Mark 11:11 (Edwin James Checkley) 95468

Bethany — Response, Bethany — Response: Mark 11:11; Jeremiah 7:11 (11:11)

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After rising from the grave triumphantly, we find the Lord giving His company to humble followers in an "upper room" rather than in temple courts, thus further emphasizing His own words as to the gorgeous temple: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23:38).

He still "looks round about upon all things," seeing not only the profane and immoral, but also the world-wide nauseous religious profession that ignores His Person, love and claims. Away from all such semblance of devotion He would lead the "little flock," and give His company to hearts drawn by His love to render the response He values.

In our days those all-seeing eyes still behold the secret intents of every heart. He sadly, yet lovingly, looks upon those of His own redeemed ones who choose the company and pursuits of His defamers, as He looked upon Peter, in order that they too may "weep bitterly" for having wounded His loving heart, even though delivered from the terrors of the damned, rescued from the horrors of an endless hell, and claimed by the love that sought and found their lost souls. His look of love assures recovery to Bethany, produces the heartfelt response toward Him which His heart desires. Thus the restored soul with kindred spirits may consort, that the repast prepared for Him at Bethany long ago may still be spread to refresh the "High and lofty One" who yet deigns to abide with "humble, contrite spirits" found at the Bethanys He loves.

Bethany afforded Him, of old, His last resting-place on earth. Not from the temple or confines of Jerusalem, but from Bethany He ascended. As from Bethany still, as from the hallowed presence of the Lord, loyal hearts may be found viewing the world's religious and irreligious disregard for His Person, work and Word; and feeling, besides, the deeper grief to His heart occasioned by the cold indifference of any of His own whose first love He laments as "left" (Rev. 2:4). Such loyal hearts, such sharer.; of "His reproach," turn away from "'the camp" (Heb. 13:13), in order to welcome HIM in, as Martha did into "het house"; adopting the young believer's answer, "Every room," when asked the question, "Have you any room for Jesus?"

The blessed Lord comes when and where He is wanted. May we perceive in the Holy One (as the Shunamite did in the "holy man of God," 2 Kings 4:9) such attractiveness as may lead us to desire His company; to make for Him a "little chamber" on the "wall" of separation; to minister to Him rest (the "bed"); to obediently learn at His feet (the "stool"); and to have the light of His Word (the "candlestick") dismiss all darkness from the chamber, from the heart, He occupies. Such a chamber will not be tenantless. John 14:23 tells us that abiding occupancy by the Father and by the Son is assured. Our Beloved's communings He directs to hearts (Luke 24:32), not to intellects. A heart for us how wondrously He has evidenced! Those who have a heart for Him yield refreshing to the glorious God who by every right lays claim to undivided hearts.

A sanctuary we may provide as we answer our Father's plea, "My son, give me thine heart" (Prov. 23:26); the plea of Christ our Lord, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph. 3:17). We may welcome the entrance of the Spirit, "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts" (Gal. 4:6); we may enjoy His love, "Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts" (Rom. 5:5); and seek to honor the sacred Word of the living God, "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Psa. 119:11).

In Luke 10:38-42 we have words for hearts to cherish and obey placed above service that hands may render. His Word expresses His will, before which the fairest of seemingly pious expressions of self-will earn but condemnation.

To hear Jesus is the "one thing needful." Martha's "many things" would only end in disappointment for her and for Him. The hearing ear for His Word ever delighted and glorified Him, and still does so (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). We are told (Col. 3:23) that "whatsoever" we do is taken account of. The motive determines whether valuable or worthless. Self-occupation is the death-blow to all true service, for, as with Martha, it leads to our judging others (as she did her sister), having no good word for them; souring instead of sweetening our spirits.

