

# Jesus Help and Love for His Friends

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[ 0 : 00 ] We now come to study the two readings from Scripture that we've covered.

So the first reading was in Luke chapter 10, and then John's Gospel chapter 11. As I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon, the theme is Jesus' help and his love for his friends. And for the youngsters, I'm going to maybe give you something to help you, which is based on the names of three of the characters in our readings. There's Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. And I would suggest to the grown-ups, you may find this useful as well, because it acts as the recurring theme through the sermon. So if we take Lazarus' name first, Lazarus comes from the Hebrew. It's a Hebrew name originally, Eliezer, which means God has helped.

God has helped. Now the name Mary is not a Hebrew name. It's a name which the Jews were given, that they discovered, when they were in Egypt at the time, the 400 years when they lived in Egypt after Joseph rescued them. And the name Mary in Hebrew properly is actually Miriam. But if you look at its origins, it comes from ancient Egyptian, and what it means is the beloved. The beloved. So that means loved in a special way. The final name, Martha, so Lazarus, Mary, Martha, so Mary, Martha, comes from another Bible language, which is Aramaic. And it means lady. Not just a woman, but a special woman, a lady. And if you run the meanings of these names together, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, and put the meanings in, you get God has helped the beloved lady. And I'll maybe extend it a bit more for the purposes of this sermon. It's God in Christ Jesus has helped the beloved lady. And hopefully you'll see that that's a recurring theme as we go through. Now the sermon will be in three parts. The first part will be to understand something from the passage in Luke 10 of how Jesus deals with Martha. The second part of the sermon will be understanding something from the passage in John 11 of how Jesus deals with Mary.

And the third part will be to look at something of application for us now. So the first part will be something to understand how Jesus dealt with Martha. The second part of the sermon to see how Jesus dealt with Mary. And the third part will be to look at something of application for us now.

[ 3 : 08 ] Two thousand years on. Because this is living word. And the living God uses it to communicate to us as living beings. So living God uses living word to communicate with us living beings. Now there are two texts which we'll use for the sermon. They're both very brief. The first text is in Luke chapter 10, verse 42, where Jesus says to Martha, but one thing is necessary.

It's an enigmatic word. But one thing is necessary. The second text will be some mysterious words in John chapter 11, right at the end of verse 20, when it says, but Mary remains seated in the house. But Mary remains seated in the house.

And hopefully all will become clear as we work our way through our study. So that's the introduction to the sermon. Shall we now move into the first part of the sermon?

And that's to understand something of Jesus dealing with Martha in our reading in Luke chapter 10. Now if we picture the scene that's described here, Jesus and his disciples have arrived in Martha's village.

And they're invited by her into her home, which she shared with her sister Mary. Now that means, quite late in the day, a minimum of 13 men have arrived.

[ 4 : 44 ] That's Jesus as a rabbi, and we know that he was addressed as rabbi by his disciples. A rabbi. And then at least 12 disciples were with him, possibly even more.

The thing is, for the household, for Mary and Martha, all these men had to be fed. They all had to be fed. Now the traditional interpretation of this passage is that Mary sits at Jesus' feet and listens to his teaching, while Martha is serving.

And Martha gets increasingly frustrated with Mary because she's not helping. And so what Martha does is she doesn't complain to Mary, she complains to Jesus.

And it often is described that the way that Jesus speaks to her is one of rebuke. One of rebuke by saying, only one thing is necessary.

Mary has chosen the good portion, and it will not be taken from her. And that makes it sound as if the one thing necessary is the good portion chosen by Mary.

[ 5 : 59 ] The problem there is, it seems as if Jesus is being very harsh with someone who's already at the end of their tether. Martha's at the end of her tether.

So is Jesus really being harsh here? Now, what I've said, the traditional interpretation, may be the correct interpretation. But today, I want to offer you a different interpretation.

A different one. But before we do that, we need to adopt a Jewish mindset. It's like putting on a pair of glasses that allow you to read the scriptures and understand the context, and especially for the Gospels, to understand in Jewish terms what's actually happening here.

And this applies both to our reading in Luke 10 and our reading in John 11. So we need a Jewish mindset.

Now, what we've then got to do is rewind the video. We've got to go back to the point when Jesus enters the village. And remember, have your Jewish glasses on, your Jewish mindset.

