

A Lesson For God's People

Frank Borg

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The New Testament discusses a visit by Jesus Christ to Bethany, a village where Mary and Martha lived. This village was situated approximately 2 miles away from Jerusalem (Jn. 11:1; Jn. 11:18). Notice the following verses that set the scene to an important principle and lesson laid out in this account:

“Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.” (Lk. 10:38-39).

Here we see that Martha invited Christ into her home. She lived with her sister, Mary. Verse 39 indicates that while Christ visited, Mary intently listened to what He had to say. Scripture states that she sat at His feet, indicating a humble position of one wanting to learn what was being taught.

“But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.” (Lk. 10:40).

Evidently, Martha was distracted with tending to her guests which kept her up and about. As mistress of the house, she was doing what she felt was necessary to offer comfort and service to her guests. Towards the last part of the verse, Martha hinted to Christ that He ask Mary to help her with serving. (One would have to wonder about her true motivation for making such comments to Christ. Did she want her labor to go noticed? Was she seeking sympathy or attention for the fact that she was the one who was laboring? These are possibilities, but we are not sure). Notice Christ's response:

“And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Lk. 10:41-42).

Instead of telling Mary that she should be helping Martha with entertaining the guests, through this situation Christ was able to teach her, and us, a valuable lesson. Christ demonstrated that perhaps Martha was too preoccupied with the physical cares of the home, serving and ensuring her guests were well entertained, while laying aside the more important opportunity to listen and learn from the wisdom He was offering. Christ was telling Martha that she was perhaps too desirous on focusing on the physical, which she could have laid aside till later. He was clearly indicating that she too should have made the most of the opportunity to listen to Christ teach while He was still among them. The lesson we should glean from this discourse is that we must first of all tend to the spiritual, as this is our primary obligation; the physical should not compete! Sadly, this is an apparent problem in this end time: many have become tired and weary of proving all things, or are too busy attending to their physical affairs to give the proper attention to the spiritual. In doing so, they have allowed themselves to be spoon fed by others which has led them to place the physical above the spiritual in their lives. This is dangerous!

The gospel of John adds more detail to the lesson outlined in John 10, and continues to emphasize this most important lesson. Notice:

“Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein” (Jn. 12:1-6).

Here we see that Lazarus, Judas Iscariot and perhaps others were on this occasion in Martha's home having supper. We are told that, after supper, Mary took costly ointment and applied it to Christ's feet. Judas Iscariot then suggested that instead of using the ointment as Mary was doing, she should have sold it and given the money to the poor. Judas's statement was clearly a sign of betrayal and reeked of vanity; false humility! His actions of later betraying Christ exposed his true motivation. Christ used this opportunity to teach a similar message which is stressed in Luke 10:38-42 (discussed above):

“Then said Jesus, *Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always*” (Jn. 12:7-8).

Certainly, Christ was here *not* discouraging the helping of the poor, but He used this opportunity to once again demonstrate that we must get our priorities in correct order. Essentially, Christ was saying that there would always be poor people to help and look after, but here was a unique opportunity to show respect to Christ while He was with them, and this opportunity would shortly be taken away.

Through both of the above exchanges it is clear that the intent of what Christ was teaching was that we should place the spiritual ahead of the physical. Today, spending time with God in prayer, study and correct application of His Word should be foremost in our minds. We must constantly work at placing God first in our lives as this will bear lasting and eternal fruits (Ex. 20).

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon was inspired to write the following:

“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually...I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit”...For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity. There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I? For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that

he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit” (Ecc. 1:2-6, 1:12-14, 2:22-26)

In Solomon’s closing statements in the book of Ecclesiastes he wrote:

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: *for this is the whole duty of man*” (Ecc. 12:13).

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111:10). Wisdom comes from instruction, knowledge and understanding (Pr. 1:7; Pr. 9:10). As Mary sat at the feet of Christ learning from what He had to say, she was receiving instruction, knowledge and understanding so that she could better apply God’s commandments. Attempts to personally seek sympathy, status or recognition are fuelled by vanity. The accounts in Luke 10 and John 12 should serve as a lesson to all of us today: we must place God first in our lives, give Him due respect and use every opportunity possible to learning and applying His Word more perfectly.