

How to Love God – Mary & Martha

Luke 10 v 38-42

Context:

A few weeks ago we studied the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 v 30-37. In the flow of Luke's Gospel, the parable comes immediately before today's passage about Mary & Martha, and this is something the author Luke has done deliberately to make a crucial point. In Luke 10 v 25-27 we hear a question posed to Jesus by an expert in the Torah, the Jewish Law: "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" In reply, Jesus invites the questioner to search for the answer to his own question in the Torah itself – after all he is supposed to be an expert in it! He responds by quoting from two places in the Torah – "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.*" (Deuteronomy 6 v 5) and "*Love your neighbour as yourself.*" (Leviticus 19 v 18). But what does it mean in practical terms to love God and to love our neighbour? Do we love them both in exactly the same way? Well, Luke then does a brilliant thing to show us that, though we are commanded to love *both* God and our neighbour, the way we love each is not the same, in fact, love for God and love for neighbour, though inextricably linked, couldn't be more different. In the wider passage, Luke 10 v 25-42, Luke employs a classic Jewish way of writing called 'Hebrew Parallelism'. So, if we label the first great commandment to love God as **A** and the second great commandment to love our neighbour as **B** (v 27), Luke then gives us a practical illustration of what it means to love our neighbour (**B**) with the Parable of the Good Samaritan in v 30-37, followed by a practical illustration of what it means to love God (**A**) with the visit to the home of Mary and Martha in v 38-42. So, we have **ABBA** – no, not the pop group, but classic Hebrew Parallelism employed by Luke to show us the principle that loving God and loving neighbour are not the same. The Parable of the Good Samaritan shows us that to love our neighbour means giving practical, compassionate help to anyone in need, regardless of their human distinctives such as race or religion. But Luke is about to show us that the way we love God is very different, in fact quite the opposite. Let's dive in.

Observation:

1. Where did Jesus arrive and who welcomed him (v 38)?
2. Who was her sister and what did she do in v 39?
3. How was Martha feeling and why in the first part of v 40?
4. What did she ask Jesus in the second half of v 40?
5. How did Jesus reply in v 41-42?

Meaning:

1. Martha and Mary lived in the village of Bethany, located at the foot of the eastern side of the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem. Jesus often passed through Bethany as it was on the well-trodden route taken by people travelling from Galilee in the north to Jerusalem in the south. So, Bethany would be the last village travellers would pass through before ascending the eastern side of the Mount of Olives and journeying down the western slope and into Jerusalem. Why do you think Martha opened her home to Jesus (v 38) and what do you think the fact that v 38 tells us that *Martha* welcomed him and describes it as *her* home indicates about the status and relationship of the two sisters and what might that have meant in their culture?

2. Why would Mary's actions in v 39 have been culturally and spiritually radical?
3. Martha was fulfilling what she believed to be her role culturally in v 40, but why do you think she was so 'distracted'?
4. Can you sympathise with Martha's anger in v 40?
5. In what sense were her words in v 40 seriously inappropriate and do you ever speak to Jesus like this?
6. Jesus' repetition of Martha's name at the beginning of v 41 is a sign of his gentle and tender care and concern for her. How does he go on to express this care and concern in what follows?
7. What do you think is the one thing Martha needs that Jesus is referring to in v 42?
8. The phrase '*Mary has chosen what is better*' in v 42 should literally be translated 'Mary has chosen the better portion', where 'portion' means a portion of food. Why do you think Jesus uses this term and what does he mean by it?
9. How do you feel about the way Jesus treats both Martha and Mary in this encounter?
10. Read John 12 v 1-8. To what extent do you think Mary and Martha learned from their experience in Luke 10 v 38-42?

Application:

1. How can we best show our love for Jesus – by doing things for him, like Martha, or by letting him do things for us, like Mary?
2. Read Acts 17 v 22-31. Reflecting on Paul's words here, and the incident with Martha and Mary, how can we serve God in a way that doesn't give the impression that God has needs that we can meet by our hard work and effort?
3. What is distracting you from listening to Jesus at the moment? What are you worried and upset about and how is that getting in the way of your relationship with God? What can you do about it?

Pray:

- For time and space to sit at Jesus' feet and listen.
- For God's help to serve him with a right attitude.
- For God's grace to overcome your distractions and worries.

Sermon Notes: