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Mary and Martha

Luke 10; Mary sitting at Jesus feet, while Martha served. At the story we just heard Mary was listening at the feet of Jesus, i.e. learning from Him, while Martha was at work. This all before the raising of the dead from Lazarus.
But, now let’s turn to John 12:2; Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. 3 Mary took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair.

The same story line again; Martha was serving, busy at work, while Mary was at learning at the feet of Jesus. First, she learned at His feet and next She anointed His feet.

Martha is the worker and Mary is the devout believer and worshipper.
Mary is praised by Jesus for the part she took and for the example she gave for all believers. Some scholars see this as something groundbreaking because Jesus encourages women and even set her as an example  to listen to and learn from Him and then to worship Him at His feet.

This is not something new for Israelites, because history learns that women were not seen as a lower class to men.
    In the OT and other ancient literature, women became leaders of the Israelites; e.g. Deborah, Judith and Salome Alexandra.
    Women were physically not as strong as men and therefore not easily chosen as leaders in a society full of war and protection against enemies. But that doesn’t mean they were seen as 2nd class citizens or subjected to male dominance. When for example a child was accused of disobedience to parents, both father and mother were heard in the gate before judgment was brought. Both testimonies were equal valid.

Jesus did not set a new law or practice, He brought back what already existed and perhaps what was practised in His society.
When Jesus praised Mary for her behaviour does that mean that she was a better follower, or believer or worshipper of Jesus than Martha? After all Mary anointed Jesus’ feet, while Martha was serving the guests as usual.

Mary had chosen the best part Jesus, said, but that doesn’t mean Martha was wrong. She only worried too much about being a hostess to visitors in keeping with her tradition of entertaining guests.
Both Mary and Martha served Jesus each on their own way; Jesus only warned Martha that there are many obstacles on our way that distract us from serving God.
Serving others above serving God is not difficult; some want to be found nice, so they serve others to be found nice; others want to be rich, so they serve their ways how to get wealth; others want to be famous; others want to follow their ideals; others fight for justice; others only want to have pleasures; there so many ways in which we can serve ourselves, other people or things, while we lose sight on serving God.

There is however a final observations, which is not to be overlooked in the faith and commitment of both Mary and Martha.
Again when we turn to John, but to Chapter 11 before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. It says: 12 when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.... 21 Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.

So, the Martha as the example of the busy body for who work was more important that faith and worship, turned out to be the one with a great faith. Martha left her home to meet Jesus, while Mary stayed at home. Martha believed in the healing of Lazarus through Jesus, Mary remained silence.
Perhaps Martha had even more trust in Jesus as the Christ of God, than her exemplary sister in faith and worship.

Don’t look too much to the impressions some people might give of their faith in commitment and worship. Great believers are not recognised from the outside, therefore it is God Who sees and searches the heart and we easily only make mistakes.
The story of Mary and Martha is a story for believers today and a lesson to us to let any judgement over to God.
We all have a mission to fulfil to make Jesus known to the world as the Christ of God. Whether we are like Mary or Martha doesn’t make much different for God. We can all be servants of God each in our own personal way.

Hans