

SERVING WITH MARTHA; SITTING WITH MARY
Luke 10:38-42

Intro: I have in my library a book called, The Pastor In Prayer. It contains some of the pulpit prayers of Charles Haddon Spurgeon which were taken down stenographically as the great London pastor prayed on Sunday mornings at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. They are truly spiritual feasts in themselves, and a blessing to read them.

It is reported that D. L. Moody, the American evangelist, traveled 4,000 miles from Chicago to London to hear Spurgeon preached. This is what he wrote afterwards:

What impressed me most was not the praise, though I thought I had never heard such grand congregational singing; it was not Mr. Spurgeon's exposition, fine though it was, nor even his sermon; IT WAS HIS PRAYER. He seemed to have such access to God that he could bring down the power from heaven; that was the great secret of his influence and his success (Op. cit., p. 167).

I have been reading those prayers for the past couple of weeks. I have tried to read one a day. They are longer than you might think--sometimes almost six pages long. In one of the prayers, Spurgeon was praying about how the Lord's people should be serving the Lord. And this was part of his prayer:

Make every child of thine here, to be every day serving Thee; and serving Thee so that heaven's work may be begin below, and something of heaven's pleasure may be enjoyed even now. But Lord, while we work for Thee, always keep us sitting at the feet of Jesus. Let our faith never wander away from the simplicity of its confidence in Him. Let our motive never be anything but His glory; may our hearts be taken up with His love, and our thoughts perpetually engaged about His person. Let us choose the good part which shall not be taken away--that if we serve with Martha we may also sit with Mary (Op. cit., p. 56).

This is where I got my subject for tonight: SERVING WITH MARTHA; SITTING WITH MARY.

Spurgeon's prayers are thoroughly sprinkled with the Word of God, and although he was not preparing to speak on the text which I have chosen for tonight, the account in Luke 10 was obviously very much in his thoughts.

This story is found only in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 10,

and we should be eternally grateful to the Holy Spirit that this event in the life of our Lord was not omitted in the Gospel records. It is a story which has been interpreted in a number of ways, but it is clear that Spurgeon's idea about Martha and Mary was not that it has to be one way or the other, but that it is both ways, or needs to be both ways.

There is enough told us in Scripture about these two sisters for us to know that they both knew the Lord. Furthermore, we know that they both loved the Lord, and that the Lord loved them. In fact, when the Apostle John was writing about the Lord's love for these two sisters and their brother Lazarus, it seems that special prominence was given to Martha because John wrote this statement:

Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus
(John 11:5).

You will notice that the Lord did not even mention Mary's name. This was not to put Mary down, but certainly to show that the Lord did not love Martha less than He loved Mary. So we certainly cannot assume that the Lord approved of Mary more than He did Martha in the account before us tonight.

I would therefore say that it is wrong to think that Martha never sat at the feet of the Lord, just as I am sure it is wrong to assume that Mary never served. They both did both, as we all do. There are times when we are serving; there are other times when we are sitting. It seems to me that the point of this story which is recorded for us by Luke was not that it is right to sit, and wrong to serve, but that we need to know when it is more important to do one than the other. The Lord would never condone slothfulness, if that is what it was, on Mary's part. We are permitted to look through the Lord's eyes into the heart of Martha to see that certain things were causing her to miss the blessing which she should have had.

But let us look at the details. The first thing that we are told is:

I. THE LORD JESUS WAS IN THEIR HOME (Luke 10:38).

Just think of what this meant, and of what it would mean to any of us if the Lord Jesus, physically visible, were to come to any of our homes. And it is certainly to Martha's credit that she welcomed Him into her home. I can't think of a more wonderful visitor, nor of one who would be more welcome. This is the setting which Dr. Luke presents to us. We don't know if Lazarus was away at the time; all we know is that Martha and Mary were there. The light of Scripture is focused upon them. This visit was clearly unannounced, and so it had to have taken both of them by surprise.

Luke doesn't include all that took place, but we can assume that some time passed as they greeted each other, and then settled down for a visit. They must have felt like Zacchaeus felt some time later when the Lord looked up into the tree where Zacchaeus was sitting, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house" (Luke 19:5). It would have been the honor of all honors to have the Lord Jesus as a house guest in your home.

Now let us think about:

II. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MARTHA AND MARY (Luke 10:39, 40).

