

WOMEN'S SUMMER BOOST WEEK 6

2.3. Mary

We all know the Mary/Martha passage. Sunday School or women's retreat, we've heard it before. But seldomly do we hear it in context of what it meant for the Ancient Near Eastern Jew. And that just happens to change the entire clue of the story!

Firstly, we know that the gospels were called evangelion. A word that existed in that culture: evangelion was "good news". But in the context of that time, it was a very specific good news. Whenever there was a new king, he would send out a herald to the different regions to proclaim His "good news", that he is indeed the new king. That proclamation would be followed by a brief mentioning of which things would be different under the reign of this new king. In short: new king, new rules. That is the backdrop of the gospel (evangelion) of Luke. So we read this as Jesus being the new King and His Kingdom has some rules that might surprise us. This helps to read the story more in context.

Let's dive in:

³⁸ 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.^[1] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Martha has invited Jesus into her home, and Jesus went to the "men's room", a living room where He was instructing His disciples. The women normally didn't go in there to join them. they would also be too busy to, making food from scratch is just a difference to getting it ready-made. But Mary sat down at His feet.

This brings us to the second point of context: Sitting at the feet of a Rabbi. In this setting it meant that you declared you wanted to be discipled: you gave full focus, because you wanted to become just like the Master.

Mary is doing something revolutionary here. She was very bold. We don't know what led her to do this. Maybe Jesus nudged her to come in, maybe God prompted her in her heart to, or maybe she just really wanted to and went for it. She was bold, that much we know.

Martha was doing what was seen as a noble task of hospitality, but she was crossing her own boundaries and expecting that Mary would get up and help her. She calls in Jesus' help to bring Mary back down to earth and to tell her to take her proper place and help.

Jesus speaks to both of these women here. He affirms Mary in her choice, opening the way for the many women who would come after her. She has chosen the better portion: If in this life, we want to bring His Kingdom, we must get activated from a place at His feet. A disciple is instructed before he is sent. Even Jesus did only what He saw the Father do. Mary wasn't lazy or quiet, she was making sure she was on the right track, taking in as much as she possibly could, to be just like Him, reflecting His priorities and values.

Martha is troubled and anxious, a problem we're very familiar with. All of us have at some point felt overwhelmed by our agenda's, families, work, or even ministry. Jesus acknowledges how she feels, and gently points out that this is anxiety of her own making.

This story is as much freeing to Martha as it is to Mary. Jesus quiets Martha's voice concerning Mary, and does not affirm her expectations. But in saying Mary has chosen the better place, Martha now knows this place is available also for her!

We are left curious as to what Martha does when Jesus finishes talking to her. But we know that Mary embraced the new King and his new rules. She understood that this was one of the changes.

Encouragement:

So often, we take on so many good and Christian things in a misunderstanding of what it actually means to die to self, or to serve.

Self help is no help at all in this context, because we really do want to live a life laid down. But anxiety and trouble and losing the joy of serving, quickly deplete us, and we are left wondering why we feel "lived" instead of owning our lives. This situation makes only the devil happy, and let's make sure we're on the same page: he is not the one we want happy!

In order to hear God's calling, in order to be in the right place, in order to give our life to Him, we first have to *own it*.

We can't let Martha's voice of inducing shame and guilt be the force that drives our agenda. We need to have ownership over our lives and agenda's so we can submit them to God. Not everything that comes on our path is God-sent.

God will discipline those He loves, and prune those who belong with Him, so they become even more fruitful.

The pruning process cuts out rotting roots, dead branches, overflow of leaves, but it also cuts out good parts. Pruning means I am going to take away good grapes so the great grapes have a chance to fill up. If I don't, there will be very little juice. There are more good things that can be done than any of us could do in a lifetime. Being hospitable is a very good thing in and of itself!

We have to spend time in God's presence so we know what is our course. And once He shows us our place, there is not a single voice that should discourage us from rising to the call, especially not our own voice.

Feed the vine, prune it regularly from things that do not bear fruit, especially from rotting things that damage the plant. You want to offer a healthy life to God every day, not a fragmented one.

Prayer pause

What do you want to retain from this passage on Mary?

What caught your attention to chew on more? Take time to do so.

Pray about what spoke to you.