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2013-03-05

Martha & Mary & Lazarus

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AD - 20090101 [# 11]; Martha & Mary & Lazarus

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Tape #: 202

Theme : Martha & Mary & Lazarus

Text: Luke 10 & John 11

Side A is not very clear.

And I want to share with you today from John's gospel chapter 11:5. A very simple sentence, couldn't be simpler. John 11:5. "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus." Here in this remarkable, Yesonine (?) expression we can catch a vision, the kind of vision that you people have been sharing in your dreams, and the reporter, or the recorder says, "Now," introducing the thought, "Jesus loved Martha." One person. "And her sister." The name is not mentioned. "And Lazarus, the brother." There are three people loved and they are loved by one. The significance of this verse is that it is in a home setting. Bethany was the home of Martha and her sister Mary, whose name sometimes is left out, which is not a very easy experience for people. He loved Martha and her sister. Now many of us know that it is not easy to live in the shadow of another person. Here is someone who is only named as the sister of Martha. And then Lazarus, he is mentioned.

Here you have got a home set up here. Bethany, not very far from Jerusalem, the home of Martha. It seemed it was Martha who owned the home. If you read in Luke chapter 10, you read it again there, and Martha invited the Saviour for a meal, and her sister Mary was helping her in the kitchen. Very, very ordinary experience, that's why I said my wife would speak better on that than anything I can produce here. And Lazarus we don't know his work either, we only know him as the one who shared the home with Martha. The central figure in this picture is Martha, a busy woman of Bethany. The home belongs to her, she was perhaps the elder sister, and then Mary the helper in the home, and then Lazarus the brother. And here we have got something that I want to share, the home setting. Three people living together. And you know, that is something, that is where christianity becomes practical. In the fellowship of the three, and the Lord Jesus being all there in the center.

You see, here was Martha, slightly or rather quite different from Mary. Martha was always very busy and very active, and I think meticulously correct in her way of doing things. She was the type of person who was a perfectionist in the kitchen, recipes must be right otherwise she will not accept less than that. Her home must be the kind of home in which the Son of God when He comes He will rest, everything must be clean, the food must be the right kind, the furniture must look perfect, a typical lady in a home, and so there is Martha very busy, quite correct in her way of looking at things. Quite active in the home and, I believe, in the community, quite well known.

Then there comes Mary. We don't know very much about her except that at one stage her sister became mad, as you say, in Luke chapter 10 we read that when the Master was at Martha's house, Martha was alone in the kitchen and Mary came and sat at the Saviour's feet which made Martha absolutely mad, because she was left in the kitchen alone. In fact, J. B. Phillips translates it and he says, "And Martha burst out of the kitchen, she came into the sitting room and she just poured the whole thing at the Saviour's feet, 'Saviour don't you care that my sister should sit when she should be working?'" And if you ask me, very typical isn't it? Quite typical that kind of bursting out. Bless God there was a Saviour to burst before. There was a Saviour at least upon whom one could pour it out. However, this was Martha, Mary seemed to have completely forgotten. No, I don't think so. I think she simply, this is Mary. She was that kind who could come and sit at the Saviour's feet and listen and learn something.

And then of course Lazarus, what about Lazarus? We don't know anything very much about him except that he died. This is what we know, in John chapter 11, the story centers about Lazarus the friend of Jesus.

This we know so much, the friend of Jesus. So you have got Martha, the busy one. You've got Mary the listening one, you've got Lazarus the friend, and three of these people are all loved. This is the common thing about them. Their mentality, mentalities are very different. Their reactions were different, their gifts were different, but they had one thing in common, they were all loved by Jesus. And it was that love which unified the home. If you waited until they were all uniform you would never have any fellowship at Bethany at all. The only unifying power at Bethany home was "He loved them three." He loved Martha in her busyness, and when she lost her temper He loved her too. He loved Mary when she sat listening, and when she went into the kitchen to help her sister, and when she forgot a few things, as religious people often tend to do. Yet, she was loved as she was. The same as Mary, and then He loved Lazarus about whom we don't know very much except that he was the friend of the Saviour.