[ 7 : 22 ] And then see what happens. So Jesus is a rabbi. And he arrives with his disciples, all men, in the village of Bethany.

Martha invites all of them as invited guests to her home, which she shares with her sister Mary.

Now, the Jewish rules on hospitality.

Remember your Jewish mindset? The Jewish rules on hospitality required that the hostesses in the house served a meal to all of these men with lots of courses.

Lots of courses. Now, ladies in Lewis may understand this and have a fellow feeling with this, especially at communion time. As a man, I'm always impressed by when I go to a communion somewhere and I'm invited to dinner on that Lord's Day, how I'm weighted upon hand and foot, treated like royalty.

The men all sit at the table and the ladies serve us. I always make the point that I thank the ladies for serving us. But I often think, what energy is going into providing this meal and done with such cheerfulness?

[ 8 : 46 ] So ladies in Lewis can perhaps understand the pressures that Martha felt under here.

Now, Jewish hostesses felt a real sense of honor in fulfilling this duty of serving the men who had come to the family home.

And this was right through the Jewish world. Now, that duty was only discharged. They'd only completed that duty when all of the courses had been served.

Now, think of how demanding that is on someone like Martha when 13 men have turned up late in the day and she's got to provide a meal with lots of courses.

Not just three. There were more than three courses. Martha felt this duty so keenly. The trouble is, she becomes exasperated because Mary, who's also a Jewish hostess, isn't helping.

And Martha feels that she should. The thing is, Mary, in a Jewish context, is doing something very unusual. She's sitting at the feet of a rabbi, listening to his teaching.

[ 10 : 00 ] That was what men did. Women didn't do that. Men did that. The thing is, Jesus commends her for doing that, for taking the position of a rabbi's disciple.

And that's what he calls the good portion, that she chose to sit at his feet and listen to his teaching and understand it.

But what of Martha? Here she is, struggling to fulfill her proper duties as a Jewish hostess, becoming utterly exasperated. All these courses, everything is going wrong for her.

What I want to point out is that when Jesus says, but one thing is necessary, he actually is helping her.

Jesus is actually helping her when he says, but only one thing is necessary. It's not a rebuke. Now, those of you with ESV Bibles will know that there's a footnote to this text, and there's an alternative reading, or an alternative understanding, and it reads, few things are necessary, or only one.

[ 11 : 16 ] Now, that should alert us to the fact that something rather interesting is going on. The point is, if we take a Jewish view of this, Jesus' comment in verse 42, but one thing is necessary, does not refer to the good portion chosen by Mary of sitting at the Lord's feet.

Rather, it refers to Martha's sense of duty under Jewish hospitality rules. What Jesus is actually saying to Martha is this, I know that you feel obliged to serve us lots of courses, that's the many

things of verse 41, but only one thing, one course is necessary.

Once you've served us just one course, you have fulfilled your duty as a Jewish hostess over hospitality, and then I invite you to come and sit at my feet like your sister Mary and listen to my teaching.

So Jesus here is actually helping Martha to come and enjoy his teaching. He did this by recognizing her exasperation and giving her away to complete her serving more quickly.

He didn't say, don't serve us, because he knew it mattered so much to her to fulfill her duty. So what he did was, he said when the duty was over, after purely one course.

[12:59] So how lovely. He recognized her frustration. He didn't rebuke her. He wanted her to come and enjoy his teaching as well. And so a bit, like I said earlier, remember Lazarus, Mary and Martha.

Here's the theme. God in Christ has helped the beloved lady. Now that's the end of the first part of the sermon. Let's move into the second part.

And remember, keep that Jewish mindset. You've got to keep the Jewish mindset. In John 11, a tragedy has occurred. A major tragedy for this family.

The brother of Mary and Martha, Lazarus, has died. So that's on page 1081. Their brother has died. And Jesus, for reasons we don't understand, delays two days more. before actually traveling. And he takes time to get there.

[14:06] He wouldn't get there quickly. And by the time he's walked to Bethany, Lazarus has been dead for four days. Martha goes to meet Jesus.

And a remarkable conversation occurs. Culminating in Martha's statement of faith in verse 27. She says to Jesus, Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.

Now that is as majestic and insightful as Peter's reply to Jesus' question in Matthew 16. Remember, Jesus asked, Who do you say that I am?

And Peter said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus tells Peter, Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven.

