

# Martha In His Face, Mary At His Feet

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My message tonight is on a familiar passage of Scripture from the gospel of Luke about the story of the two sisters, Martha and Mary. It is found in Luke 10:38-42. You can turn in your Bibles there now.

My message is entitled “Martha In His Face and Mary At His Feet.” These two sisters loved Jesus and Jesus loved them but they were very different. We have busy, bossy Martha contrasted with quiet, reflective Mary. Augustine said of these two sisters that he’d rather have Martha before dinner and Mary after.

I want us to focus on this scene from Luke tonight. Jesus just loved going to the little home in Bethany to visit Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary. It was a place where he felt at home and comfortable. It was a place where he could be himself and kick off his sandals and relax. Is your house like that, friend? Does Jesus feel at home in your home in that way? Or is there something in your home that he would be uncomfortable with?

Well, the last time I preached this message was about ten years ago and two memorable things stand out in my mind from preaching it back then. First, I recall I was preaching it to a group of pastors and Dr. Stephen F. Olford was sitting on the front row. I was nervous as all get-out. In fact, I was so nervous that before I preached, I asked Dr. Olford to pray for me and he laid his hands on me and prayed for this nervous preacher. Secondly, I recall that when I was through preaching this message a pastor from New Orleans ran up to me and he wouldn’t let me go unless I gave him my sermon notes so that he could preach the same message to his congregation that coming Sunday.

Well, I feel led to preach this message to you tonight because we can learn much from it and the main message to be learned is that there is a need for both service and worship but Mary had it right because she heeded to the one thing needful. Listen friends, worship must precede service. Sometimes we get that all turned around and God is not so concerned about what we do for him, running around here and there, serving him, as he is more concerned about our worship of him. Allow me to read you our passage of Scripture this evening,

“38 Now it happened, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. 40 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. 41 And Jesus answered and said to her, Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things: 42 but one thing is needed: and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”

Now, I want us to notice several things about this passage of Scripture, this little pericope. We see Martha in his face compared to Mary at his feet. Notice also that Martha is concerned about many things and Mary is concerned about one thing, the one thing needful. Look at verse 40 where Martha declares, “Lord, do you not care?” Martha questions him. Have you ever questioned God, friend? Have you ever said, “Lord, you see my problem. Do you not care?” But the prophet Isaiah declares, “Shall the clay say to him that fashioned it, What makest thou?”

Next we see that Martha goes a step further from questioning him to bossing him; she bosses him around and gets in his face. She says, “Tell her to help me.” Imagine the nerve of Martha bossing the Creator of the universe around and Martha was disrespectful to Jesus because she interrupts him as he is speaking with Mary. I want to read you what this text says in the Greek language because it has a stronger emphasis. It states that, “she burst in upon Jesus and assumed a stance over him saying, Speak therefore to her at once.” Can you imagine the boldness of Martha as she stands there in her apron with her hands on her hips ordering Jesus around. In essence, Martha is in his face.

But do you know what, friend? Even though Martha is chewing Jesus out, there is a passage in John's gospel where we see a tender scene at this little house in Bethany. That text reads, “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” He loved her. He loved her even though she could be difficult at times; despite all her faults, Jesus loved her. Do you know what, dear friend? Despite all my faults, he loves me and despite all your faults, he loves you. Amazing love! We should love like that.

So we see Martha in his face, interrupting him, questioning him, bossing him. Now let us look at the quiet sister, Mary. We have seen Martha in his face, now let us look and see Mary at his feet. Verse 39 says, “Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.” Mary sits near to Jesus; she wants to be close to Jesus to hear what he has to say to her. She is a learner and a worshipper of Jesus; she desires his fellowship. She always enjoyed the visits of Jesus to her home and she can't get enough of him; she wants to stay in his presence. Do you have a prayer life like that, friend? Do you stand still enough in your devotional time to listen and hear his voice and to hear his word to you? Mary sits at the feet of Jesus in an attitude of worship.

As believers we should follow Mary's example and do likewise. If we sat at his feet more, we would fall less into ditches. We each should have a daily quiet time with our

Lord, a regular devotional time where we meet God and worship him in his presence. If we could only learn this valuable lesson, that worship precedes service, but we must spend the necessary time with our Master in a daily quiet time of prayer but many of us are too busy serving him like Martha and we fail to sit at his feet like Mary.

There is an oil painting that hangs in a Spanish gallery and in this painting is a farmer who is kneeling beside his straw hat. He has just laid down his farm implements and his plow. In the distance is a town and a bell-tower of a church and it is obvious from looking at this painting that the church bell has just rung to call the village to a time of prayer. But if you look more carefully at this painting in the top right corner, you'd see the form of an angel that has just picked up the reins of the team of mules and is behind the plow as it turns a fresh furrow in the ground. The caption below the painting has three words in capital letters and they read: NO TIME LOST. Do you get it? No time lost. When we pray, all of heaven is enlisted on our behalf. We get more done in prayer than out of prayer. No time lost. Mary knew the better part, the one thing needful.

