

The Magnetism Of Bethany

Matt 21:17 And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.

Matt 26:6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper,

Mark 11:11 And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.

Luke 24:50 And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.

John 11:1 Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.

2(It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.)

3 Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.

4 When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

Key Verse - 5 Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.

Introduction

Throughout much of Judea and Galilee, lodging was often difficult. When a certain scribe promised to follow Him, Jesus responded, **“The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20)**. While many cities and villages offered inns where travelers could lodge, these seemed out of financial reach of One who had to send a disciple fishing to pay the taxes (Matthew 17:27). The only options left to our Lord were to sleep under the stars, finding what shelter was available, or to accept an invitation into someone’s home.

It is not strange, then, that regularly throughout the Gospels we view the Lord dining, visiting, or resting in the home of one person or another. He healed Peter’s mother-in-law in their home. He had dinner in the home of Zacchaeus. He dined in the house of Simon the leper. He met with publicans and sinners in Matthew’s house. On the basis of frequent stops there, however, one home seemed to have been His favorite—

a home in Bethany where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived.

A Place Jesus Loved

Bethany today is home to approximately 1,000 people who call it Aziriyeh or “the place of Lazarus.” In the time of Christ, however, this small village was known as Bethany or “house of misery” on account of its lonely situation and the invalids that congregated there. Bethany was located about two miles southeast of Jerusalem on the road to Jericho at the Mount of Olives.

Jesus seems to have generally made Bethany His place of abode when in Judea. The climate there is rather temperate, and the area is known to have been quite pleasant with its abundant growth of figs, dates, and other delicacies.

Many notable events in Jesus’ life occurred within the shadow of Jerusalem in and around Bethany.

1. It was here that Jesus spent time with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and also where He raised Lazarus from the dead. (See John 11:17-44.)
2. It was in Bethany, while dining with Simon the Leper, that a woman anointed Jesus’ feet after breaking her expensive alabaster box. (See Mark 14:3-9.)
3. Perhaps it was Jesus’ great love for Bethany that caused Him to choose it to be the place from where He ascended to heaven. (Luke 24:50-51).

Jesus Loved People

The principle reason that Jesus so loved this area so much was not the climate, vegetation, or geography. People have always been the driving force behind all of God’s actions, and so it was at Bethany. His whole earthly ministry centered around people. His very reason for being born was to “seek and to save” people (Luke 19:10). So it was that the thing that drew Jesus repeatedly to Bethany was the relationship He had with the people who lived there.

His feelings for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus made Bethany seem near to wherever Jesus was. Sore feet and tired legs seemed unimportant when compared to the chance to see His loved ones. Ever since fellowship was severed in the Garden of Eden, God has desired to have close relationships with mankind. The journey to Bethany was quite small compared to the journey from glory to a Bethlehem stable. This journey He also made for the sake of people.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in

him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Clothing Himself in human flesh introduced God to weariness, pain, hunger, and a host of other unpleasant human experiences. But these all paled when compared to the relationship He would institute with fallen man.

People always make the difference to Jesus! And it was the people who lived in Bethany that drew Jesus there—Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

Each one of them exemplified different aspects of friendship and relationship with Christ .

The Three Treasures of Bethany

There were 3 valuable treasures that Jesus loved in Bethany. The company of these drew him toward that little village sitting in Jerusalem’s shadow.

Mary—The Worshipper.

Of the three family members living in Bethany, Mary is the one most often mentioned in Scripture. She displayed a character trait worthy of notice and imitation. Mary possessed a deep spiritual hunger. She was willing at any time to place the affairs of her life in proper priority in order to know more of Christ. This is readily seen by the description of where she often was found. On at least three occasions, Mary is recorded as being at the feet of Jesus!

The Philippi Parallel- Although Mary lived many years before the words of Philippians 3:10 were placed on parchment, she demonstrated the spirit of them in her hungering quest to be in Christ’s presence. Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi,

“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:10).

There seems to be a definite parallel to these words in Mary’s life.

1. That I May Know Him - The first record of Mary being at the feet of Jesus is found in Luke 10:38-42. Jesus had stopped at their home to dine, and while her sister was busily making the preparations for the meal, Mary could think of nothing better than sitting at His feet and hearing His Word.

Every woman desires her table to be just right and her home to be spotless when receiving important guests. We can be quite sure that Mary was no different from Martha in that feeling. However, something higher beckoned her when she saw the Holy One of Israel seated in her home. There would be other meals, but how many more times to bask in the beauty of perfect wisdom? While the demands of the dinner—and Martha—asked her why she sat inactive, her life cried out the answer: “That I may know him”!

