

MARTHA AND MARY

Luke 10:38-42

Key Verses: 10:41,42

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

Study Questions:

1. Where were Jesus and his disciples going? Why? (Jn 1:29) Review his earthly Messianic ministry, especially events which reveal the compassion of God (Jn 1:14). Which event moves your heart most?
2. Where was the village of Martha and Mary? (Jn 11:1,18) What do you know about this family? How does the event in John 11 reveal the spiritual needs of Martha and Mary? (Jn 11:21,25-26,39)
3. Think about Mary. While Martha was making preparations to serve the guests, what was Mary doing? When Martha complained, how did Jesus defend Mary? Why did Jesus give first priority to one-to-one Bible study in that crowded, busy house? Why did he call Mary's choice "better"?
4. Think about Martha. Read verses 38 and 40 again. From Martha's point of view, why was her complaint reasonable? How did Jesus answer? From Jesus' point of view, what was Martha's problem? Why didn't she know that Bible study with Jesus was an urgent matter?

To Jesus, Jerusalem is where suffering and crucifixion awaited. When he thought about Jerusalem, Jesus may have had many tragic pictures before his mind's eye. Nevertheless, Jesus was teaching Mary the Bible in the crowded house of Martha. In this passage, we learn that we must teach the Bible as of first importance, as Jesus did.

First, reminiscence of Jesus' Galilean ministry.

When we think about the time setting of this event, Jesus was on

the way to Jerusalem, after nearly three years of earthly Messianic ministry. It is better for us to reminisce about Jesus' earthly Messianic ministry, mainly in the Galilean district, which is beautiful forever. One of those days, on the way to Jerusalem, the western horizon turned red and then, it was dark. Again a night came. Jesus' company and some of his followers had to stay somewhere overnight. There was one family open to Jesus. It was Martha's house. Her house was in the quiet and small town of Bethany, which is located two miles away from Jerusalem (Jn 11:1). Even to Martha, it was not a small task to treat Jesus and his company. Nevertheless, to Martha it was a great honor and privilege to have Jesus and his followers. At that time, women were disregarded. But the historian and evangelist Luke gives a special place to many women in the gospel narratives. Luke's account of Jesus virtually liberated all women of the world from the man-oriented ancient society. And Jesus was also happy to be a friend to Martha and Mary; Jesus was like a father to them. Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem. But no one perceived it. John the Baptist, with prophetic insight, saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29)

Right after recording the birth of Jesus Christ, Luke revealed particularly that our Jesus is the God of compassion. For example, while Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. At that time, men with leprosy were quarantined and they were not permitted to go around the city. But this leper came to Jesus by faith. He fell with his face to the ground and begged Jesus, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus did not say, "You go back to your quarantine." Out of great compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean,'" my son. And immediately the leprosy left him (5:12,13). Jesus' compassion toward a leper shows that Jesus is the God of compassion. Jesus is different from other people. Suppose anyone saw a man with leprosy. He would run away as far as his breathing permitted. How beautiful to see what Jesus did.

Let me tell you another sad story. Once Jesus went to a town

called Nain with his disciples, and a large crowd went along with him. Jesus' procession was joyous and full of hope. The other procession coming out of the town was a sorrowful one. As Jesus approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out--the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. A large crowd from this town was with her. This was a funeral procession. When Jesus saw this, he became as sorrowful as the mother whose only son was dead. Out of great compassion, Jesus said, "Don't cry." Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" Then the young man got up. Jesus was a comforter to the sorrowful woman. Jesus is the God of comfort. The people who saw this event were all filled with awe and praised God, saying, "God has come to help his people" (7:11-17).

Once Jesus went to another region by boat with his disciples for a retreat. On the way, they suffered much because of high waves of the sea. When they landed, it was morning. The name of the region was Gerasa, across the Lake Galilee. They had to rest for the time being because the night before, all night, they struggled with the stormy sea. All of a sudden, the cry of a wounded animal was heard. It was the crying of a demon-possessed man. The disciples were terrified. Some hid behind the rocks and some in between the crevices. But Jesus knew that his problem was demon possession. Out of great compassion, Jesus approached him and healed him at the cost of 2,000 pigs.

Once Jairus, a ruler of a synagogue, came to Jesus because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying. Jesus understood the father's sorrowful mind and was willing to go with Jairus to heal his dying daughter. But on the way, a woman with a hemorrhage touched Jesus' cloak in the back amid the crowd of people. Jesus asked again and again, "Who touched my cloak? My power has gone out." The woman was so shy that she could not immediately answer, "It was I." But soon she confessed how she was healed. Then Jesus helped the woman make a confession of faith (Ro 10:10). The compassion of Jesus extended to the smelly woman. As a result, a considerable

amount of time had passed by. Jesus delayed too long to heal a dying girl. While Jesus was about to go to Jairus' house, people from his home came and said, "Your daughter is dead." But Jesus said, "Just believe." When Jairus just believed, Jesus healed the girl who was already dead. She asked her daddy for a Happy Meal, saying, "I'm hungry" (Lk 8:40-56). This event again shows that Jesus is the God of compassion and the God of mercy. To the ordinary people, how he could help all these people on the way to Jerusalem was indeed remarkable.