Somehow, Jesus used to go to Bethany when He was tired of teaching in Jerusalem He would walk a few miles, 2 miles in fact, to this lovely village about which we wouldn't have known anything at all, we know something about Bethany simply because the Son Of God used to go there. A number of things happened, one incident is that Martha lost her temper at one stage, another thing is that Mary sat at His feet and learned, another thing is that Lazarus was taken ill and died in Bethany, and there were many tears and weeping and all that at Bethany, as you read in chapter 11. Don't you see, this is the setting of what I want to share. An ordinary home with ordinary people experiencing ordinary experiences of everyday life. And then at the center of the whole thing, the beauty of Bethany is that it had Jesus at the center. And because Jesus is at the center of Bethany it made the whole difference in the world. It made Bethany known.

It made Martha known. It made Mary known. It made Lazarus known. And these three people are known in the context of the love of Jesus Christ. He loved Martha, He loved Mary, He loved Lazarus.

I want to say a few things here. How does this love come out? One, it comes out in that it understood, for example when Martha lost her temper in the kitchen. I am not suggesting here as I've heard some church people comment that Martha was the kind of people who strut about, that they are perfect. The Saviour doesn't say that about it. In Luke chapter 10 He says, "Martha, Martha my dear, you're worried." Isn't that a lovely word? "Martha, Martha you're worried." I suppose it may be a lovely word to her ears (?). You ever have that experience? The Saviour did not say, "Martha, Martha, you've lost your temper because the kitchen is wrong." Or "Martha, Martha, you're angry with your sister because the work is too much." And perhaps that could have been right and the Saviour simply put it nicely, "Martha my dear, you're worried, that is the problem." And when you worry the recipes don't come right, and the kitchen becomes a place of anxiety instead of a place of glory and rest. You know how gracious the Lord is, no blame is ? on her, no despising, no judging, He simply picked up Martha as she was and says, "Oh you spoiled a beautiful day my dear. The kitchen could have been full of my ? and glory. The recipes could have spoken of wonderful experiences making food for the Saviour. I came that the tired may rest, that the anxious may have peace. Martha my dear, you've lost it through worry."

And I want to say, do you see love understanding the situation? Do you see Jesus, as it were, entering into the business of Martha, and instead of losing it ?, hum-drum, He brings meaning out of it. "I understand that you are being in the kitchen. I understand you are very busy, my dear Martha,

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you need my peace when you are like that." When you worry your work becomes too much before you do it. You get tired before you work, and therefore, that was a lovely word from one who loved Martha. He loved Martha and He knew Martha, and because He knew Martha that's why He loved her. It was not blind love, it was understanding love.

Then He loved Mary and one day, as you read in your New Testament, when Lazarus was taken ill, the two sisters were anxious and they sent a message to Him who loved them, "Your friend Lazarus is very ill," or unwell. As you read in the New Testament here, Jesus stayed two days more where He was, having heard the message He stayed two days more. Is that ^{how} love reacts? Do you see how you can easily misunderstand love? And the sisters are waiting breathlessly, they wanted Him to come and yet Jesus...their brother was becoming more seriously ill. They didn't know what to do, and suddenly the brother died and the Saviour had not yet come. Broken-hearted, tears flowing, an empty home, a miserable experience, things ^{are} completely out of hand. Oh, I wish that He were there, but He wasn't there, and therefore, what conclusion do you think they took? He did not love as we thought, for when He heard our tragedy, our trouble He would have come immediately to our rescue. Very easy to misunderstand that.