2. The Power of His Resurrection - The second time we discover Mary at Christ's feet is found in John 11 at the resurrection of Lazarus. In one of the darkest hours of her life, Mary found herself in a familiar spot—at His feet. This time, however, she was not attentively listening to His teaching, but crying out to Him in grief at the loss of her brother. In a matter of moments, however, she went from grieving at His feet to enjoying the enactment of the second portion of Philippians 3:10—the power of His resurrection. Jesus cried, “Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43), and the power of the resurrection was displayed before her eyes as Lazarus came forth! There was no other place she could have bowed herself to receive that kind of answer to life's dilemmas. Mary's familiarity with being at His feet gave her access to His resurrection when she needed it most!

3. The Fellowship of His Sufferings - The final occasion when Mary is seen in Scripture at the feet of Jesus is recorded in John 12:1-8. Jesus was once again dining with His friends when Mary came and anointed His feet with costly ointment and wiped them with her hair. This act, although condemned by the carnal people in the crowd, was declared by Jesus to have been done “against the day” of His burying. (See John 12:7.) Others might not have understood, but Mary's spiritual hunger demanded that she also know Him in the “fellowship of his sufferings.” While many were still looking for Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom, Mary was spiritually perceptive enough to understand that Calvary loomed on His horizon. That knowledge drove her to His feet once again.

There also are people in the church who, like Mary, are given to prayer and spiritual concerns. The church should remain ever grateful for the prayer warriors in our local congregations. The hunger of these Mary-type Christians sometimes is misinterpreted. (See Luke 10:40.) They are battle scarred from hours spent in combat against the forces of the enemy. They intercede and weep in prayer closets without any visibility. Often they lead in public worship by their example in the pew.

Illustration- *A certain elderly lady, whose mind was failing, spent the last several months of her life confined to her bed. Many in the church would have said that she was unable to be productive for the kingdom of God during this time. After her passing, however, her daughter revealed that although her mental capacity was gone for everything else, she daily called the name of each of the forty or so members of her local church until her death. So deeply was that pattern ingrained in her that even the ravages of age and disease could not erase it. Unproductive? Not hardly! Mary, you are still a precious treasure to the church!*

Martha – The Servant.

The second member of this family who befriended Jesus is Martha, whose particular virtue is that of service. Martha is recorded as preparing meals for Jesus on two occasions. (See Luke 10:38; John 12:2.) When one thinks of Martha he thinks of flour-dusted aprons, hair somewhat disheveled from time spent scrubbing floors, and hands that seem suited to carrying a water

pot. While not homely, one could see her as plain rather than flashy. She seems from Scripture to be the lady who always does the dishes after the church supper and who faithfully volunteers for nursery duty.

Martha, the servant, is the type of person Jesus would call a great Christian. The Lord declared, **“But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Matthew 20:26-27).** The highest calling of a child of God is that of servanthood. None in His kingdom is exempt from this responsibility. The Scriptures command us to **“by love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).**

Martha serves as an enduring example to us of presenting our talents and energies to the Lord.

She did not mourn over the things she could not do, but willingly and wholeheartedly invested herself in doing what she could do to serve Jesus Christ. This servant spirit made her dear to our Savior, and so does that spirit today.

There are people, who like Martha, love to serve. Every church hopefully has several people like her. They are the workers who willingly and tirelessly give of themselves in what some would call menial capacities. Often overlooked, sometimes misunderstood, and nearly always under appreciated, these modern-day Marthas are essential to any successful church. Someone has to clean the windows. Someone must gather the trash. Someone must make certain the church grass is cut. True servant individuals seem ready always to do such tasks. Only heaven will reveal the rewards coming to many unseen “Martha” saints.

Illustration- *A ragged boy with a violin under his arm once roamed the streets of Europe. A famous musician hearing him play, and learning the boy had no home or family, took him under his wing. He became a father to the lad and taught him all he knew about the violin. The boy practiced faithfully. The evening of his first performance came. He played so well that after each number the applause was deafening. But for some reason the boy paid no attention to the ovation. He kept his eyes turned upward and played on and on. The audience was mystified at his strange behavior. Finally, someone remarked, “I don’t understand why he’s insensitive to this thunderous applause. He keeps looking up all the time. I’m going to find out what is attracting his attention.” Moving about the concert hall the observer found the answer. There in the upper balcony was the old music master, peering over the railing toward his young pupil, and nodding his head as if to say, “Well done, my boy. Play on.” The boy played on, seemingly unconcerned whether the audience liked it or not. He was playing only to please his master.*

Martha-type Christians are so grateful to be a part of the church that they serve only for Christ’s pleasure. Whether or not the crowd applauds is unimportant to them. It is enough if the adopted Father looks down, nods, and says, “Well done, my child. Serve on.”

Lazarus—The Quiet Disciple.

