

Women in the Gospels

Seeing Jesus from their perspective.

September 24, 2024

Mary and Martha

Our First Introduction to Mary and Martha

Luke 10:38 – 42

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

This story is about how two different women respond to Jesus. And most importantly, it's about Jesus' response to Martha's request.

Sitting at someone's feet was a posture of discipleship. The Apostle Paul speaks of it:

Acts 22:3:

"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day."

So, whether Mary literally "sat at the feet" of Jesus or not, she obviously chose a place near him, and it was obvious that she intended to listen rather than to work in the kitchen.

"The picture of a woman in the disciple's position, at the feet of Jesus, would be startling in a culture where women did not receive formal teaching from a rabbi" (*Jesus Through the Eyes of Women*, p. 61).

Why didn't Martha quietly go to Mary and ask for her help? Martha seems to blame Jesus for Mary's behavior. One thing for sure, Martha is put out that she has all the work to do by herself—it's all about Martha!

Luke tells us that "*Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made*" (Luke 10:40). Distracted means *having one's thoughts or attention drawn away: unable to concentrate or give attention to something*. Here's type A Martha, assuming she's right and Jesus will agree, and she approaches him in a very assertive manner: "Lord, don't you care. . ."

Is Martha's request reasonable?

Could it have just been jealousy that caused her to approach Jesus like she did?

This is the "it's not fair" response. Martha has a solution to this situation and she gives Jesus the order: "*Tell her to help me.*" (Luke 10:40).

Not only does Jesus not do as Martha requested, he does the opposite. He replies with a gentle rebuke to Martha, not Mary. "*Martha, Martha,*" the Lord answered, "*you are worried and upset about many things...*" (Luke 10:41). Martha must have been stunned. This is not what she expected.

The ESV puts it this way: *"Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."* How critical it is for us to choose what is good—choose the good portion—in our daily quest as disciples of Jesus Christ. To not allow things that have no eternal value to keep us so occupied that we don't have time to spend with Jesus. It is the tyranny of the urgent!

Tyranny means cruel, unreasonable and arbitrary use of power or control. Sounds like Satan's tactics to me—trying to control my priorities. I believe it is one of the easiest ways for Satan to trap us—in causing us to make poor choices about our daily priorities. And Satan uses this kind of attack on a regular basis, like daily, and we don't even see him coming. After all, we're busy.

Psalm 16:5: *LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure.*

Psalm 73:25 – 26: *Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

Psalm 119:57: *You are my portion, Lord; I have promised to obey your words.*

How often are you distracted from what is really important? How often do you tell Jesus what he needs to do only to discover that he really doesn't take orders from you? He is God and we are not!

John 11:1 – 16

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷ and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

⁸ "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"

⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. ¹⁰ It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."

¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

¹² His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." ¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

¹⁴ So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

¹⁶ Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Jesus had a plan. He knew that he would be misunderstood, but he did not let that deter his plan. Jesus loves you dearly and he has plans for you that are good, even when you misunderstand what he is doing.

Anytime we walk in fear, we are not walking according to the will of God. God has a plan. He has not lost control and he never will. You can trust him—he is a trustworthy God.

Jesus Comforts Martha

John 11:17 - 27

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

From Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

Do you believe this? "You see, if it's true, nothing that can happen in my life on earth can rob me of that everlasting life. And if it's false, nothing in my life on earth ultimately matters anyway. Either everything ends in death, or Jesus is the resurrection and the life" (*Jesus Through the Eyes of Women*, p. 67).

John 11: 28 - 37

After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

"He hadn't stayed away because he didn't care. He stayed away because he did care. The best thing he could give these siblings, whom he profoundly loved, was not immediate answer to their prayers, but revelation of himself" (*Jesus Through the Eyes of Women* p.69).

Jesus wept with Mary because he loved her and he understood the pain she felt. And he weeps with you in your pain.

Hebrews 4:15 - 16

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Matthew 11:28: *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*

John 11: 38 – 46

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹“Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

⁴⁰Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

⁴¹So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

⁴³When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

⁴⁵Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. ⁴⁶But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

Mary Anoints Jesus

In three different Gospels, Matthew, Mark and John, we are told this story of Mary anointing Jesus.

Matthew 26:6 – 7

While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, ⁷a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

Mark 14:3

While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

John 12:1 – 3

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

And in all three Gospel accounts, the woman—Mary—is criticized.

Matthew 26:8 - 13

⁸When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. ⁹“This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.”

¹⁰Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. ¹²When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. ¹³Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

Mark 14:4 - 9

Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? ⁵It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

⁶“Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

John 12:4 - 8

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵“Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.” ⁶He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

⁷“Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

Jesus strongly defended Mary’s decision to anoint him. Jesus receives this anointing from Mary as anointing for his burial. Again, a shocker! Even though Jesus had told his disciples time and again that he must die and be buried but he would rise from the tomb, they never got it. Mary got it!

Mary did what she could, and as a result, the whole world now knows what she did. And what she did was extravagant.

Mary will always be remembered for anointing Jesus for his burial, and Jesus chose Martha to receive some of the most astonishing words he ever spoke.

References are from the book, *Jesus Through the Eyes of Women* by Rebecca McLaughlin