

MARY OF BETHANY (Lk. 10:38,39; Jn. 11:28-32; Jn. 12:1-3)

While the Bible is primarily and ultimately God's inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word, it is also a 'people book' for from its opening chapters, - with Adam and Eve, - the whole way through, there are multiple accounts of God's dealings with *people*, sometimes to multitudes and sometimes to individuals.

One of the most well-known stories in the Gospels relates to a visit Jesus made to the home of two sisters. They lived with their brother in Bethany, which was a village two miles to the east of Jerusalem on the road to Jericho. It does not seem as if Lazarus was at home that day for it was the elder sister, Martha, who received *[Jesus]* into her house (v.38). She welcomed Him in the customary way by greeting Him at the entrance, bringing Him into her home, and making Him comfortable while she attended to the matters appropriate to having a guest in her home. Meanwhile, her sister stopped everything she was doing and sat at the feet of Jesus listening to what He was saying. He was the centre of Mary's attention, and all the other tasks were put 'on hold' for when Jesus called,. ... **She found at His feet HER BLESSING.**

This was a busy time in Jerusalem and throughout the area because it was approaching the Passover when many travellers came through their village. ... Coming along the street was this One they knew so well, and it was always a pleasure to have Him in their home. He had visited them on previous occasions and, - as they had done before, - they warmly welcomed Him.

Consider this ... Jesus, when He was here on earth, depended on others. For example, in the preceding chapter He had said, **Lk. 9:58** The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. ... Indeed, it would have been expensive to receive Christ into your home for He would have had His disciples with Him. ... But this was a happy place because both Mary and Martha were privileged with the Saviour's presence.

Consider this too ... There is coming a day when the hospitality will be *reversed* for instead of *us* inviting *Him* into our homes, *He* will invite *us* into *His* home, for He has promised, **Jn. 14:2** I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And He will welcome us with the words, **Mt. 25:34** Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

In a few days, Mary and Martha would receive the news of Jesus' crucifixion, how precious then was His last visit, to have the Saviour in their home. ... To the crowds, He had 'no form or comeliness', and when they saw Him, there was no beauty in Him they should desire him. To many, He had no attraction, other

than being someone who enticed controversy. ... But here in this home in Bethany, Jesus came for a family who watched for His coming.

It used to be in homes you would see the inscription, *Christ is the Head of this house, The unseen Guest at every meal, The silent Listener to every conversation.* In the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus He was the most special Guest, fulfilling all these descriptions. And on this particular day, Mary and Martha looked out through their door to see Jesus approaching. What a joy!

Out of all the homes in Bethany, it was the reason He decided to come to their village, - to see them. ... He went inside their home, sat down, and whatever else Mary had been doing before Jesus came, she stopped and gave Him her full attention. Look how she does it, Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. She stopped what she was doing and listened to every word Jesus spoke. She was captivated by His presence. ... She might have noticed perhaps something that possibly indicated this could be the last time He would visit.

Her Jewish religion excluded her from how the rabbis taught from the Law ... but here *she* sat at the feet of Jesus, as scholars were privileged to sit at the feet of their tutors. ... Mary was sitting and learning at the feet of *her* Master.

She didn't want to miss this time with Him. Yes, of course, she had other things to do, but none was as precious as being at the feet of Jesus. She loved Him dearly. She treasured the times she was in the company of the Man of Galilee. He share with her about His Heavenly Father, and He spoke from the Old Testament Scriptures making them 'alive' as He showed the rich spiritual heritage with which God had blessed her people. She 'hung' on His every word.

In the kitchen she would have had her baking, but at the feet of Jesus she had her blessing. ... Martha had warmly welcomed Jesus too, but other things also needed doing and because she would not have known Jesus was calling that day, she had nothing prepared. She wanted Mary to leave Jesus and help her. ... However, Jesus gently rebuked her. ... While Martha was getting herself flustered in the kitchen, Mary was calmly sitting at the feet of Jesus.

You will always find yourself busy, - often legitimately so, - but the most important place to be the busiest is at 'the feet of Jesus'. Considering all He has done, He deserves His hallowed place in our lives. ... That's how Mary teaches us as she sat at the feet of the Saviour. ... **She found at His feet HER BLESSING.**

She brought to His feet HER BURDEN ... This is an altogether different scene ... **Jn. 11:28** And when she [*Martha*] had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee. ²⁹ As soon as she heard

that, she arose quickly, and came unto him. ³⁰ Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him *in the cemetery*. ³¹ The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there. ³² Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

There is an unpleasant smell now. It was not the smell of the kitchen, but it was the smell of death. Jesus had heard Lazarus, - Mary and Martha's brother, - was dying ... and by the time Jesus arrived he was dead. Martha ran to Him ... just outside the village. She's obviously grieving, and she tries to understand it as positively as she could, ²⁴ I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. ... but she couldn't help saying to the Saviour, ²¹ Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

She had her well-grounded faith. With every bone and every muscle in her body she spoke those words to Jesus which demonstrated the depth of her faith. She said to Him, ²⁷ Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. What a statement from the lips of a woman! She wasn't a rabbi, nor educated in Jewish scholarship. ... She was simply an ordinary woman who had placed her hope in Jesus as she mourned the loss of our brother.