And so when Jesus came in John chapter 11, Martha learning that Jesus had come rushed out of the home, went and met Him outside and poured her heart in anger. "Master, had you been here my brother would never have died." She said it with a kind of disappointment, she poured it out. The same old Martha, and Jesus looked at her and He said, "Do calm down, relax, Martha, your brother shall rise again." "? Lord, I know that," so says Martha in the ^Criptures, "I know he will rise again when all the people who died rise again on the last day. I know that." Tears are flowing

down her cheeks as she says, "I know." What do you know? "I know the doctrine of the resurrection. Being a good Jew I know that people rise again in the future, has that got anything to do with me at the present?" No. Tears of despair are flowing, tears of disappointment haven't dried. "I know." Do you know? ? ?. She thought she knew, but what did she know? She knew the doctrine, she did not know the person, and there are many people in the church who know the doctrine like Martha. "I know. I know there is a resurrection," but tears are flowing down. ? ? ?, and the Master, the Son of God looks at her, "Do you think you do know? What do you know Martha? A doctrine which has no comfort, which has no life, which can not save the situation?" Only He did not put it in so many words.

And so the Lord Jesus looked at her and said, "Martha, Martha my dear, I am." What wonderful words. "I am." What a revelation. You thought he will rise again in the future, a distant future. It has no relevance to the immediate situation. It could not speak to those tears. It could not speak to the empty ? at the Bethany home. It could not restore joy and peace and glory, that kind of knowledge was out of place. The Lord quickly said in His simplicity, "I am." What a beautiful biblical word, "I am." A blank check for Martha, "Dear Martha, I am." I am what? "I am exactly what you need when you need it." What do you need immediately Martha? "I need life for my brother." "I am that life." "I need the resurrection for my dear brother who has been in the grave for four days." "Oh I am the resurrection." "I need hope my Master." "I am the hope of glory." "I need peace in my heart." "I am that peace which you need." "My home is breaking to pieces I need power to put the disintegrating hope together." "I am that power." "But you know I am one of those people who suffer from terrible anxieties and I need the kind of peace which can mend my life."

"I am that peace, my dear." This is a blank check given by grace to this suffering woman, when everything is breaking to pieces Jesus offers Himself. He doesn't offer a doctrine, He doesn't offer a teaching, He offers Himself.

"My dear Martha you need a person in whose hand you can put your trembling hand. You need a heart which can beat in tune with your suffering heart. You need another one upon whom you can lean the weight of your fear and worry, and I am here for you." Do you know my dear christian friends, this is where Jesus become unique. When you are trembling, when you are utterly weak and shaky, when you don't know where to turn, there by your side, and right in your heart, and bang in your circumstances, stands one who ~~is~~ so understands you that whatever your heart needs, He says, "I am that one." There are no limitations. You pray for your son or your daughter, and I am a parent. My wife and I have four daughters and for whom we have to pray day by day just like you. There are those moments of anxiety for parents, there are those moments when you don't know whether you can understand each other. When Martha burst out. When you come bursting out and you need some one to calm you, "I am the calm in the storm. I am the one who can bring love."

Then Mary came because Martha, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and I am the life. That's exactly what you need Martha and now I am here for you. I am the glory which came walking to Bethany. I knew how dark it was. I knew how lonely it was. That's why I came walking to Bethany. And then Martha, do you believe that?" He asked a question, "Do you believe that?" Then Martha said, "Yes Lord. I believe you are the very Son of God for whom the world has been waiting." Having said that she rushed off. You know, usually you make a confession in weakness and trembling and

immediately you make the confession you find that's ?. As soon as Martha said, "I believe," immediately she was so full of anxiety to tell her sister, so she rushes home and scripture says here in John, she whispers to her sister. "The Master has come and wants you." But we don't read that Jesus said, "Go and call your sister." Somehow Martha must have seen it in the eyes of Jesus, she must have caught the message and then in assurance she says, "Mary, my dear, the Master has come and is calling for you."

