

## **MARY OF BETHANY, A PRIMER ON DISCIPLESHIP**

In many ways, Mary of Bethany was way ahead of her time in the matter of following Jesus. Men and women alike would do well to emulate her simple and forthright obedience. She, as much as anyone in the company of Jesus, got the message Jesus was sending forth. Let us follow her as she follows Christ, for as you will soon see, her life was a “primer” on discipleship.

### **I. The Main Thing**

Luke 10:38-42. The first thing we read about Mary is that she “...sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard His word” (Luke 10:39b). What a contrast to her sister Martha of whom the Scriptures inform us was “...cumbered about much serving...” (Luke 10:40a). The Lord corrected Martha rebuking her about being “...careful and troubled about many things” (Luke 10:41b). Then in Luke 10:42, Jesus said, “But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

We have heard it said, “Let’s keep the main thing the main thing.” This is precisely what Mary did. Jesus said three things about Mary’s action:

- A. It is the basic need of Christianity.
- B. Mary wisely chose the best thing to do.
- C. Her reward would never be revoked.

### **II. The Mysteries**

John 11:19, 20. The report had been given to Jesus that Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, had died. Upon discovering Jesus was en route to Bethany, impulsive Martha runs to meet Him, but Mary sits still in the house. Why would God let a good man like Lazarus die when Christ had been healing people everywhere? How do we handle death? The mysteries of our faith abound even to this day. There is something about this statement in Luke 11:20 that touches my heart: “...but Mary sat still in her house.” Psalm 46:10a tells us, “Be still, and know that I am God....” This is so hard to do when our hearts are broken. We are so prone to try to make things happen. Yet, if we really want God to do what only God can do, it is a good idea to wait on Him. This is what Moses did in Exodus 14:13, “And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.” This is also what Jahaziel

prophetically spoke to Jehoshaphat in II Chronicles 20:17: “Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you.” Jehoshaphat obeyed, waited and saw the deliverance that only God could give.

There is an old saying, “When we come to the end of our rope, tie a knot and hang on.” If I may tweak that saying and make it a little more biblical, I would say, “When we have done what we can do, trust God to do what only He can do.” This is the attitude of Jehoshaphat who said in II Chronicles 20:12, “O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.”

Let us not be put off by the mysteries of God’s ways or God’s timing. Let us glory in His omniscience and omnipotence. Since God knows everything that should be done in any given situation, let us pray, “Oh Lord, we do not know, but thou knowest what is best and what is a mystery to me is not a mystery to Thee, therefore let thy will be done.”

### **III. The Mandate**

John 11:28, 29. As soon as Mary knew that Jesus requested her company, she immediately and without hesitation went to Jesus. This is a very valuable lesson in leadership. Obedience is not hesitation in the face of a clear command. This is the lesson the Lord is teaching us in Matthew 21:28-31. The commands of God are never suggestions or anything to be debated, only followed.

The allied forces in the north African campaign during World War II were having problems. The problem lay in the leadership of the different countries. Finally, General Montgomery of Great Britain was placed in charge. And the first thing he did was to call in the subordinate officers representing the allied forces and gave this directive, “From this time forward, my commands will never be the subject of debate.” This philosophy became the winning dynamic in this theatre of the war. James 1:22, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

### **IV. The Mercy**

John 11:32-35. Paul said in Romans 12:15, “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.” When Jesus saw Mary weeping, He wept: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). Exodus 2:23b, 24a says, “...And the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered....”

Tears are a language God understands. In Jeremiah 8:22, the great prophet asked, "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" Jesus is the Great Physician. Micah 7:18 reveals God's nature when it declares, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retained not his anger for ever, because he delighted in mercy." God not only gives mercy; He delights in mercy.

## **V. The Missionary**

John 11:45. After the Lord raised Lazarus from the dead, the people wanted to know more about Jesus and were willing to believe on Him. They did not go to Martha. They did not even go to Lazarus. They went to Mary! They surmised that Mary was the closest one to Jesus and could tell them what they needed to know. In Acts 18:26c, we are told that Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos "...unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." Mary was the one who became a dynamic missionary because she, like Aquila and Priscilla, could "more perfectly" point others to Jesus.

## **VI. The Ministry**

John 12:1-5. The reason Mary was so effective is disclosed within this story. She took the dowry of her precious ointment of spikenard, equal to a year's salary and gave it to Jesus. She anointed His feet and wiped His feet with her hair. She had nothing to fall back on after this. She gave everything to Jesus! It is not so much of what we give that reflects our dedication to Christ, but what we have left over. Those who are not willing to give everything will miss happiness in the only thing that really matters. It is that one needful thing that Jesus spoke about in Luke 10:42.

## **VII. The Mind**

John 12:7. The Bible says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). Of Mary's anointing, "Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this" (John 12:7). She had been saving this precious gift for this very moment. The disciples such as Peter, James and John did not "get it", but Mary "got it", i.e., the reason Jesus came was to die for our sins and rise again from the dead. Mary was ahead of all the disciples! Her early acknowledgment meant so much to our Lord that He said, "Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her" (Mark 14:9). And today I am fulfilling what Jesus said would happen; my entire message is surrounding this one faithful lady, who saw before the others the reason why Christ had come.

Johnny Pope