The least visible of this family of Bethany is the man of the house, Lazarus. He is, of course, quite well known as the recipient of a miraculous resurrection, but beyond that incident little is known of him. His name is only mentioned in one chapter of Scripture other than in the account of His resurrection. In John 12 one can read of Lazarus dining with Christ and of the Pharisees' distaste for Lazarus because of the powerful witness his life was for Him. Behind all this "anonymity," however, there was a consistent and quiet relationship with the Lord that won special feelings from the Lord, for Jesus called him His friend in John 11:11. Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, also recognized this special favor, for when they sent for Christ in John 11:3 they said, "**He whom thou lovest is sick.**"

There are people in the church who, like Lazarus, are seldom heard from but are faithful. One man said that the church is like a fireplace. It has some flames and some bricks. By this he meant that some people are just solid, stable, and consistent. The flames in the fireplace garner the attention, but the bricks keep it in control, avoid destruction, and add warmth to the whole house. Nobody sits and admires the bricks, but their faithfulness is necessary to the success of the flames. Lazarus-type Christians still sit on our pews. They might not be noticed when they are present, but they are most definitely missed when they are gone. The one characteristic which radiates from Lazarus-type Christians is faithfulness. They do not tend to be splashy or loud, just constant. Often these are elders who have, proven through a lifetime their commitment to Christ. Without them the church would be much more susceptible to winds of false doctrine. But they lend their stability to the church and will well deserve to hear, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).

The Church as a Bethany

Jesus' interaction with His friends in Bethany in at least two ways paints a picture of how Christ will deal with the church at large. By both comparison and contrast we can see more clearly the interaction to be expected when He returns to earth.

1. *Jesus came to Bethany for one family.* It is without question that Christ loved every man, woman, boy, and girl living in Bethany during His lifetime. God is not a respecter of persons. His love is universal, immeasurable, and unconditional. It is true, however, that when He entered Bethany, there was only one family which met certain qualifications, defined exclusively by Him, that made them the recipients of His visit. His coming then was directed to one family, and His return will be for one family.

When Christ comes again there will be certain criteria which will determine the recipients of His coming. These criteria are solely established by Him and plainly declared to us in His Word.

“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

The new birth message as declared in Acts 2:38 is more than just another doctrine. It is the Bible plan by which a spiritual orphan receives the spirit of adoption spoken of in Romans 8:15 and finds himself a member of the family of God. As part of the adopted family of God we all anxiously await the arrival of our heavenly visitor and Father, Jesus Christ.

When He comes it will be for this one family— the church—which has met His established criteria for acceptance.

2. Jesus came for the living and then the dead. When Jesus came to Bethany for the resurrection of Lazarus, He sought first the living, that is Mary and Martha. He extended to them hope and comfort and then sought the dead—Lazarus. This order made perfect sense in that setting. When the Lord comes back for His church, however, we will see a direct reversal of this pattern. We are told very clearly that in that day ***“the dead in Christ shall rise first” (I Thessalonians 4:16).*** It will be those who sleep in Jesus who first will rise to meet the Lord. He will seek and call the dead in Christ first.

“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (I Thessalonians 4:17).

What a glorious hope we have that, no matter whether living or dead, all in right order, we shall see Him!

3. Be Ready for His Coming - Mary, Martha, and Lazarus could never be sure of the exact time when Jesus would arrive again. In anticipation of His visits, though, we can be certain that they took great care that their house was clean and in order. Perhaps neighbors could not understand their preoccupation with keeping the house clean and their tendency to look off down the road

for a certain traveler. Many may have questioned why the constant vigilance and readiness.

When Jesus walked into their home and found everything prepared for His arrival, the smile on His face was reward enough. So it is today that many people may never understand our commitment to keeping ourselves clean and unspotted. They may not comprehend that we are anticipating an unannounced arrival and must be prepared.

John wrote that ***“every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (I John 3:3).***

The skyward look in our eyes is only silent witness to the fact that we are looking for the soon coming of Jesus. Though others may laugh at the preparations, it will be reward enough to see Him smile and to hear Him say, “Well done!”

Conclusion

The Magnetism of Bethany was not its locality. Remember at the beginning of this message I told you that Bethany's name to many meant "place of misery". But it is worthwhile to note that today it is no longer called Bethany but rather AZARIYEH, which means "The place of Lazarus."

It is a town known now for the miracle of resurrection power! Ever since Jesus entered into that town, it was never the same again!

Jesus walked into misery and gave it a resurrection! He can do the same for you because He is pulled toward Bethany! He is drawn and is moved toward Mary's, Martha's, and Lazarus's who can't wait for his next visit.

The Saints of Bethany are what drew him there. It will be the saints who endure to the end that will draw him back to Earth from Heaven.

The Magnetism of His Bride awaiting is Divine Return will be the catalyst that will propel the church from this "Place of Misery" to a "Glorious Resurrection"