

MARTHA - “The Threat Of Resentment”



1. **(Background)** Mary and Martha only appear in three narratives in our New Testaments, and only in two of the four Gospels (Luke & John). They always appear together, but the Gospel writer’s portrayal of the two women is quite different. Luke presents *Martha* as the most important: “*As they went on their way, a woman named Martha received them into her home. She had a sister named Mary...*” (Lk 10:38) Of the 13x Martha is mentioned in Scripture, only 4 of them are by Luke, and his entire narrative is a mere 108 words in English.

John on the other hand, uses 1,022 words in his narratives about the two women, nearly 5.5% of his entire Gospel! He introduces the women quite differently than Luke: “*...Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha...*” (Jn 11:1) Apparently, according to Luke Martha owned the house, but according to John, Mary “owned” the village!

2. **(Q2a)** There were *at least* 16 mouths to feed in this story, and it is highly likely that Jesus had an entourage following him or even *with him*. ANE hospitality would have demanded that Martha extend the same level of welcome to those traveling with him as Jesus himself. This was more of a “banquet” than a brunch!
3. **(Q2b)** Martha expected Mary to help her fulfill *her* “vision” for what was needed and who should serve. This scenario has been repeated countless times among believers . From throwing a party, to enlarging a VBS program, to capital building programs, often one person’s (or committee’s) “vision” from God becomes everyone else’s burden. Considering where Mary *ended* up in this story, it’s safe to assume that she *didn’t* share Martha’s grand vision, *and* finally decided “enough is enough.”
4. **(Q2)** Martha’s use of the word translated “then,” in the phrase, “*...tell her **then** to help me.*” is a reference to a logical conclusion. Martha was *convinced* she was correct in her reasoning, therefore Mary was “obviously” just being lazy, selfish, or insensitive...or whatever adjective we want to fill in.
5. **(Q3)** Jesus’ teaching on giving in the early verses of Matthew 6 is of special importance here. Serving is a form of giving. If it is to be done “in secret,” is certainly is to be done without recognition. Much service in Christian circles *receives* recognition. We *award* people for service. We scale types of service. We raise our kids to believe service is “extra,” over-and-above sort of behavior, rather than part of the “normal Christian life.” As a result, often our resentment is the stepchild of our own depravity and weak theology.
6. **(Q3)** The NIV “resentful” and ESV “patiently enduring evil,” are seeking to translate a single Greek word (*anexikakon*), and this is the only occurrence of the word in our NT. The word has more to do with wrong doing done *to* me than what happened between Martha and Mary. But, the point is the same. I need to exercise care in my attitude and outlook towards others in terms of my response to *how they treat me*.

The context of 2:24 is a description of “the Lord’s servant.” How I think and respond to others’ treatment of me *while I serve* is a big part of being a true servant of the Lord.

7. **(Q4)** Paul’s statement to servants here and elsewhere *should* be important passages for *all believers*. Paul makes the identity of “servant” a central component of discipleship. He calls *himself* a “servant” (Rom 1:1) and paints the portrait of a servant as essential to the “normal Christian life” (Rom 15:8; 1 Cor 3:5; 4:1; 9:19). He even places the servanthood of believers alongside the Lordship of Jesus in his presentation of the Gospel! (2 Cor 4:5)

8. **(Q5-Prov 3)** This verse is referring to situations when God treats me like a *child*. He refuses my repeated requests, He takes away liberties, He reduces my choices, etc. The implication is that I do *not* know what's best for me.
9. **(Q5-Prov 19)** In short, I can become resentful towards God when "life" doesn't deliver, even when my own choices are at fault. I am prone towards resentment (according to these two verses) when I don't get my own way.
10. **(Q6)** Resentment causes us to feel justified in ceasing to give (or serve). Because we are made in the likeness of a God who is centrifugal (giving), *and* the likeness of Adam who is centripetal (taking), resentment causes me to think and behave *less* like God and more like Adam. It causes me to live in a direction that is the opposite of my "design." It is therefore destructive.



"Stumbling Stones"

1. **(Q2b)** Even though there is no reference to it in any of the Gospels, we must *assume* that Jesus had prior dealings with this family. It is even possible that he and *his* family had stayed with them for some of the 30+ Passovers they would have celebrated in Jerusalem as Jesus was growing up and prior to his public ministry. Therefore, Martha's "assertiveness" with Jesus is *totally* unacceptable under any other circumstances. As a woman in the ANE, she would *never* have treated Jesus the way she did unless he was almost "family" to her. The freedom she felt to do so implies not only familiarity, but a very close friendship. John's editorial comment in Jn 11:5 and the crowd's statement in 11:36 point to this fact.
2. **(Q2a)** Keep in mind this meal was prepared *without* refrigeration, running water, and was cooked using a fire!
3. **(Q4)** We need to analyze what we *really* believe are the facets of discipleship that are "normal" (i.e. typical, characteristics of *all* Christians), *and* whether or not my theology is rooted in Scripture.



"Going Deeper"

1. The message on "Martha and Mary" in the Hands of Hur website would be helpful for further insights into these two women. It is accessible through the "Audio" page, and is part of the series, "Ecce Homo: Behold the Man!"
2. **(Q1)** When is the last time you used what *you* would want done for *you* as the determining factor in serving someone else?
3. **(Q2a)** In the Bible, the opposite of being whole hearted" is *not* being "half-hearted." It's having a "divided heart" (cf. Ps 86:11; Ezek 11:19-20). How did Martha's "whole hearted" commitment to serving Jesus end up really producing a "divided heart" towards Him? Have you ever fallen into this trap?
4. **(Q2a)** Jesus seems to tell Martha in this story that it's okay to "go against culture." When is the last time *you* refused to do something, even though it was a social expectation?
5. **(Q6)** Do you think of "servanthood" as normal behavior, or "extra" when it comes to your own life?
6. **(Q6)** Someone has said, "*You can tell how much of a servant you are by how you respond when someone treats you like one.*" Do you agree with this statement?
7. **(Q6)** What effect does resentment have on serving?
8. **(Q7-8)** Have group members share their responses to these two questions.