 10:24 “For I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it.”

It was a great privilege for these seventy people to hear and see these things. And it was also a great privilege for Martha and Mary to hear and see these things. And it is also a great privilege for us today as well, to be able to know many of these things that prophets and kings desired to know about and see but could not. We may not see it physically like they did, but we can see other things physically and we can see things spiritually and understand through spiritual eyes.

So the messages that we hear from our ministers and from the Internet and literature are all focused on God's Word. Mary sat at Jesus' feet and heard the very Word of God, and in the same manner we today have His Word in our Bibles.

But Martha had her concept of what was important, and she was, as other translations say: preoccupied; encumbered; distressed; troubled; busy; distracted. She was concerned about the physical things, and she thought that this was important, in her mind. So she looked at her sister Mary and said, “What is the matter with her? She is sitting there talking when she should be

helping me.” This was her mindset, and she thought that this was the righteous thing to do. She even went to Jesus and told Him to “tell her to get up and help me because she left me to do all the work alone.”

Now sometimes we do this in our prayers like Martha did. We have our own mindset of what we should do, and without really understanding God's Word and letting it be our guide instead. Sometimes we have objectives that we think other people should do and we think that they should be doing something and maybe we might pray that God changes them and make them do what we think that they should do. And maybe we do not realize what the will of God really is and what the important things really are.

When Martha said this to Jesus, here was a lady who was commanding the Son of God to make her sister do something that she thought was needful. But in a sense, Jesus answered, “Now that you mention it Martha, if you want to know the truth, you are troubled and concerned about physical things and one thing is needful, and Mary has actually chosen the good part that shall not be taken away from her.”

Now if I were to ask you to write what you thought that “good and needful part” was, there would probably be different versions of similar answers, but we would not all get the same answer, because Jesus did not really say what the “good part” was. But if you look in the account, the only actions that it says Mary did was to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His Word.

So my conclusion is that if we learn to “sit at Jesus' feet” in a spiritual sense, and listen to His Word, with intent to zealously obey, then this is the “good part” and it shall not be taken away from us. Because it is spiritual information, it will inspire us and motivate us and inform us. This knowledge is not physical, it lasts forever.

In conclusion, remember the “Martha, Martha” story and choose the “good part.” Sit at Jesus' feet, hear His words, and it will not be taken away from you.