

JESUS VISITS MARTHA AND MARY

Luke 10:38-42

Key Verse: 10:41,42

“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 it will not be taken away from her.”

In the last passage Jesus told an expert in the law the parable of the good Samaritan. Then Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.” Jesus wants us to put the love of God into action in order to please God. Then we can enjoy God’s life in our souls. Knowing the word of God is important. But without putting what we know into practice, we become the spectacle of a hypocrite like the priest or Levite in the parable. After hearing this parable, many of us were cut to the heart and could not but repent of our selfishness and hypocrisy. But through repentance and the grace of forgiveness of sins, we found the hope of God to raise each of us like the good Samaritan who has a compassionate heart and puts God’s love into action. This is important for us. But it is even more important to God. Even now, there are many half-dead students in Chicago’s high schools and universities. At one high school, which draws the most talented students from the best backgrounds, a counselor said that many students struggle with the thought of suicide. Suicide is the third-leading cause of death among young people in America aged 15-24. Of course, each person has his or her specific reasons, but ultimately they are all rooted in the power of sin and death working in these young people’s lives. If only they had shepherds who would listen to them and share God’s word with them, they could be raised from death to life. God called us to be shepherds for them. But some of us are too busy managing our own affairs to go to the campuses and meet students. Some of us share wonderful Bible testimonies at our weekly meetings, but do nothing for dying students around us. May God forgive our selfishness and hypocrisy and change our hearts into the heart of a good Samaritan. May God make America a good Samaritan nation for all nations of the world.

In today’s passage, Jesus visits the home of Martha and Mary. This event is unique to Luke’s gospel. Actually, it is only a few words of conversation between Jesus and Martha that took place in a most informal setting. To many people it may seem like nothing. But to the eyes of Luke the historian and evangelist, the words of Jesus were most significant and they were the words of life. Jesus teaches us that listening to his word first is of utmost importance. May the Lord speak to each of us personally through this study.

First, in review, Jesus is the good Samaritan.

Considering what we have studied thus far, Luke’s Gospel vividly reveals Jesus’ compassion. Look at verse 38a. “As Jesus and his disciples were on their way....” Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem. Jesus knew what awaited him there. It was betrayal, trial, condemnation, suffering and death on the cross. John the Baptist had also known this and called Jesus, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Jesus loved God with all his heart and soul and strength and mind. So Jesus took step after step toward Jerusalem. Jesus was ready to offer his life as a ransom sacrifice on the cross for the sin of the world. There is nothing in the past, present or future that is more important to God and to world salvation work than Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection. Jesus could have been burdened. Jesus could have ignored requests that came to him. But not only did he meet all suffering people’s demands, but Jesus went out of his way to save those who were perishing under the power of sin and death.

Once, Jesus was teaching the Bible in the synagogue. He saw a man whose right hand was shriveled. Jesus felt pity for him. Perhaps this man had wanted to play baseball. But he could not. Because he was not good in sports, his peers thought he was a sissy. So they ridiculed him mercilessly. Ignoring his fatalistic life problem, the teachers of the law wanted to use this man as bait to trap Jesus into healing on the Sabbath so they could accuse him. Jesus knew this. But divine compassion compelled him to heal the man at any cost. Jesus told him in front of them all, “Get up and stand in front of everyone.” Then Jesus said to him, “Stretch out your hand.” The man did so, and his hand was completely restored. Jesus healed this man at the risk of his life.

Another time, Jesus was passing through a town called Nain. He saw a funeral procession for the only son of a widow. This poor woman had lost everything. She was mourning and wailing and no one could console her. But when Jesus saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.” Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. Jesus turned her sorrow into joy and brought her from death to life.

Still another time, Jesus was going through a large crowd of people. Then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up and touched the edge of his cloak and she was healed of her infirmity. She wanted to “hit and run” without telling Jesus. But Jesus stopped the entire crowd of thronging people and called out, “Who touched me?” Jesus did this again and again in spite of the protests of his disciples and others. Finally, the woman came trembling and publicly confessed why she touched Jesus and how she had been instantly healed. It was her personal testimony of Jesus’ grace. It was difficult for her to do. But in this way, she became a child of God. Jesus did not let her remain in a “hit and run” mentality. Jesus spent time to make a personal relationship with her until she could have God’s salvation.