Martha's "my," "me," "doss Thou not care?" (Luke 10:40), betray the unrest of soul within, and the lack of such needful preparation for true service as occupation with Him and lowly attention to His Word would afford. Let us contemplate the significant difference between Martha distracted and Mary attracted, and learn, as Martha did, to serve acceptably, as in John 12:2. Heavenly motives in smallest things lift the meanest drudgery of daily life to highest service, and earn His loving commendation rather than rebuke. When no longer "cumbered" Martha's service gladdened the Lord, and won an honored place in the imperishable record of that blessed Bethany household, each an object of the love of Christ and heartily responsive to it. Note how naturally their message to the Lord as to Lazarus speaks of, "Him whom Thou lowest," still equally true of every child of God.

His love led our glorious Lord to enter Martha's lowly "home," and sacred words from His blessed lips corrected her faulty service, as the sequel shows, for we read in John 12 that "Martha served," the record of divine approval when all the work connected with the supper she lovingly prepared was performed for "Him." The heart set right, drawn by the constraining love of Christ, ears, hands and feet were governed to suit Him, and were no longer moved by self-occupation or unbroken will. As listening to the Lord expressing His tender heart's desires for His loved ones, in true lowliness "at His feet," humbly hearing and heeding His Word, who could read chapters 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 of John's Gospel, and fail to render responsive service in hearty compliance with His will.

Companionship with Jesus, hearing His Word, receiving His ministrations of love, sympathy, power and glory in John 11, leads to His loved ones (John 12) ministering to Him, gratifying divine longings for response.

Bethany lessons unfolded in John 11 are all centered in verse 4; to promote "the glory of God" was the spring of all the Savior's actions. The Spirit leads us to view all circumstances with reference to God's glory. His object in permitting sickness, death and all other trials, the "needs be" (1 Peter 1:6), and "the end of the Lord" (James 5:10,11) will manifest, that our Father's will, our Father's glory, may be the outcome (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31).

The Lord's love is a wise and a faithful love. His glory and our blessing are bound together. Two days' delay (John 11:6) may chafe our spirits. Our impatience would hasten relief, making the grave mistake of seeking immediate ease from pressure rather than the glory of God; and hindering our viewing, as we surely may, the bright rainbow yet to shine through clouds however dark.

Jesus looked on the progress of sickness, the sisters' grief, on death itself, yet gave no relief until every human hope had vanished, for Lazarus was four days dead. A real mercy it was. Nature says, "No," faith says "Yes," for "precious" faith emerged from the trial "unto glory" (1 Peter 1:7). For our example, we behold as Jesus' motive the divine will, and as His object, divine glory. We witness at the grave of Lazarus heavenly glory shining out over the dreary region of death, a glory soon to be participated in by all His own, for He will deliver them from the grasp of the enemy, just as He raised Lazarus. Meanwhile faith may answer every evil suggestion as to apparent lack of sympathy or succor, by use of His Word, "Blessed are they that wait for Him" (Isa. 30:18), for His "due time," knowing that the Lord's delays are not refusals. Paying no attention to man's vaunted "common-sense," but every attention to that true wisdom of Prov. 3:5, 6; welcoming every means that He employs to rid us of all hateful vain -confidence—to faith the tears and groanings of our blessed Lord call for heart appreciation of His sympathy with human misery, which was so real; and also of His sorrow, so profound, because of the unbelief and hardness of heart exhibited by careless souls, indifferent to the evil conditions that so grieved His heart; conditions akin to the distressing moral departure from God prevalent in our day. Oh, for hearts to feel, as He does, the moral corruption of our worldly surroundings!

Thanking God for the record of our Savior's sympathy with human sorrows, and sharing the grief by which holiness regards sin's havoc, may our souls now rise to witness the Savior's triumph. The sisters sought Jesus in their distress, and so may we. They called Him "Lord" and so honored the Nazarene. "He whom Thou lovest" as much as says, ""His love, not mine, the resting-place." "Is sick" humbly owns that divine love permits illness. And all this is supplemented by the further lessons that not even natural affection, but God's glory, should impel our every action. The Spirit of God would stimulate our faith to see the glory of God displayed on the darkest background, to see the grace of our Beloved's heart revealed. Jesus waited Mary's coming (John 11:3); she, His call (John 11:28). Surely the words, "Calleth for thee," lent wings to her feet. Thus she was found "where Jesus was" to behold His face, to fall at His feet, and then only to speak her heart's burden. Happy example for us! Exposure of corruption the flesh dreads (John 11:39). Unbelief saw but a decomposing body; faith the glory of God (John 11:40). Note the order: "Believe," and then as surely, "See."

