

Faith, Service, and Worship

*She [Martha] saith unto him, Yea, Lord:  
I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God,  
which should come into the world.*

John 11:27

Two sisters – both godly women, but very different personalities – will show us how each type should minister. The Word shows us this through three very personal glimpses into their lives, the life of Jesus, and how they all loved each other. Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus were very close friends with Jesus. They lived a prosperous life in a house big enough to welcome many to join them in a meal and to stay with them. It was in Bethany, right across from Jerusalem. Mary and Martha are in only three passages in the Bible. All took place in Bethany.

- (1) At the home of Mary and Martha – partway through Jesus' ministry.
- (2) At the home of Mary and Martha – later in His ministry (but not near the end).
- (3) At the home of Simon the leper, with the sisters serving the meal – six days prior to the last passover before the crucifixion.

There are a number of Marys in the Bible, but this Mary the sister of Martha is in only these three passages.

Also note that sometimes people confuse the Luke 7:36-50 anointing of Jesus with this one. But the Luke 7 occurrence was over one year earlier, in Galilee, and done by a sinful woman.

The Character of Martha and Mary, and the Kindness of Jesus

READ Luke 10:38-42

Both sisters were godly and loved Jesus. Both served. But Martha could not get past the practical things that needed to be done.

Mary served and then *also* (v.39) sat down at Jesus' feet for the one *needful thing*.

Martha was *cumbered* – distracted (as if from dragging things around); and she was *careful and troubled* – anxious and disturbed. So, she became bossy and demanding. Because Jesus loved her, He gently corrected her.

So, what was compared here?

Earthly things (meals, etc.) – can be taken away

Heavenly things (His Word) – cannot be taken away

From this familiar passage, let us be reminded:

For those of us who are practical, take-charge types – get that stuff done and then turn to that which is eternal, our Lord and His Word.

For those of us who stay back and serve the Lord much in eternal things – don't forget to take your turn helping out. Others need us, too.

Most of us are a bit of a combination of these things. The important thing is to keep our eyes on Jesus, be in His Word and prayer, and listen for His leading in our lives.

### Jesus' Great Love Brings a Miracle

John 11:1-46

READ John 11:1-3 These verses identify the details of the circumstances. In Bethany, Mary's and Martha's brother Lazarus was sick. This Mary was the one who would anoint the Lord with ointment 6 days before the last passover (Jn. 12:3). Jesus loved them all (Jn. 11:5), and the sisters sent for Him to come.

READ John 11:4-6 Because He loved them, He waited two days before He left to go to them. He went at the right time to strengthen their faith, bring forth a greater miracle, and use it to bring many others to faith. It would glorify God the Father and the Son of God.

John 11:7-19 gives much more details, but not about the sisters. Though Jesus explained it to the disciples, they did not understand. Verse 15 tells us that the way and timing of Jesus would cause them to believe. Verse 17 tells us that Lazarus was in the grave four days when Jesus got there. Jewish superstition held that for 3 days the spirit would hover over the body, but on the fourth day it would leave. So perhaps Jesus wanted them to realize that this was a real and great miracle when Lazarus was raised from the dead.

READ John 11:20-28a Martha's faith was strengthened by Jesus' words. At first Martha was thinking only of her hope that Jesus would bring her brother back to life (v. 22). Then, Jesus spoke to her, slowly bringing her to a greater faith (v.23). May we be as the man in Mark 9:24 who said, *Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief.* Indeed, this is exactly what Jesus was doing for Martha. Most Jews were expecting Messiah, Christ, who they thought would conquer Rome and lead them to freedom. But they were not expecting the Savior, Redeemer. Only the remnant of believers understood at all. Mary and Martha were part of that remnant, and Martha made a remarkable statement of faith after Jesus said the following:

*Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life:  
he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:*

*And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*

*Believest thou this?*

John 11:25-26

And YES she did believe – in Messiah, the Christ, AND in the Son of God, the Savior. Note that Jesus gave her the Word to strengthen her faith; He does the same for us.

READ John 11:28b-32 Mary also sought Jesus, and fell at His feet saying what Martha had said at first (v.21) – but no more. Jesus talked with Martha to strengthen her faith; Mary simply needed His comfort.

John 11:33-40 Time for action. There was much grief and weeping, and some questioned in unbelief. Now, since the four days had passed, they would see a mighty miracle that could not be questioned. Martha, the practical one, mentioned that Lazarus would stink. But Jesus only encouraged her to believe. The great miracle is recorded in verses 41-44. The command to come forth was to Lazarus specifically.