Jesus also paid full attention to discipleship training during his earthly Messianic ministry. For example, he called Simon, who worked hard all night and caught nothing. He was arranging the nets for tomorrow. Jesus saw his diligent spirit in a discouraging situation and helped restore him from immediate failure by letting him catch a large number of fish on the spot. Then Jesus said to him, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men" (5:1-11). It meant that, at the time, he was nothing but a fisherman. Yet Jesus saw his unique greatness. Soon Simon became Jesus' top disciple. Later, Peter carried out the duty of supreme commander of the early church while they had to fight against the power of darkness, Judaism and the Roman Empire, so as to shepherd God's sheep. Jesus is great because he raised very, very ordinary Simon into a man of mission. Later, Peter succeeded the unfinished task of Jesus.

When we review Jesus' earthly Messianic ministry in the Galilean district, we learn that Jesus called Levi the tax collector. At that time, tax collectors were known as national traitors. Simply speaking, Levi was a selfish man. He only sought after his selfishness. One day Jesus visited his tax collector's booth. As soon as Levi opened the door, Jesus said to him, "Follow me." Soon he followed Jesus, leaving everything behind. This selfish man became a shepherd of God's flock (5:27-32). It seems not an extraordinary historical event. However, he became St. Matthew. Next, he wrote the constitution of the kingdom of God...the Sermon on the Mount.

When we think about Jesus' earthly Messianic ministry, we cannot but recite John 1:14. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." When we read about the Messianic ministry of Jesus in the Galilean district, we cannot but say that Jesus is the God of comfort, and he has come to help his people (7:16). Our Jesus is the God of compassion and the God of mercy. His mercy extends to those who believe in him, whoever they may be.

Second, Mary (38-40).

We don't know much about Mary. But it seems that she was born in Bethany, a satellite town of Jerusalem. She lost her father when she was very young. She had a sickly younger brother, Lazarus, and a strong older sister. Since Jesus and his disciples and some other members came, there were a lot of things to do to prepare a dinner. But look at what she did. Verse 39 says, "She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said." Mary knew that a bunch of uninvited guests invaded her house. Mary also knew that she had to go to the kitchen and help her older sister with the heavy load of preparing dinner. But she only sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to what he said. Seemingly, she looks very lazy and spoiled to the third degree.

Then why did Mary not go to the kitchen to help her sister? Mary's family was unstable, but very happy. As long as sickly Lazarus was there, two sisters, Mary and Martha, worked hard and supported the family. But once, Lazarus was sick for two days and died. The sisters sent a message to Jesus and waited and waited for Jesus. But Jesus came when Lazarus had died and was buried. And bad odor spread all over. At that time, Jesus really wanted to plant the resurrection faith in the hearts of Martha and Mary. So Jesus purposely delayed two days (Jn 11:6) and went there when Lazarus had died. When Jesus went to Bethany, many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother, Lazarus.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him. But Mary stayed at home. Maybe Mary was too regretful. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." In short, Martha had no resurrection faith. So at the death of Lazarus, she complained that Jesus came too late to save him. Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Martha only had theological faith and it made her bitter and sorrowful.

At that time, Jesus gave the most important words to Martha in John 11:25-26. It says, "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'" But Martha succumbed to the reality of Lazarus' death and did not listen to Jesus.

After a while, Mary reached the place where Jesus was. She fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (Jn 11:32). It was a bitter complaint which came from the devil. When people do not have resurrection faith, anybody can become a victim of fate. Finally Jesus wept (Jn 11:35).

Jesus was going up to Jerusalem to die for the sin of the world. But he knew that Mary did not have true resurrection faith. So in this situation, Jesus concentrated on planting resurrection faith in Mary. Probably, Jesus spoke to her until she believed, and it took a long time. Probably the prepared food became cold. Most probably the disciples' patience ran out. On the other hand, darkness disappeared from the heart of Mary. Mary felt sure that the heavenly Father is her Everlasting Father and she will see him at the pearly gate of the kingdom of God. Mary felt sure that she has the assurance of eternal life. Mary felt sure that she has the kingdom of God as her inheritance. Through one-to-one Bible study, she saw the heavenly sunshine.

Third, Martha (41-42).

Let's see about Martha. Look at verse 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!'" Martha's rebuking was reasonable.

However, Martha did not understand what Jesus was doing. Jesus was planting the resurrection faith in Mary so that she may have eternal life and the kingdom of God as her inheritance. Martha was worried and upset about many things as usual. Jesus said, "Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (42). Mary looked obnoxious. But she loved Jesus. Because Mary loved Jesus, she listened to Jesus very carefully and obtained eternal life and the kingdom of God (Jn 14:21). On the other hand, Martha was a strong and self-centered person. She loved Jesus, too. But she did not know what Jesus wants her to do and what Jesus wanted to do for her. But Martha did not know that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem to die for the sin of the world. How wonderful it would be if Martha knew Jesus was going up to Jerusalem to die on the cross as a ransom for many.

People want many things. But many things make people worried and upset. Therefore we must put Bible study as our first priority. We must study the Bible and have God in our hearts. Then we can enjoy spiritual reality and overcoming faith in this lawless generation.