I have mentioned that they were alike in many ways. They both loved the Lord. It would be wrong to say that one loved the Lord more than the other. They both believed that He was the Messiah, the Son of God. They both looked upon Him as their Master and Teacher. Cf. John 11:28. But on this occasion there was a significant difference. Martha looked upon this as an opportunity to do something for the Lord; Mary looked upon it as an opportunity for the Lord to do something for her. Martha felt responsible to prepare something for the Lord to eat, and she clearly resented seeing Mary at the Lord's feet where she was listening to His teaching. What the Lord was saying to her, we are not told. That is not the point. The point is that, whatever He was saying, Mary gave priority to that.

I don't say that Martha was always like this. I personally don't think that she was. But for some reason she was at this time. And there are four statements in this text which tell us what was going on in Martha's heart.

The first comes from Luke, the writer of this Gospel:

A. Martha was "cumbered about much serving" (v. 40).

"Cumbered" means distracted. She was distraught. She was troubled with conflicting feelings. She knew that it was good for Mary to be at the Lord's feet, and yet she resented what she was doing. She probably felt that it was the right place to be, but not the right time.

The second indication of what was going on in Martha's heart comes from Martha herself.

B. Her resentment was toward the Lord.

Notice her words in verse 40. (Read.) She felt that the Lord could see how hard she was working to try to prepare a meal, and the Lord seemed ungrateful and uncaring that she

was having to do it all by herself.

It is very clear that Martha did not have any joy in her heart as she prepared to feed the Lord. She couldn't understand why the Lord didn't wait until after the meal, and then both of them could be taught. And she was bold enough to tell the Lord what He ought to say to Mary. Her outburst clearly interrupted the teaching that was going on.

The last two words which described Martha's condition are in verse 41, and they come from the Lord Himself. He described Martha as "careful and troubled."

We must consider this under another heading:

III. THE LORD'S GENTLE REBUKE (Luke 10:41, 42).

How did the Lord describe Martha? We can be sure that His description was very accurate.

A. The Lord's description of Martha (v. 41).

I call this a gentle rebuke because of the way the Lord addressed Martha: "Martha, Martha." How tender the Lord is with us when we are seeking to serve Him, but are distracted.

1. "Thou art careful."

This is to be full of care, to be anxious, to be worried. This means that she didn't see how she could possibly get a meal on the table unless Mary helped her. Maybe the Lord could only be there a short time. But the burden was resting on Martha, and she was weighed down by it.

2. "Thou art...troubled."

The expression lit. means that she had muddied the waters. She was like a bottle with a lot of sediment in the bottom, and someone picks it up, and shakes it. She was making things worse for herself than they needed to be. She wasn't enjoying the Lord. Her service on this occasion was not a blessing to her like it should have been because she resented that Mary was sitting, and she was serving.

We see Martha at her worst in this situation, but I would hasten to add that she was not always like this. She was like we are occasionally. This is when we need what the Lord told her in the last verse of the chapter.

B. The Lord's ministry to Martha (v. 42).

The Lord was not being ungrateful to Martha for what she was doing. But He was indicating to her that while we spend some time serving, and some time sitting, this was the time to sit.

I can see from the expressions that are used in this story that the Lord did not have a lot of time. And so there was a choice here between serving and sitting. Martha chose to serve; Mary chose to sit--to sit at Jesus' feet, to hear His Word, i.e., that is, what He had to say to her.

Concl: If the Lord were to come to my house, or to your house, what would be your first concern--what you could do for Him, or what He could do for you? I am sure that we would all want to do all that we could to make the Lord's time with us as comfortable and satisfying to Him as we possibly could. And that is exactly the point. There is nothing that delights the Lord more than for us to sit at His feet to hear His Word. It is at His feet that our burdens are lifted, our cares are exchanged for peace, our doubts are turned into faith.

It is "good" to serve the Lord; it is better to let the Lord minister to us. It is after the Lord has ministered to us that we are the better prepared to serve the Lord. And there is time for both.

Perhaps Mary had some hard times also like Martha did here. We don't know. But we all need to learn that our fellowship with the Lord is not limited to the morning hours. Often those extra times during the day that we take with Him are the times when we experience the greatest blessing.

And let us all remember this: The Lord is with us. He not only visits us, but He lives with us. And how it delights His heart when we take the time to sit at His feet, for the moment, not serving, but sitting that He might minister to our hearts and teach us what He wants us to know. What we do for the Lord may or may not endure. But what the Lord does for us is that good part which cannot be taken away from us.