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was moved by the need of the people around him. He was deeply aware that there were so many dying souls who needed the kingdom of God more than a dehydrated man needs water. Though his disciples were like little lambs, Jesus sent them out to proclaim the message of the kingdom of God to save men from the devil and bring them back to God. Our Lord Jesus Christ had a compassionate heart for all mankind; Jesus is the good Samaritan.

Second, Martha opened her home to Jesus (38).

Look at verse 38 again. “As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.” According to John, this village was Bethany, a small suburb about two miles away from Jerusalem (Jn 11:1). But Luke does not identify the city. To Luke the place was not so important; what happened there was important. The name of the place might be changed again and again. The kinds of people who inhabited the village might change. But when Jesus walked on earth, something happened there that became a part of gospel history. The event remains forever in the work and history of God. Jesus and his disciples had been traveling along, going from place to place. There was quite a number of them. They needed a place to stay and something to eat. But it was not easy for anyone to take care of them because of the tremendous amount of food needed as well as the threat from hostile religious leaders. But there was someone. It was Martha. She opened her home to them. Again, Luke reveals that behind Jesus’ messianic ministry there were sacrificial women of God.

When Martha opened her home to Jesus it was a beautiful act of hospitality. To Jewish people, the home was regarded as the family sanctuary. The home was a sacred place for family fellowship and even for worship services. Jewish people were very discerning about inviting people to their homes. Martha opened her home to Jesus. She invited Jesus wholeheartedly. Martha knew there would be a tremendous amount of work involved in caring for Jesus and his disciples. But she opened her home to them. Martha was hardworking, generous and wise enough to invite Jesus. Jesus did not hesitate to accept.

In God’s work, women like Martha are very important. In Luke 8:3 we learned about other sacrificial women of God who served Jesus and his company selflessly. Luke gave much credit to these women as part of Jesus’ fruitful ministry. Around us there are women who practice the open home policy toward Jesus and his disciples. We know Mother Barry as an eminent woman of God and the international director of UBF ministry. But her home is always open to the people of God to come and go, and she herself serves them with prayer and with delicious beef. Many men see that Martha opened her home to Jesus and take it for granted. But this required a great deal of work on Martha’s part and willingness to sacrifice. Everyone knows that Missionary Joshua Hong is a sacrificial shepherd who sheds tears for God’s sheep under his care. But behind him is his coworker, Missionary Grace Hong, who opens her home to Jesus’ disciples and takes care of their needs. Some people see Martha as only a negative example. But Martha had a very good point: Martha opened her home to Jesus.

Third, Mary’s one-to-one Bible study with Jesus (39).

Look at verse 39. “She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.” Mary seems to be the younger sister. She is different in character than Martha. She seems to be very sweet and lovely and not so diligent. But she was excellent in one thing. She loved to listen to Jesus’ Bible teaching. As Jesus taught about the kingdom of God, Mary sat at his feet listening to what he said. Her heart was captured by the words of Jesus. She felt that Jesus’ teaching was more important than anything else in the whole world. At first, she could feel Martha’s piercing gaze on the back of her neck. But as she listened to Jesus’ words, the peace of God came into her soul. She

was transported from this world to the spiritual reality. She could picture with her mind's eye the reality of the kingdom of God and the beauty of the kingdom of God. She forgot everything else and only heard Jesus' words.

