

Coach House Church BEACONS

MARTHA AND MARY

26TH NOVEMBER 2020

Jamie and I watched a program on Netflix called we are the champions last week. In it, there are lots of different zany contests around the world, including things like cheese rolling, yoyo contests and chilli eating. What they all had in common is that the people prioritised their skill or contest. They gave things up to be part of it and to be the best. Whether it was time or their body, they put things on the line to compete. It seemed strange that things that seemed to me to be insignificant were vital in other people's lives.

We only have a certain amount of time in our lives. We only have so many hours and so much energy to put into activities. We have to sleep and eat every day and most of us have to work to make sure we can eat and sleep, so we have to prioritise to make sure the important things get done properly. This topic was highlighted in a story in the gospel of Luke.

Martha and Mary were two women that lived in Bethany. They had a brother called Lazarus and one day they had Jesus and His disciples round for dinner.

This is the first time we meet Martha and Mary in the bible. They become very dear to Jesus and some of His closest followers. This story can be found in Luke 10:38-42. "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 the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

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

This story is about where we put our priorities, where our heart lies. Martha is worried about serving and making everything perfect for the guests. She is worried about impressing others. She wants everything to be done perfectly. But while she's rushing around, stressing herself out, Mary is listening to Jesus.

She is sat at His feet, ready to learn, available to listen. We might feel that Jesus is putting down the value of Martha's work and therefore feel that our work at church is of little value to Jesus, but Jesus never meant to hurt anyone so this must mean something different or there must be something we are missing.

Martha and Mary are great for us to learn from because they are such different people. All of us will be more like Martha or more like Mary in certain situations, but we've probably been like both at some time or another.

There will have been times in life when we have been exasperated by others because we are working harder than they are. This might be at work or in the house or at church. I'd be the first to admit that I have felt like this at times with the housework. It might not even be the truth that we are working hardest but it might feel like it. It might feel like you have to carry other people's burdens because they aren't pulling their weight. We might have become perfectionists, working as hard as we can to make sure everything is as good as it can be.

We can often do this at church. We get so caught up in organising and making sure that everything is right for our events that we forget that the events are about Jesus. We become like Martha, so busy preparing everything she forgot to spend time with the one it was all for. We sometimes put God's work above God.

This is really unhealthy because it will drive us to focus on our own efforts and the efforts of those around us, as if we could earn God's love or our salvation. We will be so focussed on who is doing what that we will forget why we serve others at all in the first place. We will begin to feel resentful that we are working so hard to make things right and we will lose the ability to empathise with others. We won't have the time to spend with God to make sure the most important thing is right first.

There will also have been times when we have needed to receive from God. In those times we might have chosen to do what Mary did. We might have chosen to stop and listen and spend time with the father regardless of what those around in church thought of the fact we were taking time out. Or we might have carried on serving anyway, even though we know it's not right for us in the moment. We might have tried to power on in our own strength. This is dangerous as it can lead us to drift in our relationship with God. Spending time with God is the most important. Serving has to flow out of our relationship with God. We can't earn or make ourselves closer to God by serving.

To be honest with you there are times in my own life where I have got this balance wrong. When I was preparing for this beacon I saw a lot of Martha in the things I do. There have been times when I have been so busy working at serving at church that I didn't have time to pray or read my bible. If that happens we need to stop and redress the balance. We need to put things back in their rightful places. Whether it's something as simple as setting an alarm to

make sure we pray or a reminder on our bible apps to make sure we read or set a time past which we don't work anymore. My dad had a sign up in his office that said the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. That sounds complex but it's basically saying make sure the centre of your life is what should be there. Don't let other things creep in.

Let's get our priorities straight. Let's make sure that at the centre of our lives is what belongs there. Make sure you have time to spend with the one who has given everything for us. Don't look at what other people are putting in. Keep your eyes on the prize.



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