

THE HOME OF MARTHA, MARY, AND LAZARUS TO SHARE HIS SERENITY
THE HOME OF MARTHA, MARY, AND LAZARUS TO SHARE HIS SERENITY (LUKE 10:38)

It has often been claimed that comparisons are odious, and therefore it might be dangerous to compare homes mentioned in the New Testament. Houses are as different in design as people are in temperament. Nevertheless, it is probable that of all the dwellings in Palestine, Jesus preferred most the one owned by Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. It was like an oasis in what could easily have been a desert! As often as possible Jesus stayed with His friends. He was their favorite guest

Certain details about that beloved family are extremely interesting. The Bible never mentions anything spoken by the only man in the house. Lazarus was a man of few words. Perhaps all the talking was done by his sisters! Nothing is said about him except that his illness terminated in death and resurrection, and that certain people feared his restoration to life would increase the popularity of the Savior. The story of his experiences remains unknown; his deeds were never recorded for posterity.

It seems strange that little is recorded of Mary's testimony except that she anointed the Lord with her very expensive ointment. Apparently she preferred to listen to Jesus rather than to spend time with other people. Two important things were said of her: (1) she sat at His feet (see Luke 10:39), and (2) she anointed the Lord with her ointment (see John 12:3). The Bethany family is mentioned three times in the Scriptures, and together the references provide an interesting study.

Fellowship Sought (Luke 10:38)

"Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word." It was Martha who first invited Jesus into her home; who complained, cleaned, and cooked. That delightful lady took her problem to Christ when, belatedly, He arrived after the death of Lazarus. Her residence was not a cathedral. It was probably only a cottage, but the Lord loved to go there. That fact should encourage and delight every Christian family. The Lord is able to transform a place of strain into a palace of serenity.

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It would be interesting to know what happened before Martha invited Christ to supper. Had she attended any meeting or witnessed any miracle? Did she invite the Lord with the full approval of her family, or did she act alone believing her sister and brother would be pleased with her request? She approached the Lord and wistfully said, "Sir, would you be willing to come to my house to supper? My family would be delighted to welcome You and your friends." The Lord thanked her and gladly accepted the invitation. As a general rule, people are not invited into a home unless the host or hostess has a special reason for extending the invitation. Many Christians have speculated about Martha's request. Was she spiritually hungry, and did she believe the Savior could supply what she urgently needed?

When the Lord and the disciples arrived, they were given a great welcome, and He knew He had entered a haven of rest. Lazarus, the silent one, smiled; Mary listened; but Martha proceeded to prepare the evening meal. That was the commencement of a fellowship destined to charm the entire world. Probably Martha believed Jesus possessed something that she needed. His peace and joy superseded anything she had known. What He said was worth hearing; what He offered could not be obtained elsewhere. Martha quickly discovered

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that when Jesus entered her life and home, amazing things began to happen.

Perhaps she had listened to His teaching about the kingdom of God and, desiring to learn more, invited Him to supper. Maybe she did not realize His hand was knocking upon the door of her soul. This was one of the first indications that Jesus desired admittance to human hearts. When He sent a message to the church at Laodicea, He said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20). The home in Bethany was the only one to which Jesus went repeatedly. When He was about to be crucified, "he... went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there (Mart. 21:17). During moments of deep anguish the Lord found comfort among His dearest friends.

Martha welcomed the Lord and then went into the kitchen to prepare a meal. She was a magnificent hostess. Mary welcomed the Lord and then sat at His feet to listen. Let it be admitted that but for the industrious Martha the guests would have gone hungry.

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Fellowship Spoiled (Luke 10:40-42)

"But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Poor Martha, she was all fingers and thumbs. Nothing was going right, and she was swiftly becoming an angry woman. The size of her kitchen remains unknown, but the nature of her complaint was obvious to everybody. At least sixteen people expected to be fed. If they were to sit or recline at a table, places had to be set with knives, forks, or whatever was used in those days, and plates put in order. Martha was trying to do six jobs at once, and where was her sister? It is not difficult to understand her frustration as she looked in vain for the help urgently required. When she saw Mary sitting peacefully at the feet of the honored Guest, her soul exploded!

"Lord, dost thou not care It was unfortunate that she indirectly blamed the Lord for the disorder in the kitchen. Had she remained calm she might have said: "Master, I need a little help with the meal. Could you spare my sister for a few minutes, and then together we will be thrilled to listen." Martha was angry and frustrated; her thoughtless sister had no brains! Yet it was regrettable that she resented the attitude of the Lord. Devotion was admirable but not at another's expense. It was like giving a generous donation to a wonderful cause but using another person's money! The church has never ceased debating whether or not Martha's outburst was justified. It may be admitted that in a similar situation we might emulate her example.