Actually, Mary had deep sorrow in her heart. It could be triggered by Martha's relentless bossiness and pushiness. But it was rooted in the power of death working in Mary's heart. Already her father and mother had died. When her brother Lazarus died too, she had bitterly said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her agony of soul, he wept. But Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (Jn 11:25,26). Then he raised Lazarus from the dead. Mary was happy to have Lazarus back with her alive again. But the problem in her heart was not completely solved by the raising of Lazarus. Mary needed to know the world salvation plan of God and the living hope of the kingdom of God for all mankind. Jesus must have taught her from Genesis to Revelation with a clear explanation of his own suffering, death and resurrection. Jesus wanted to plant the gospel in Mary's heart. Jesus' words were soothing to Mary's heart. As Jesus continued to speak, his words ministered to the sorrow and pain deep in her soul that came from the power of death. Probably, Jesus spoke so long that Martha's well-prepared food got cold. Most people's patience ran out. But the darkness disappeared from Mary's heart. Mary felt sure that God loved her. Mary was certain that the kingdom of God was for her and that she would live there with Jesus forever. Heavenly sunshine touched her soul, flooding her heart.

In this event, Mary and Martha are contrasted. According to verse 42, Jesus evaluated that Mary chose what is better. Mary chose to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to his word. Martha chose to prepare dinner for Jesus and the disciples. Humanly speaking, it looks like Mary is being lazy and aristocratic and a spoiled youngest daughter. But Jesus did not think so. Jesus was happy that Mary sat down to study the Bible with him. Here we learn that Jesus' real intention in visiting the home of Mary and Martha was to teach the Bible to them. Mary was humble enough to recognize her need. She needed Jesus' word. She perceived Jesus' heart's desire to give her his word. Of course, Jesus and his disciples were hungry and needed a place to stay. But Jesus' real intention in visiting the house was to share the word of God with Mary and Martha. Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God as of first importance. In this part, we learn from Mary that what Jesus really wants us to do is to sit at his feet and listen to his word. Jesus visits to bless, not to burden. Most of all, we learn from Jesus that he taught the Bible to one open-hearted person as of first importance.

Fourth, calm down Martha and listen to Jesus (40-42).

Look at verse 40. "But Martha was distracted by all the preparations 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!'" Luke says, "But Martha was distracted." Martha missed the point of Jesus' coming. She did not know that Jesus came to teach the Bible to her. She did not know that Jesus really wanted fellowship with her. Jesus wanted her to listen to him and receive the words of eternal life. But Martha was distracted. She thought about the pot roast in the oven, the potatoes that were not peeled, and the water jars that were still half empty. She realized that she was out of dill, oregano and paprika. How could she cook without them? The back room was messy, the laundry was not done, the disciples needed their socks mended, and so on and so on. After around forty things piled up in her brain, she had a brain overload and she just couldn't take it anymore. She was most sorry and upset that Mary was sitting down when there was so much work to be done. She wanted Mary to listen to her. But Mary paid not attention. So Martha went to Jesus and expressed her frustration and her doubt about Jesus' love and understanding of the situation. She really wanted Jesus to rebuke Mary for being lazy and useless and selfish and indifferent.

What did Jesus do? Look at verses 41-42. "'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 it will not be taken away from her.'" When we call a person's name twice, it means we really want to get him or her, usually her, to listen when they are really busy talking. Jesus could have been angry at Martha's outburst. But Jesus responded to her humbly with the deep desire to help her out. Jesus was like a father to his petulant daughter, embracing her with humbleness and love. Then Jesus explained to her simply what her problem was. She missed the main point of Jesus' visit. When Jesus came into her door, she should have spent time with Jesus first until she received his blessing of peace. She should have realized his grace of coming to her house. She should have listened to Jesus until she understood Jesus' heart. She should have received Jesus' word before trying to do something for Jesus. Here we learn a very important lesson. When we want to do something for Jesus before receiving his word, we become scatterbrains. There are too

many things to do and not enough time, and our blood pressure goes up until we feel that our heads will spin off and shoot into space like a rocket.

Jesus said, "...only one thing is needed." This is God's wisdom. We don't need many things. We need only one thing. We need Jesus. When we have Jesus, everything is okay. Therefore, Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." We must remember that only one thing is needed. It is Jesus himself. When we have Jesus we have everything.

Martha wanted Jesus to order Mary to help her. But Jesus did not. Jesus defended his sheep Mary and protected her personal relationship with him. Jesus said in John 10:28, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."

Jesus taught the word of God to one needy soul as an absolute priority. Jesus wants to give us his word first. Moreover, we must teach the word of God before eating delicious food.