

KINGDOM: Sons, Not Servants

We are familiar with the incident at Mary & Martha's home in Bethany when Jesus visited.¹ We've probably heard innumerable sermons on the topic. Here's a different take on the account which looks at the difference between servitude and sonship which was demonstrated on that occasion.

As background, when Martha called Mary to task for leaving her responsibilities in the kitchen to listen to Jesus, he didn't defend Mary. Jesus highlighted that Martha was focused on "many things", but Mary was concerned only about "one thing". That "one thing" was Jesus himself, and the "better thing" was to sit at his feet, to become his disciple.

This doesn't mean that we shouldn't fulfil our family responsibilities when we are disciples of Jesus – there's enough admonition in Paul's writings to nullify that argument². There is, however, a lesson to be learnt about Martha's servant focus and Mary's personal, intimate focus on Jesus.

"The Marthas of the Christian world are those who have been taught that the main thing that God desires of us is service. He wants us to do many things for Him. He wants us to be missional, to make converts, and then to turn those converts into disciples. He has a big to-do list.

The Marthas of this world are very busy doing good things. But eventually, they burn out or bail out. Why? Because they operate in their own power. And their priorities become crooked.

They are trying to do something for God, yet haven't learned the secret of letting God live in and through them where *He* is doing the work.

Countless Christians live each day out of guilt, condemnation, religious duty and obligation, trying to win brownie points with God by doing, doing and more doing. They feel happy when they check off a spiritual task, but they also embrace condemnation when they haven't created enough checks in a day. To them, the Christian life is a treadmill where you trip and fall, or you run-run-run and never arrive.

In light of this, some burn out, growing tired of serving altogether. So they create an aversion to any kind of Christian service. Others bail out. They stop following the Lord altogether because they feel that their service for God has gained them nothing. Because their eyes stay fixed on their own work for the Lord (as Martha's were), they judge their fellow disciples who haven't done as much as them, yet who seemingly enjoy God's blessing on their lives.

So they conclude: *What's the use? Why am I doing all of this for God when He's blessing these others—who aren't doing a fraction of what I do—more than He's blessing me?*

Don't make the mistake of thinking that Mary didn't serve the Lord. She certainly did. But her service was rooted in something higher than duty or obligation. And it wasn't motivated by fear, outward applause, condemnation or guilt. The "one thing" motivated Mary.

In light of this, look at Mary again and take your cue from her. Learn what she understood—that being a disciple isn't about serving or keeping a spiritual to-do list. It's first and foremost about opening your heart and listening to Jesus, spending time with Him.

It's about being teachable, sitting at His feet. It's about humility, acknowledging that He knows best how we should live our lives. It's about loving Him, forsaking even important tasks for the sake of revering Him alone. And out of those values flow everything else. Including service and mission."³

1 – Luke 10:38-42

2 – e.g. Titus 1:7-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-5; 5:8

3 – Frank Viola "Some Neglected Aspects of Discipleship" Blog item 11th June 2015 (frankviola.org/2015/06/11/neglecteddiscipleship)

We are called to be sons⁴, not servants (slaves). However, like Jesus, as a son we live in intimate relationship with Father and out of that intimacy we serve.⁵ Get that!

Jesus got to the point in his relationship with his disciples where he stopped calling them servants and referred to them as friends.⁶ We are friends of God, like Moses⁷, and that's a relationship we must operate out of, in the same way as we operate out of being sons.

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4 – Galatians 3:26

5 – Mark 10:45

6 – John 15:15

7 – Exodus 33:11