Mary, Martha, and the Disciples' Prayer — Bible Study, December 30, 2023

Luke 10:38–11:16; Worship Before Service; The Better Part; Prayer According to the Spirit; and Jehu vs. David

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Scripture Reading: Luke 10:38–42; 11:1–16; 12:24–31; John 12:3; Ephesians 2:8–10; 6:18; 2 Kings 10:15, 31; Psalm 26:1–8; John 11:38–44; Romans 8:26

> *"Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken from her." (Luke 10:42, J.N. Darby translation)*
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> *"For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has before prepared that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)*

The Glory in the Cloud: One Thing Matters

J.G. Bellett's brief paper 'The Glory in the Cloud' speaks of moments in the Old Testament when the glory was visible in the pillar of cloud — not hidden, but seen. Mary saw the glory in the cloud. She saw the one who mattered. Luke 10:38 reads: as they went, he entered into a certain village. They were many; he was one. And he is the one who entered the village, the one who matters.

Martha received him and was distracted with much serving. Mary sat at his feet and listened to his word. The Lord's answer to Martha's complaint does not condemn what she was doing; it identifies what Mary was doing as the one necessary thing. There is need of one, and Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken from her. Serving the Lord is good. But service can eclipse

Christ and exalt self. When service becomes our first occupation, we can end up distracted from the one we are serving, or even commanding the Lord to arrange things according to our plans. Martha tells the Lord what to do to correct the situation. That is what happens when service takes the place of worship.

John 12:3 shows what Mary had learned from sitting at his feet: she anointed them with costly ointment and wiped them with her hair. She still had nothing to say. But what she did demonstrated that she had treasured and kept what she heard. The fruit of sitting at his feet was not busyness; it was a quiet, costly act of worship at the precise moment it was appropriate — just before his death. By John 12, Martha too was serving without the distraction that characterized her in Luke 10. Both sisters had grown.

Worship First: Ephesians 2:8–10

Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes what everyone knows: salvation is not of works. But verse 10 adds the correction to any misreading of that: for we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has before prepared that we should walk in them. God has prepared the good works in advance. Our place is to walk in them — with our feet, following the one whose feet Mary anointed. This is the order: salvation by grace through faith; then, because we are his workmanship, the works that flow from a worshiping heart. Those works are prepared by God and we walk into them. They are not our invention, not the product of our planning; we walk in what he has prepared.

Martha is the exact opposite of this order. Her service was not flowing from a worshiping heart; her heart was occupied with the service itself. A man who left the Lord’s table to pursue money for his gospel efforts exemplifies the same thing: the service became the object, and the servant of the Lord became the one managing the situation. That is not walking in what God has prepared.

Jehu vs. David: Zeal Without a Whole Heart

Second Kings 10:15–16 records Jehu inviting Jehonadab into his chariot: come with me and see my zeal for the Lord. Yet verse 31 delivers the verdict: Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of Jehovah the God of Israel with all his heart. Zeal and service without the whole heart. The contrast with David is pointed. Psalm 26:1–8 shows David saying, Prove me, Jehovah, and test me; thy loving-kindness is before my eyes and I have walked in thy truth… Jehovah, I have loved the habitation of thy house and the place where thy glory dwelleth. The whole heart toward God, not just the energy of service.

Prayer: The Second Secret of Discipleship

Luke 11:1 begins: as he was in a certain place praying. He was in a certain place — just as the Lord was aimed at a certain village and a certain woman in the previous chapter. Prayer for the Lord Jesus was not haphazard. And when he was asked to teach prayer, his answer was not a formula to memorize but a pattern with moral content: Father first; his name; his kingdom; then daily needs; sins; and frailty. The words in Luke are not identical to those in Matthew, because the Lord never intended them to be memorized and recited. They set out moral priorities, not an incantation.

The disciples' prayer in Luke 11 must not be the ceiling of Christian prayer. These disciples had not yet received the Holy Spirit; they had not yet had their sins washed away in the Lord's blood; they were not yet indwelt. A believer indwelt by the Holy Spirit prays in the Spirit — and the Spirit intercedes with groanings that cannot be uttered, according to the mind of God (Romans 8:26). Christian prayer is not a matter of composing the most eloquent petition or assembling the most prayer warriors for a chain of intercession. It is prayer in the Spirit, informed by his mind, aligned with the will of God — prayer in which the one who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because he

intercedes for saints according to God.

The parable of the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5–8) and the promise in verses 9–10 — ask, seek, knock — establish the abundance of God's grace in answering prayer. He who asks does not arrange to receive it himself; he asks, and God arranges for him to receive it. The asking and the receiving are both carried through by grace. The example of the Lord in John 11 is instructive: at the tomb of Lazarus, the prayer of the Lord before the Father is not recorded in words. The Scripture says, Jesus wept. Then he said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. His heart had spoken; the Father had heard; the words that followed were spoken for the crowd's benefit. God in heaven can hear better than we can pray.

Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken from her.