Mary's sister, Martha, was concerned about many things. Jesus said to her, "Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things." Martha was missing the main thing in her house and that was the Son of God. Mary, on the other hand, was concerned about that one thing, one thing needful: Jesus Christ.

When I was doing my research on my biography of George Whitfield, I located a famous piece of Whitfield memorabilia. It is now housed in a museum on Long Island. It's a piece of a window pane from an old house where George Whitfield had been the guest and spent the night there. In fact, on the back of this pane of glass is a document attached which reads,

"George Whitfield in 1765 visited the township of Southold. He lodged one night at a house owned by a wealthy man by the name of Mr. Thomas Fanning who possessed an abundance of the good things of this life, yet seemed to be destitute of heavenly things. In the morning, George Whitfield arose and before he left the room he wrote with a diamond on the pane of glass these important words, 'One thing is needful.'"

You see friends, the great British evangelist knew full well about Jesus being the one thing needful, so did Mary. Martha had to learn it, how about you? Are you too busy to pray? Are you too busy in Christian service to spend time in the worship of the Almighty? Do we realize the necessity of sitting at the feet of our Master each day and hearing his word?

One day, a young ruler approached Jesus and this man was quite wealthy and he knew all the commandments and claimed to have kept them since his youth. But Jesus told him, "Thou lackest one thing." That rich young ruler had something which stood between him and his God and that was his money. He was not willing to part with his money to follow Christ. He lacked the one thing needful which was Jesus Christ. I like what Vance

Havner said about the rich young ruler, he said, “The rich young ruler was a good boy but he wasn’t God’s boy.”

How about you, friend? Is there something in your life that stands between you and God? Is there something in your life which would make Jesus uncomfortable if he visited your home today? Is there some sin you are hugging that is keeping you from the one thing needful? Go through your Bible and see the examples of men and women who found God to be the one thing needful. It’s a theme that runs like a golden thread throughout the entire Scriptures. Moses stood at the burning bush and his life was forever changed. Abraham believed God enough to sacrifice his precious son, Isaac. Jacob wrestled all night with God until he learned it. Paul saw it. Peter eventually realized it. Have you?

Is Jesus the one thing needful in your life, friend? Let me ask you this: are you a Martha or a Mary? Do you allow yourself to be worn out in the service of the King and seldom have time to worship the King? Do you desire to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear his voice? Do we even take the time to reflect on what God has done for us through salvation?

I remember a story that Leonard Ravenhill told. He said that when he was a pastor in England, he often passed by a small house on his way to church. In that house lived a packrat, an old woman who collected boxes and books and assortments of all kinds of things that most people would find useless. One day as he passed her house, she stopped him and invited him in for a cup of tea. He knew that this old woman had visited his church from time-to-time so he could not refuse her. As he entered her dirty house, he noticed that she was observing his every move as he made his way to her kitchen which the rooms were stacked to the ceiling with boxes and books and rubbish. She motioned him to take a seat at her kitchen table which he did. In the sink he saw a stack of dirty dishes and they’d been there so long that mold was growing on them. She asked him if he wanted sugar with his tea. He replied, “No.” She said she didn’t have any. She asked him if he wanted milk with his tea. He said, “No.” She said, “Good, I don’t have any.” Then Leonard Ravenhill said this old woman handed him a dirty cup that had not been washed in weeks. At the bottom of it was all black grime. She then poured into that dirty cup some thick black goo from an old tea kettle and she waited to see if he would drink it. Ravenhill said, “I sat there knowing her eyes were upon me to see if I would drink that filthy cup of tea and as I sat there, I stared into that dirty cup and my mind raced back 2,000 years to another man who was handed a cup that he had to swallow and that cup was black as well because it was filled with my black rotten sins and he had to drink it for me.”

Listen friends, Jesus hung naked on a bloody cross for your rotten sins. His agony was great as he hung on that bloody tree. It was a scandal to be crucified as a common criminal but he did it. He drank that cup of the wrath of God for sin and he did it so that we may have life. How can we claim to be too busy for him? How can we have time for our amusements, time for our sports, time for our entertainments, time for our hobbies, time for our shopping and yet complain we have no time to pray? Our lack of a vital prayer life demonstrates our lack of the one thing needful. We are too preoccupied with

unimportant things in light of eternity and they consume our time and our lives and one day soon we will die and enter that eternity. And when we stand before him who has eyes of fire, what will our excuses be then as to why we did not spend more time with him?

If you are guilty in this lack, dear friend, admit your guilt to God right now. Ask him to forgive you for ignoring him, for replacing him with the things of this world. Our weak prayer lives stand as an indictment against us and will stand on that day. Be like Mary, friend, and go to your knees and stay at his feet until he meets you there. Go there now, friend. Go there now. Do not delay. Get serious with God and he will get serious with you. All that matters is eternity.

Let me close in prayer.

*Lord Jesus, forgive me for not spending more time with you. Forgive me for replacing you with worthless things. Forgive me for ignoring you by my being too busy for you. Jesus, please give me the grace to see you more clearly, to desire you more earnestly, to hear you more precisely. Let this be a day where my life is forever changed.*