So for Martha to say almost exactly the same words shows that she had sat at his feet and she had taken in his teaching.

[15:20] and here is in a way a confirmation of a link between our two passages. Luke 10 and John 11. She had understood the most profound thing there was to understand about Jesus.

And remember, it was Jesus who had helped her to be able to come as a disciple and sit at his feet. But what about Mary here in John 11?

Remember our text. Very unusual words. But Mary remained seated in the house. Why did she not go with Martha to see Jesus?

They obviously knew that he was coming. Now this is where we need to have our Jewish mindset again.

our text. Mary remained seated. What does it mean? Our New Testaments are translated from Greek.

[16:29] But the original language that the people spoke was there were two. There was Aramaic and Hebrew which are very closely linked. And the problem we've got here is that our English Bibles have picked up the Greek when the Greek is struggling to express the original Hebrew.

So all it says in our English Bibles and Mary remained seated in the house. Now those of you who have Gaelic will know this. If you try and translate something that has a certain idiom from Gaelic into English and you do it literally the words don't make sense.

and you've got to find another idiom to produce the sense. So let's understand the idiom in Hebrew that is behind these words.

If you had been there at that time and you asked what's Mary doing her neighbours would have said she's sitting seven.

That's all the Hebrew would be. she's sitting seven. In fact Jewish people still say that to this day. She's sitting seven. Now what that means and this is where the Greek couldn't really translate it.

[17:53] What it means in Jewish bereavement observance relatives who had lost a loved one they sat in their homes for seven days with no distractions.

they just sat and wept. They sat in their distress they sat for seven days. Sitting seven means just to sit and to grieve.

You don't move. No distractions are allowed. No work no diversions at all. Not even going to the synagogue to pray.

you just sit for seven days in your distress. Now we know from what we've read that Mary and Martha were four days into the grieving process.

Martha tells us that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days so they were four days in to sitting seven.

[ 19 : 01 ] So if we stop and think for a moment in John chapter 11 it's Mary who in her distress is observing the Jewish custom on mourning whereas in Luke 10 it was Martha observing the Jewish custom and hospitality.

And in the same way that Jesus helped Martha in Luke 10 Jesus now helps Mary in John 11. He sends a message to her.

He sends a message with Martha. We don't hear the message being given. It's not recorded for us. But we do hear the message arriving. The message is in verse 28 and it reads when Martha had said this she went and called her sister Mary saying in private the teacher is here and is calling for you.

That was a message given to her by Jesus to give to Mary who is in her home grieving sitting seven. Someone who in her distress feels very intently that she has to fulfill what her society says you should do when you grieve.

You sit and she's absolutely overwhelmed by grief and there are no distractions that are allowed.

We need though to understand the fuller meaning in Greek of what Jesus, the message that Jesus sent.

[ 20 : 38 ] In English it reads the teacher is here and is calling for you. But if we understand what the original language says in the Greek what it says is when Martha whispers privately to Mary she says the teacher is close at hand and is concerned for you and is asking for you.

The teacher is close at hand and is concerned for you and is asking for you. Here is Jesus expressing his concern for Mary.

He speaks into her distress as she's sitting seven. This was one distraction that she finds she can respond to.

One distraction he's reached into her life in all of her distress she's been touched by him in her life in all the awfulness of what she's going through and she gets up and runs to him.

Now we know and remember the Jewishness of this all the neighbors misunderstood what she was doing. They hadn't heard the message being delivered. They thought that she was running to the tomb to weep there.

[ 22 : 07 ] So they follow her but find she goes off in the other direction. She's actually going to the point where Jesus is on the edge of the village. So Jesus speaks into her distress.

He knew exactly what she was going through. His heart had gone out to her. And so he speaks something lovely into her life.

And then he does something even more remarkable. He erases her brother from the dead. And if you read on into John chapter 12 you will find Lazarus, Mary and Martha appear again.

And you will find there Mary expressing her gratitude to Jesus by anointing his feet with perfumed ointment. But let's summarise the second part of the sermon about how Jesus dealt with Mary.

What Jesus did was he spoke into her distress. He connected with her in all of the awfulness of what she was going through on the death of her brother.

[ 23 : 18 ] His heart went out to her. And again, as he had helped Martha, he has now helped Mary. And remember I said those words, Lazarus, Mary and Martha.

