

November 7, 2021

“That Good Part”

(18) *“Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. (19) 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.”*

These verses refer to an incident which occurred during the days of Jesus’ earthly ministry. He had entered “*a certain village*,” and was welcomed into the “*home*” of Martha. According to John 11:1, Bethany was the village wherein lived Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus. Bethany was located about “*two miles*” from Jerusalem (John 11:18); Inasmuch as Martha “*welcomed*” Jesus, and inasmuch as she was involved in “*much serving*,” we conclude that Martha was “*given to hospitality* (cf. Rom. 12:13), a most commendable quality. However, Mary had “*left*” Martha to “*serve alone*,” in order to be able to sit at “*Jesus’ feet*” and to hear “*His word*.” Martha was displeased with her sister, and she mildly rebuked Jesus for His not “*caring*” about Mary’s lack of cooperation. After all, Martha was very busy, and she needed some help!

However, Jesus did not rebuke Mary for having left Martha “*to serve alone*.” To the contrary, He rebuked Martha for being “*worried and troubled about many things*,” and He commended Mary for having “*chosen that good part*.”

Please keep in mind the fact that these verses do not provide a **contrast** between good and evil. To the contrary, they provide a **comparison** between the good and the better. What Martha did in receiving Jesus into her home and providing lodging, food, and comfort for Him was not inherently sinful. In fact, it was inherently **good**; however, regardless of how unfair it may have seemed to Martha, what Mary did was **even better**.

Martha’s Mistake

As previously stated, Martha’s reception of Jesus into her home was not a sin. Nor was it a sin for her to provide for guests in her home. Martha’s problem was that she was “*worried and troubled about many things*.” Like so many today, she was busy, busy, busy; she was so caught up in the things to be done for her honored Guest that she had little time to listen to the **message** which fell from the lips of that honored Guest!

Martha was not evil, but she was “*distracted*” (v. 40). She was not distracted because of immorality or evil conduct. To the contrary, she was “*distracted with much serving*.” She was like a great multitude of “good” people today — people who are busy in the pursuit of those things which are inherently good, but whose activities leave them with very little time to listen to the word of the Lord. Most of us find ourselves caught up in the affairs of life; we run here; we run there; we run everywhere. We keep this appointment; we dash to that appointment. We feel

harried, hurried, and almost harassed. It seems that if we miss one section of the revolving door we get so far behind that we can never catch up! We are equipped with pagers, beepers, cell phones, and answering machines. We pay extra money to speed up the delivery of mailed items, we fret at the time lost while we wait for the red light to change. We are too busy to slow down and **smell** the roses; in fact, we are moving so fast we don't even **see** the roses! In a word, we, like Martha, are often "*distracted*."

The main problem with the type distraction herein described is not hypertension, heart murmurs, insomnia, and upset stomachs. The main problem in being so "*distracted*" with our much "*servicing*" and/or running, is that we often fail to "find" time to sit as it were at the feet of Jesus and listen to His word. The physical body is figuratively "tied up in knots," and the "*inward man*" (2 Cor. 4:16) is often malnourished. However, when weighed on the scales of eternity, many of our energy and time-consuming pursuits don't amount to a proverbial "hill of beans." In view of these things, it seems that we would do well to consider:

Mary's Choice

Let us not accuse Mary of laziness or a lack of hospitality. The fact that she had "*left*" Martha indicates that she had been involved in the "*servicing*" activities. Mary knew that it was a greater compliment to Jesus to listen to "*His word*" than it was to serve Him their food. Jesus being in their home provided a brief "window of opportunity" for hearing the "*word*" from His lips.

The statement that "*Mary...sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word*" (v. 39) describes the attitude of a scholar who takes lessons from a master. To illustrate this point, we suggest that Saul of Tarsus became a scholar in Judaism because he sat "*at the feet of Gamaliel*" (Acts 22:3).

"*That good part*" (v. 42) with reference to Mary involved both her choice and her priorities. Jesus said "*Mary has chosen*;" moreover, she had chosen "*that good part*," the "*part*" which could not be taken away from her. No doubt Mary was also a busy woman, but she refused to become so involved in the mundane things of life that she couldn't "find time" to show her love and reverence for the Lord, or to listen to His word

Conclusion:

With regards to soul-hunger and priorities, we need more Marys today. We need more genuine Christians who "find time" to pray, read, and study the Scriptures, and to worship God with regularity. So many of those things we think we simply "**have**" to do may provide some temporary pleasure; they may provide a moment of satisfaction, but they fail to put God first, benefit humanity, give real inner peace, or strengthen personal faith. In sum and substance, compared to what is **really** important, they are a waste of time and effort! On the other hand, when we come to "the end of life's little day," and when we face God in the judgment, we will have no regret whatever if we have redeemed *the time*" (Eph. 4:15,16) by worshipping and serving God, and by learning and following His revealed will. Yes, with regards to the items herein discussed, it behooves each one of us to "*examine*" ourselves (2 Cor. 13:5), look at our "track record," and ask the question "Am I a **Mary** or Am I a **Martha**?" Like Mary, let us choose that "*good part*."

—B. Witherington