

## Significant Lives — Chapter 2

By Jim Golden — Mary, Martha, Who Are You?

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*"There is only one thing needful,"*

To say that life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in America, is fast-paced and confusing is an understatement. People make millions each year teaching others how to prioritize their lives. With so many things in the world vying for our attention the last thing we need are over-zealous *prophets* and *teachers* adding to our confusion. Many Christians are drowning in a sea of complexity when even the most unlearned person should be able to understand and flourish through the Gospel's message. Let's look at what Jesus has to say about complexity.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 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 all the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about so many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10: 38-42)

Words that stick out in our Lord's response to Martha's accusation of Mary's lack of assistance, and what appeared to be Jesus' indifference at her plight are: **one**, **needful**, **chosen** and **taken**. The thing we must remember about the scripture is that it is the Holy Spirit's voice to God's people. Through the Word he is able to reveal **himself** and his **ways** to us. He can show us what is important to him through the different stories he desired recorded in its pages.

If we will commit ourselves to respond to his guidance through his word he will pour out his grace bringing revolutionary change in our lives. I say all that to make us realize that this is not just a cute little story about an overworked woman frustrated by her lazy sister sitting at the feet of a worship-seeking Messiah. It is poignant in its diagnosis of the ills of the Church and the cure for all the associated problems facing her and the world today.

The first thing to notice is that Jesus had entered into her village. Jesus will always come within reach of us. Next was her response to him being there. She invited him into her home. It is important to note that Mary and Martha were sisters. It was probably their home. I believe they are a cross section of Christianity today. As Christians we have opened our homes to Jesus, haven't we? I tell my children that they must watch what they eat because their bodies are the temples of God. In this sense all Christians open our **homes** to the Master when we ask him to be our Lord and Savior.

The next verse shows us the most important thing we can do once we open our **home** to Jesus: sit at his feet and listen to him! "But Martha was distracted with all the preparations that had to be made." In our Christian lives there are many preparations that must be made in order to accommodate the ministry of the Lord

preparations that must be made in order to accommodate the ministry of the Lord. The **key** is **NOT** allowing them to become an encumbrance or distraction. The only way I know how to do that is by allowing Jesus to do the preparatory work in us. Jesus is called the author and finisher of our faith. It is God that is at work in us both to will and to work his good pleasure. He that has begun a good work in us will bring it to maturity. The capper of all is, "**... are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit are you now made perfect by the flesh?**"

It is important to remember that none of these **things**, or **preparations** can be done in our own strength. They must come about in the timing of the Lord or we run the risk of producing mere external change!

I am sure that Martha must have felt a little jealousy toward her sister. She also wanted a little recognition for all her service from Jesus, or she would have spoken to Mary privately about her *irresponsibility*. Martha had made the mistake that we all make at one time or another, the mistake of assumption. She assumed that the Lord wanted her to do all these things. Little did she expect the response she received.

Now don't get me wrong, Martha was very precious to the Lord. She just had her priorities a little out of order and it was affecting her life and the lives of those around her. We are taught that we should go to those in authority in a **spirit of inquiry** when we don't agree with something that is going on. Somehow, I don't think Martha quite had the right idea of what an inquiring attitude was. She starts out her sentence with the word **Lord**, but her question sounds more like an accusation than an inquiry. When she commands Jesus to tell her sister to help her it removes most of the doubt from my mind. The translators should have reversed the words **don't** and **you** to read, "Lord you don't care that my sister has left me to do all the work. Tell her to help me!" How many times we say the right things but inside we are just like Martha! The problem is Jesus can read between the lines. He hears just as clearly what we **don't** say as what we **do** say!

I believe that her conversation with Jesus is reflective of much of our prayer life as Christians. We go to the Lord and pour out our complaints. Yet seldom do we even wait for his response. It is fairly evident that she just wanted her feelings made known. She wasn't concerned whether her question was received as a question or accusation. For so long I thought Jesus said her name twice as a means of comforting her until I had children of my own. Many times when we speak to our children we have to say their names twice to get their attention. I believe that is exactly what Jesus was doing with Martha. If her question had truly been a question she would have been waiting for the answer. But Jesus says, "**Martha, MARTHA, you are worried and upset about many things.**" Immediately we know she is in trouble, if she heard his sermon on the mount, because he classifies worry as sin and unbelief.

He then goes on to imply that she has done nothing to serve him because she hasn't been sitting at his feet listening to his word. The scripture tells us to wait for the Lord, that the eyes of the servant are on the hand of the Lord. We, like Jesus, must do only the things that the Father tells us to do. I wonder how long Jesus will have to say my name two or three times to get my attention. I wonder how much of our service is assumption. How often do we sit at his feet and simply do what he tells us to do? Jesus declared Mary's actions to be the only thing that was **useful** for us to do in the role of our preparation for him. He said that it was a choice that we have to make. Once we make this choice he won't permit anything

to endanger it.

Many times we find it much easier to keep busy than to be still in God's presence for fear of what he might say, or what we should say. Something that has brought me peace in this area is knowing that God has already written all my days in his book, before there ever was one. Honesty is the best policy. When I was his enemy he gave his life on the cross for me. Knowing his love and acceptance prepares me to receive any word from him, no matter how hard. Knowing his wisdom and power creates faith in me. His word doesn't just expose my bankruptcy but, when acknowledged, fills my lack. He more than pays my debts, and shortcomings with his immeasurable grace.

Like never before there is a need for revival being recognized among God's people. Like never before we must learn to sit at his feet and listen to his voice. Jesus said that his words were **spirit** and **life**. Job said that he treasured the words of God's mouth more than his daily bread. Jesus said that man didn't live by bread alone but by every word that came from the mouth of God. It is no wonder that the devil would like to turn us into a **performance-based society** rather than **the society of Jesus**. Satan knows that if he can keep us distracted with what appears to be the **good** preparations for the Lord he can keep us from hearing the words of eternal life and of truly becoming his servants.

Unless we give up our agendas we will never receive his agenda. The attitude that was in Mary's heart needs to grip and consume the heart of the Church today. I pray that we all learn what it means to be **God's servant** and not just **a servant**. The confidence and results that come from speaking for God will once again turn the world upside down. It is time to sound the trumpet and take the keys to the Kingdom and unlock the power of the age to come.

The call to war is going forth to every man woman and child of God. It's time to put on God's armor and change the face of this planet in the power of His might. God doesn't need any special gifts or great natural abilities. He only requires your devotion and availability. If you will listen closely you might just hear his still small voice saying, "Whom shall I send?" I pray your answer will be, "**Here I am Lord, send me!**" If we don't learn to be his friend, and abide in him, we may have to pass the torch on to another generation. If we do I pray that it is a torch that burns brightly with our sincere love and devotion for Jesus Christ!