READ John 11:45-46 Lazarus and his sisters became celebrities. Many had followed Mary out where she went, so they were there to see and believe. Lazarus was sought after because of what had happened to him.

After this Jesus withdrew for several months and even spent time in Galilee. The events of John 12 happened several months after Lazarus was raised from the dead.

So, we learn more about believing God:

- (1) By seeing Martha's struggles to believe, and Jesus' gentle encouragement; and
- (2) By Mary's quiet, steady faith in the Lord that was so greatly centered on her worship of Him.

#### Service, Fellowship, and Worship

John 12:1-7; Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9

We will follow this in the Gospel of John and use the Matthew and Mark passages to help us understand all the details. Jesus was now near the end of His life here on earth, and days away from being arrested. Now, He wanted to be with His closest friends.

READ John 12:1-2 This sets the scene. It is six days before Jesus' last passover. There was a supper in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper. Mary, Martha and Lazarus were there: Martha served, Lazarus sat at the table with Jesus, and Mary would anoint Jesus.

Again, we have the two sisters, but this is the only mention of Martha in this passage. She served the meal as the men sat at the table. Apparently, she was doing as was her custom, but this time without the complaining, bossiness or corrections from Jesus.

READ verse 3 Mary gave her best. In her worship of Jesus she anointed Him for His burial. The alabaster box had to be broken, and it and the oil in it were very valuable. It was worth 300 pence, which was about one year's wages for a working man.

She poured it on His head, and then on His feet; then she used her hair to wipe His feet. It was a custom to anoint the head and feet of guests to refresh them from a dusty journey, but using her hair was a great act of love and worship.

Spikenard is a very costly oil with a strong, deep, and earthy fragrance – not a rose perfume that a woman would wear. Mary must have had that distinctive fragrance lingering in her hair over the days to come. There is also a fragrance that the Holy Spirit brings to us which is pleasant to believers, but unpleasant to those who reject Christ.

*For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? 2 Cor. 2:15-16.*

READ John 12:4-6 The disciples did not understand, and Judas stirred them up against Mary. Judas was a thief who was interested only in money and worldly power.

READ John 12:7-8 *Let her alone* Matthew gives more detail; Mary would be forever remembered for this act of worship and love for the Lord:

*When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her. Mat.26:10-12*

### Conclusion

There are three fragrances in the passages and three times that Mary was at the feet of Jesus:

Three fragrances:

- (1) food
- (2) death
- (3) worship – the oil’s perfume

Three time Mary was at Jesus’ feet:

- (1) She sat at His feet hearing His Word (Luke 10:39)
- (2) She fell at His feet telling her sorrow (John 11:32)
- (3) She came to His feet to give Him Worship (John 12:3)

These familiar passages taken together have given us deeper understanding of Mary and Martha, and also of how we women can draw closer to the Lord and trust, serve and worship Him.

*One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after;  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,  
to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.*

Psalm 27:4

Women of the Word – in Order on Timeline of History in the Bible

Eve	Genesis 3	4004 BC
Sarah	Genesis 11 and following	Born 1986 BC
Rebekah	Genesis 24 and following	About 1850 BC
Jochebed	Exodus 2 (bore Moses)	1570 BC
Miriam	Exodus 2 and following	1570 BC and following
Rahab	Joshua 2	About 1450 BC
Naomi	Ruth; (time of Judges 4)	1280-1271 BC
Ruth	Ruth; (time of Judges 4)	1280-1271 BC
Deborah	Judges 4	1280 BC
Hannah	1 Samuel 1 and 2	About 1150 BC
Michal	1 Samuel 14 and following	About 1060 BC
Abigail	1 Samuel 25	1060 BC
Shunamite Woman	2 Kings 4	890 BC
Esther	Esther	519-509 BC
(Mary)	(Gospels, Acts 1, 2)	04 BC – 30 AD and?
Anna	Luke 2	04 BC
Woman at the Well	John 4	27 AD
A Woman of Faith	Matthew 9	29 AD
Syrophoenician Woman	Matthew 15; Mark 7	29 AD
Mary and Martha	Luke 10	29 AD
Dorcas	Acts 9	33 AD
Lydia	Acts 16	51 AD
Lois and Eunice	Acts 16; 2 Timothy 1	51 AD
Priscilla	Acts 18	52 AD
Phebe	Romans 16	59 AD
Eudias and Syntche	Philippians 4:2	63 AD

Compiled by Sue Webb