Mary was *sitting* at home (v.20) ... and Martha ran back and told her, ²⁸ *The Master is come, and calleth for thee* ... and then John the Gospel writer records the effectual call of the Saviour, ²⁹ As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him. There she is again. As before when she could have been busy cooking, on this particular day she could have been busy crying ... but nothing held her back from being with Jesus. ... She rushed to the graveyard, to Lazarus' tomb where Jesus was standing outside. The Jews thought she was going to the tomb to weep (v.31) but she was actually going to find Jesus, and when she did, she told Him the same as Martha had told Him (cf. v.21), ³² Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. ... Lord, this would not have happened!

... This same Jesus, in a few days' time, would also be dead in a tomb ... but He was in the graveyard *that* day with a heavy heart for His friend Lazarus, and for Martha and Mary. ... The tears trickled down His face as He wept (v.35). The Son of God, the God of Heaven, 'touched with the feelings of our infirmities' in the company of these grieving sisters, and the Bible tells us, ³² when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, *she fell down at his feet*.

Once again, ... Mary at the feet of the Saviour ... On a previous visit, in her home Mary found at the feet of Jesus **her blessing** and in the cemetery, at the feet of Jesus she brought **her burden**.

On the third occasion ... **She brought to His feet HER BEST** Jn. 12:1 Then Jesus six days before the passover [*Pesach*] came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. ² There they made him a supper *evening meal*; and Martha served [*... that is what she was doing earlier also, Lk. 10:40*] But Martha was cumbered [*distracted*] about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? ³ I but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. ³ Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.

It's not the smell of cooking or the stench of the tomb in the cemetery, but it is the sweet scent of fragrance. ... A special supper was laid on and, of course, Martha served (it's good to have 'Marthas'!) Lazarus was there too, - the whole family was there with Jesus. *A great occasion!*

An event it prefigures is the marriage supper of the Lamb when all God's family will be at the Heavenly Table. You need to be saved to be there! You need to be a child of God to be invited! ... For the unsaved, look at the option, - the rich man in Hell cried out for Abraham to come and touch his tongue with a single drop of water, - but what use would a drop of water be in hell! ... and yet in Heaven there is plenty, *Rev. 7:15* he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ... ¹⁷ For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them.

While the proceedings were continuing, Mary gets up and carries a little box to where Jesus was, - and you can be sure she wasn't too far away. He had already washed His feet and His hands as required in preparation for entering the home. Mary approaches with this expensive ointment, and brings it over to Jesus.

She bends down on her knees, and she pours the oil on His feet which in a few days the cruel nails would penetrate, and from which His precious blood would flow. ... She knelt before the feet of Jesus, and she bowed her head so low she wiped his feet with her hair. ... **She gave at His feet HER BEST.**

She wasn't embarrassed or ashamed in front of those people. Neither was she doing it to be seen. She did it because she loved the Lord and wanted to give **at His feet HER BEST.** ... When she untied her hair, - ... every Jewish woman had their long hair tied in public, but here she *untied* it, and she laid her glory at the feet of Jesus, *I Cor. 11:15* if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her (*I Cor. 11:15*).

Of course, she was misunderstood and criticised (by Judas Iscariot, v.4f) ... but what Mary did was a blessing to the Saviour, and the fragrance of her perfume wafted through the house. Jesus was so touched that in Matthew's account of this event, it is recorded He said *Mt. 26:13* 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. ... And so, *we* are considering Mary today.

These three occasions are not old sentimental stories 'tugging at your heart strings'. Instead, they are accounts of a woman who found her needs met at the feet of Jesus. ... She gave Him her time, accepted Him unquestionably as our Master, listened to and learned from His word, and many blessings besides. ...

To many this Mary did not count for all that much, nonetheless, her story is beautiful ... and more than beautiful for she is an example the Holy Spirit presents in the Word of God for every child of God. He shows us the privileges of being at the feet of Jesus, - she brought to His feet **her blessing, her burden,** and she brought to His feet **her best.** ... Joseph Lincoln Hall wrote ...

Sitting at the feet of Jesus, Is there anywhere more blest?
There I lay my sins and sorrows, And, when weary, find His rest.
Sitting at the feet of Jesus, There I worship and I pray,
While I from His fulness gather Grace and comfort for today.