God in Christ has helped the beloved lady. Again, how God can have a relationship with him. Now that's the end of the second part of the sermon, and the third part will be much briefer.

But it's perhaps the most important. What's the application for us now? This is living word. It's not a dead letter. This is the living God speaking to us through his living word.

And we are living beings. And just as the living beings that we read about in the scriptures, like Mary and Martha, can have a relationship with him, so can we.

So can we. The thing is, even in this service now, Jesus is with us. He promised he would be. Whenever two or three are gathered.

[ 24 : 23 ] He's maybe not with us in a physical sense, but he's with us in a spiritual sense. And he does that by coming as the counselor, or with the counselor, him who is the Holy Spirit.

And any gathering of God's people always involves his presence by him who is the Holy Spirit. And one thing that you can never do with a triune God is separate and somehow detach one of the persons.

One of the curious things you will find is, when you end up with one of the persons of the Trinity, you actually end up with all three. And that is how, through the counselor being with us, him who is the Holy Spirit, the living Lord Jesus is actually with each of us in a spiritual sense now.

And also with each of us who have been saved as we go through our lives, through each week. Through every week, every moment of every day.

And he has not changed. The way he reaches into the lives of people is the same now as in the scriptures. So let's understand then, what's the application?

[ 25 : 40 ] In the same way that he understood and knew Mary and Martha, he knows us through and through. And especially for those of you who have come to a saving faith in Jesus, he knows you through and through.

Just in the way that we sang in Psalm 139b. The thing is, he understands all that frustrates us, all that angers us, all that disappoints us.

He also understands all of the things that distress us, all of the difficulties that we have to face in this life. He understands them all. And he doesn't understand them in a detached way.

He understands them in the same way that he dealt with Mary and Martha. And he also understands when we can't pray properly.

When Martha blurted it out to Jesus in her frustration that Mary should help, that was a prayer. In all of her frustration, that was a prayer. That was a prayer to him.

[ 26 : 46 ] And the thing is, in our frustrations, we can talk to him like that as well. Do you find sometimes you become utterly exasperated? The words come out all wrong.

And you then find that you're apologizing to God for the way the words came out. But in the same way that he looked at Martha in love, he does that to us.

He does that to us. So when we come with our frustrations, our distresses, we don't have to get ourselves into good order and say things in a proper way.

We can actually just blurt it out. In fact, he knows the words we're going to say even before we say them. And then, in return, he speaks into our lives.

He knows just the way we are. And we then find that lovely connection with the living God. So Lazarus, Mary, and Martha means God has helped the beloved lady.

[ 27 : 50 ] But I should also extend that to gentlemen. It's for all of us. All of us. And what we see here is still the way that he deals with his people.

And especially, I would say, that relationship is not a long-distance one. He describes us as friends. Those who have come to saving faith in Jesus are his friends.

Now, some may say, this is all good and well, but I do not know Jesus as a friend.

I have not come to saving faith in Jesus. But what I would say is, let even this service be the beginning of that wonderful journey. A bit like the children's address.

That bulb just remained dusty because I'd left it up on the rafters in the garage. Open God's Word. Read it. Talk to him.

[ 28 : 50 ] Ask him to explain it to you. Ask him to give you the meanings. And especially, always focus on Jesus. Always focus on the second person of the Godhead.

And the wonderful thing he will do in your life, a bit like the daffodils I showed to the children earlier, the wonderful thing he will do is deal with your sin through the sacrifice on the cross.

And he will then create a covenant relationship with you based on friendship. Based on intimate friendship. So what I would say is, discover those well-worn steps to the foot of the cross if you've not taken them already.

Come to Jesus. Confess your sin. Repent for your sin. But come to Jesus. That's the imperative. That's the force of all of Scripture. And then, enter into a right relationship with the living God from now, from this life, and through all eternity.

And you will discover what a friend the living God is. There's a wonderful description of this friendship in the Old Testament.

[ 30 : 03 ] The description that looks forward to what Jesus would do. And that's in Proverbs 18.24, where it says, there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

I would encourage you to discover those most wonderful of friends. And remember, at the beginning of the service I said, this is about Jesus' love for his friends. All you do when you become a friend of Jesus is show him that love in return. Now, that's the end of the third part of the sermon, and therefore, the end of the sermon. And I trust that these words may be blessed in some way to each of us here. Shall we now stand for a very short prayer before we sing again? Thank you.