And so Mary goes out weeping and we read in scripture here, when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet again. You remember in Luke, she sat at His feet, and now she fell at His feet. She had learnt a lesson at the feet of the Master. But when things are on top of you what do you do? You bring the whole burden and pour at His feet. She saw Him and she fell at His feet and at His feet she made the confession. This is the difference between Martha and Mary. Martha made the confession standing and looking, Mary made the confession down at His feet and there she poured out her heart. "Master, had you been here my brother would never have died." Do you realise that Jesus never spoke a word to Mary. He spoke many words to Martha, there is no word for Mary. Mary seeing Him, He was enough for her. Mary seeing Him, it melted her heart, and melted her problem.

And next before we finish this off, prayer has been offered. Confessions have been made. Faith has now revived, what do you need? Realistic approach. Jesus said to Mary and Martha, "Where have you laid him?" It is written here, verse 34. "Where have you laid Lazarus the cause of your trouble?" Because you remember the tears, the loneliness, the mourning, it was because Lazarus died. He was the cause of this whole mess. Exper-

ience of death. "Where have you laid him?" Don't you think that Jesus never knew? I'm sure He did know, but He will never enter into the affairs of your life until you are realistic enough to say, "There is the problem." So, "Where have you laid him?" And then they said, "Master come and see." Master come and see.

So Martha and Mary and Jesus walked to the grave and Mary is weeping, and Martha is weeping, and God is weeping. Isn't that a most fascinating picture. The Saviour, the two girls, all in tears, in fact the tears of Jesus were deeper than Mary's because He groaned in the Spirit as He went step by step to the grave, sighing, groaning, weeping publicly. And He is holding the hands of the two sisters. Have you known Him like that? Have you ever introduced Him into your sighs, and groans, and pain, and wounds? Oh, tears are blessed when you weep them upon the chest of Jesus. Sighs are wonderful when you sigh them upon the heart of Him who was wounded for you. It's wonderful. It's a blessed experience.

So, they walked to the grave with Him, and the grave now threatening because rottenness ?, the Master has arrived. And He said, "Remove the stone will you?" And Martha in her usual manner protested, "Oh not that Master. We have already been embarrassed, we are already suffering, please, please, keep that from us. Save us from that." Save you from what? From the stinking smell of a dead man, so thought Martha. And Martha says, "No, not that. He has been there four days, it's going to be terrible." And the Lord Jesus turned and said to Martha, "Martha, did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God coming out of impossibility?" And Martha kept quiet. They removed the stone, and the Master looked into the terrible dungeon of death, and what happened? "Lazarus come out." And the glory came out of the dead, and darkness gave room to light, and hope

replaced despair, and fears were replaced with joy. It was a tremendous experience and Martha and Mary, and Lazarus and the mourners, Bethany began to sing because Jesus came to Bethany.

Key 73. Calling our continent to Jesus Christ. There is no despair my dear people. I have been called from despair into hope. From fear into courage, from actually human brokenness into where men and women can become alive because Jesus says, "I am the resurrection, I am light for Africa, for America, for young people, for your own." We have seen homes becoming alive again because Jesus came down. Because Jesus wept you can weep upon His chest and weep and laugh. Because Jesus knows what is going in the grave you can introduce Him into circumstances of your own, and you can say, "Master, come and see my daughter. Master come and see my husband. Master, come and see me in my brokenness inside." "Master, come and see our society." Please don't act like Martha by saying, "Oh, it is too bad don't look in." When Jesus looked into a situation there is no longer any hopelessness at all. The cross can change a hopeless situation into the hope of glory. A husband who was utterly given up to his desire. A wife who always challenges me because the situation in that home back home in Africa was so bad that we advised the lady to separate from her husband who was becoming dangerous. He had become so bad that every night was death to the wife and the children. Some of us said, "Perhaps the better thing for you is to keep apart in order to keep alive," And this wife who had known Jesus and who did not depend materially on the husband, the husband depended on her, refused to separate. Somehow, I don't know in a strange way she kept on loving this impossible man. A man who was broken to pieces. A man who was all out to kill her, and we did not know what could happen, what to expect. It was so dark, it was so miserable