Many years ago when I belonged to a traveling band of evangelists, we had a picnic lunch every day on the journey from one city to the next. We stopped along the highway and in the shade of a tree enjoyed what our cook provided. It was strange that after the meal some members of the party immediately developed an intense desire to enjoy their quiet time with the Lord. The washing of the dirty dishes was left to two of us, who postponed our prayer time until the utensils were cleaned and packed ready for the continuation of our journey. I confess with sincerity that occasionally I desired to use my tongue unlawfully! Maybe Martha would have understood and sympathized.

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The Lord's reply to the irate woman was calm, considerate, and soothing, and it was significant that she never complained again. Probably Mary would have been useless in the kitchen, for her thoughts were with Jesus, and if she had not given attention to the kitchen chores, she might have become a nuisance. The inflammation within Martha's soul quickly subsided, and it was evident the great Physician had not lost His skill. The glorious fellowship of that evening could easily have been ruined. If an artist were commissioned to produce a portrait of Martha, he might paint a lady with her sleeves rolled up! If he were requested to do one of Mary, he would depict a woman with eyes shining like stars! It is strange and bewildering that members of a family can be so different. Some Christians love the Savior but are too busy to sit at His feet; others who live in conventions and special meetings are of no earthly use!

Fellowship Subdued (John 11:3-4)

It is refreshing to know that the disciples in Bethany were not angels. They were ordinary people who occasionally could be delightful, devoted, and disturbed by disappointment. Their eyes could fill with tears and their minds with distressing doubts. The illness and death of Lazarus were devastating, for it was difficult to believe their Friend, Jesus of Nazareth, could be insensitive to need. When He was informed of the critical illness of Lazarus, He did not respond and seemed unconcerned that the hearts of Mary and Martha were breaking. "When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was" (John 11:6).

Unless people have experienced similar periods of distress, it is impossible to understand the grief of those women. The Lord seemed to be unsympathetic during their time of need. Their request for help had been ignored, and it was extremely difficult to understand the apparent indifference of their Friend. When Martha went to meet Jesus, she said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee" (John 11:21-22). The words even now shone as brilliant stars on a dark night and suggested the power of Christ was limitless. "Even now, when all other hope is dead, when nothing can be done to revive my brother's body, even now, You can do the impossible." She refused to abandon her quest, and relied implicitly upon His compassion. She remained baffled by His reluctance to respond to their earlier desire for assistance, and could not

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understand His reasons for permitting them to suffer unprecedented anguish. Mary, who had sat at the Lord's feet, was now sitting alone at home, but Martha, who seldom sat still, was doing her utmost to solve problems.

She never forgot that meeting in the street, and remembered His words, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:25-26). Although both sisters misunderstood the Lord's motives and allowed sorrow to overshadow their faith, Christ never scolded them. He patiently led them into greater experiences of spiritual maturity. His success was evident when Martha exclaimed, "Yea Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (John 11:27). Within the dark room of adversity she developed a clear picture of His majesty and immortality. This should be an encouragement to every Christian family. When the Savior is invited into a home, His help is assured in every emergency, and strain is replaced by serenity. When fever harasses

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the soul, the great Physician knows how to deal with the situation.
Nevertheless, it is wise to remember that even He is hindered when
closed doors prevent His entrance.

The apostle Paul referred to "the church in thine house" (Philem. 2). Christians first gathered in the home of John Mark and frequently in a part of the temple known as Solomon's Porch, but afterward they worshiped in homes where every meal became a love feast—where Christ was known in the breaking of the bread. When troubled people bowed in the Master's presence, frayed nerves were quieted and tempers disappeared. Each member of the congregation remembered that Jesus promised, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). The Lord loved to make house calls, and although many years have passed since He ministered in Palestine, His desire has never changed.

Fellowship Shared (John 12:2)

The visits made by Jesus to the home in Bethany delighted the entire family. The fact that Mary sacrificed her valuable ointment and Martha prepared His meals indicated He was their favorite guest. He never imposed upon their kindness, and His arrival never caused concern to either of the women. Lazarus was always proud

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to sit with the Master to whom he owed his life. It could not have been easy to entertain thirteen men, but the Lord's presence was sufficient compensation even if they had been expected to entertain a multitude.

It was therefore with mixed feelings Martha and her sister heard their neighbor inviting them to supper. To grant his request would mean the loss of a night of fellowship, and although they had been included in the invitation, it would not be as intimate a gathering as they would have enjoyed in their own home. It may never be known whether or not they had regrets on that memorable evening. Perhaps, however, they were filled with delight, for they loved to share happiness with other people.

When the early Christians were oppressed by persecution, they went everywhere preaching the gospel. At that time mass media systems of communication were unknown, and yet before the end of the first century, the world had heard their message. That amazing result was achieved because the preachers were energized by an intense desire to share their faith. When the woman of Samaria met the Savior at Sychar's well, she was constrained to share her experience with neighbors, and her testimony led to a city-wide revival. The people afterward said, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). To share knowledge of the Lord is life's greatest privilege.

The clock of life is wound but once;
And no man has the power
To tell just when the hands will stop,
At late or early hour.

To lose one's wealth is sad indeed,
To lose one's health is more:
To lose one's soul is such a loss:
That no man can restore.

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