

LIVES THAT REMIND US ABOUT GOD - Meeting Yourself In The Sacred Text Part nineteen - Sunday, June 23rd, 2024
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MARTHA - Learning to Prioritize Devotion to Jesus - Luke 10:38-42 -
“Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. [39] And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. [40] But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." [41] But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, [42] but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

- 1) **SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION** - Martha lived with her sister (Mary), and her brother (Lazarus). John tells us the name of their home town was ***Bethany***. Jesus seemed to frequent their home as he travelled through that region. It is at this place Jesus ***raised Lazarus from the dead*** (John 11:1-44). At Bethany Jesus was "***anointed for His future burial***" by Mary (John 12:1-7).

- 2) **MARTHA'S FAILURE** - I'm sure it seemed strange to Martha that she got the rebuke she thought should have gone to Mary. ***What had she done wrong?*** Is it wrong for a host to want to properly look after a guest? There is something in Martha's actions that makes so much sense. What is the ***use*** of Mary's devotion to Jesus when there's important work to be done? Nobody would eat dinner if everyone just sat at Jesus' feet. Deep down in all of us there is admiration for good old ***productivity*** in Martha's actions.

The issue seems to lie in the words "**anxious**" and "**troubled**" in **verse 40**. It *is* right to attend to one's duties and responsibilities. **And that is precisely where the danger lies**. Martha would never dream of robbing a bank or committing adultery. She wouldn't dream of committing such outward acts of rebellion. **But this is not the only way spiritual damage is done in our lives**.

This seems to cut to the heart of the significance of this account. One does not have to do something **bad** to miss a spiritual opportunity. One has only to **ignore what is most important**. This passage is more about the **ordering** of events rather than good and evil. Martha is **anxious** and **troubled**.

What sucks the life out of service and work for the Lord, and what puts joy and contentment back into it? This is where Martha misses it. This is why she is **anxious** and **troubled**. She is focussing on "**many things**" while missing the **one** thing "**necessary**"(42).

Martha wasn't doing anything we would normally call **wicked**. But this wasn't a normal situation. This wasn't just **any** guest. Our routines can keep us from closeness to our Lord. And they are destructive indeed when they keep us from recognizing when devotion to Jesus is most urgent.

Is there a message here for all who would build their righteousness around ethical merit and diligence without giving priority to the Person and message of Jesus? Morality and industry are indeed precious. But neither is the same as the saving grace imputed through Jesus Christ.

For more on this idea see Jesus' words in **Matthew 13:22** - “As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the **cares of the world** and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”

This is very close to Martha's problem. This is proven by the fact that she actually wants Jesus to send Mary away from the place at His feet so she can help her in the kitchen. Notice the assumption here. The assumption is it's more important to be working in the kitchen than worshipping at Jesus' feet. And Jesus will not allow this minimizing of the central role of worship and devotion.

How easy it is to settle for ***doing something for Jesus*** while not actually ***presenting our heart to Jesus***. All of our religious routines need to be constantly reviewed in light of this teaching.

- 3) **THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVOTION** - We are in desperate need of this story today. ***Jesus is certainly not against service and work***. It is significant that the placing of this account of the distracted work of Martha comes right on the heels of Jesus' teaching about the sweaty labor of the Good Samaritan (**Luke 10:25-37**). There is more than one way to miss God's will for the moment.

Jesus is sharpshooting in our text. He is dealing specifically with the common tendency on the part of many to ***minimize the importance of devotion***. Ours is a world that worships activity - lots of activity. We tend to place work and service (even in the church) above worship and devotion. Unfettered worship and devotion are viewed as an aesthetic option for the mystically minded. We're all warned about those who are so heavenly minded that they're no earthly good.

But how important *is* undistracted devotion? What is happening when it looks like the worshipper is doing nothing important. Plenty. Consider this. Remember the fall of Lucifer. Remember how he was "*lifted up*" in his own pride and pulled away from God oriented proper worship. The truth is, every act of pure, undistracted worship and devotion is the *protection of the universe*. And long after all the hungry are fed and the naked clothed - long after poverty is no more and every disease obliterated from the earth - long after our Lord wipes every tear from our eyes - we will all be *worshipping* around the throne of God.

- 4) **DID MARTHA ENJOY HER OWN DINNER?** - That's more than a light-hearted question. No doubt it is true that a more elaborate meal was eaten in Bethany that day due to the hard work of Martha. But this is also true: there would probably have been greater joy with a simpler meal and the deeper spirit of joy and unity among all the guests.

Martha clearly wasn't joyful. Jesus described her as "*anxious*" and "*troubled*". When we get our eyes off of Jesus and on to our labors alone, we always lose the joy in our spirits that only His presence can bring. *The closeness of the presence of Jesus puts down the cares of this world's tasks the same way the rising sun puts out the stars of night*. The stars are still there. But you don't notice them once the sun comes out.

- 5) **THINGS THAT WON'T BE TAKEN FROM US** - These are the words Jesus used to describe the wisdom of Mary's choice of priorities in **verse 42** - "...but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which ***will not be taken away from her.***" These are potent words. One day you won't be able to **do** all the things you do. Your strength will be "***taken from you.***" Health and mental brightness only **seem** eternal. They will fade and leave behind only what you have **loved**.

This is Jesus' loving point. Only what you and I **love** can bring lasting **joy**. Accomplishments are important, but fleeting. Love for Jesus is what keeps our **egos** in check. It is what keeps our work from becoming **idolatrous**. It keeps Jesus at the center. No wonder Jesus called Mary's devotion "***necessary***"(42).

The things we need to pursue can be simply identified by this little test. You need something that won't slip away in the face of **poverty**. Something that stays in **sickness or health**. Something that is just as real and important in **youth or at deathbeds**. Something that will still be bringing joy to your life in **time or in eternity**.