and yet somehow she kept on sustained by love. The love of Christ. And what happened later? Ten years later. TEN years later, the husband was brought to Jesus Christ. I shall never forget the experience, one day the wife was driving her small car, the husband had had a big promotion since he had been brought to Christ, and he stopped me as I greeted him, a great friend, and he said, "Do you see that lady in that car?" And I said, "Of course I do and I know her personally." He said, "I owe everything that I am to that woman in that car." Tears in his eyes.

Now he is a very important person in our country, and yet he pointed to someone who loved and suffered, and loved and suffered until that suffering love reclaimed the impossible, and through that love Jesus changed that hopeless man into the man I am talking about. I am encouraging you today as you pray for Key 73, have you discovered the key for your Bethany? Jesus is the key. Do you find that there are situations where you don't know where to put the key? Jesus is the key. He can open any door even the door of the grave. He can open the door for forgiveness. He can restore you to someone you don't like. He can give you grace to put up with impossibilities. Key 73 is nothing but Jesus walking straight into the circumstances which have been crushing you.

I praise God, and I thank God that my wife is here for we have known Jesus together for the last thirty years, and may I talk here intimately, there is no better place to learn how to walk with the Key Jesus, than in a home because two people are impossible to be made into one, but once you have Jesus bang in the center, the one who arbitrates, the one who settles the differences, the one when, who when He speaks you can see clearly, and we have had moments together. We both belong to Africa, we speak the same mother tongue, our colour is the same, we grew up in the same village, and

we were married because we loved each other. But if I had time to tell you the simple lessons of how to find the key to open life day by day, you think it is big? It is not in carrying a big Bible and preaching a big sermon. No, no, that is easy. Let me tell you some of the moments when I learned the lesson. The moment I learned the lesson of what it means to walk with Jesus day by day in practical circumstances of Bethany is when there is a misunderstanding between me and that wife. When we try to speak using the same mother tongue and yet I speak, it is as if I am speaking Greek, and I wait for her and she speaks to me trying to get me to understand and it's as if she is speaking Spanish, and so we continue and she speaks, and I finish listening, she thinks I'm listening to her I'm listening to myself. As soon as she finishes I start again thinking that she is going to listen to me.

This goes on sometimes for five, ten minutes and we are not getting anywhere, there is no communication. The language becomes more difficult, the words become more meaningless, and the distance becomes greater and greater. What do you under those circumstance^s? Educated people know what to do. You pretend all is well when all is not well. You shy away from facing reality, that's what I do, and you know at that time I walk out blaming her and excusing myself. I take my Bible and I'm going to preach in another crusade. But sometimes as I walk out of the house the Master, the wonderful lover whispers into my heart, "Festo, you can take that big Bible and go and preach a wonderful sermon, but you are going to be alone for I'm staying back with your wife. I'm going to stay back in the kitchen with her, you can go with your big Bible and preach."

Those are times when I have to say, "Now what next? What do I do?"
"You go back to that wife of yours, you sort out the difference taking your

side of the blame and leaving her to take her side when I show her, and then you can take your bible and go when all is well in that kitchen." And you know those are the wonderful moments when God gives you grace to face it at that level, then the Bible becomes meaningful, then preaching becomes practical, then Jesus becomes an intimate friend. Then your fellowship together becomes deeper than it was before. What about the confusion of language? The language becomes clear. You know what confused English in America? It wasn't because sentences are not correct, it is not because grammar is wrong, but because when relationship is strained, words are strained and they don't make sense. Bethany can be a wonderful place, but Bethany can be a miserable place without Jesus.

Pray for your beautiful America, a beautiful home, for your lovely children, for your wonderful churches, that they ^{may} become places where Jesus makes sense. Let us pray.