New creation we too experience (Eph. 2:10) by the same mighty "working" to "walk" in the newness of resurrection life, brought into being by His word as in John 11:43, 44. The tender touches of His ways of grace appear the sweeter as power and glory fill the scene. We are encouraged by the very mention of His dear ones: Mary named first in John 11:1 for commendation (John 11:2); Martha, first in John 11:5, for Jesus "loves" the weakest; and we shall see in John 12 the testimony of risen life that Lazarus rendered to His praise and the glory of God.

Beholding Jesus the last week before the cross, its shame and woe, thinking not of Himself, but devoting all of that solemn season to ministry to and intercession for the little band of those He called by the endearing name "His own," we join with those who loved Him to extol the matchless attraction which the record of John 12 presents.

"The house of Simon the leper" at Bethany (Matt. 26:6) He deigned to enter, who as "inhabiting eternity" was ever "the high and lofty One." Grace shines afresh as the Spirit of God puts on record the lowly earthly abode the Lord of glory loved. We are now to see the further condescension of the One above all others accepting the feast they made for Him (John 12:2). "Jesus came" in that day, and still comes at the call of those who desire His company.

If John 11 declares what they were to Him, John 12 as plainly states what He was to them; not only what the Lord has done (John 11), but is (John 12), constrains loving hearts to gratify His desire for response. If in John 11 He wept with them, we see in John 12 that He rejoiced with them. Blessed Partner in sorrow and in joy alike! Not alone "every room" that He may "abide with us," but the homage of our hearts we would render, taught by the scene of John 12 that (like Lazarus) as "new creatures in Christ Jesus, passed from death unto life," we may enjoy what new birth introduces us to, His company; may exercise the holy privilege of "sitting at the table with Him"—communion; may emulate in worship, Mary, pouring our hearts' unreserved store upon His loved Person; and, like Martha, may serve where every activity derives its value from its Object—"Inasmuch as.... ye have done it unto Me." Dear to our Lord that "they made Him a supper." Communion and worship and service does so yet. Lazarus "at the table with Him," in resurrection life, shows what awaits believers, "ever with the Lord" in glory. Meanwhile, Lazarus witnessed the power of new life; not what he said, but was, demonstrated the work of grace that led "many," because of Lazarus, to believe on Jesus.

Mary, by lovely example, enters into His mind, anticipating the intentions of His love (His approaching death). Suited worship pours its richest treasures on the sacred head of the rejected King (Matt. 26:7), and upon the feet (John 12:3) that brought the Son of God as a lowly Man to Bethany's humble home. Her estimate of His Person, "three hundred pence," contrasts in bright relief with the "thirty pieces of silver" that Judas and the chief priests allotted as the once of His betrayal. Such worship as Mary's the worldly-minded still regard as "waste"; but it was not left for Mary to vindicate her devotion—her Lord and Savior answered for her. Every loyal heart may rest content that such worship gratifies Him, as the imperishable record of His appreciation of Mary's ointment proves. The rarity of worship "in spirit and in truth" may be gauged by this solemn fact —that we read of only one alabaster box of ointment broken for bestowal upon Him! May the Lord awaken grateful hearts to bring Him many!

Mary's worship was no sudden impulse. Of that which expressed her devotion we are told, "She bath kept this"—too costly to use it herself or bestow it on others, but not too costly for His anointing. Wicked hands would soon do Him violence: her loving hands would bring to Him her treasure store. Such the inestimable value of the Person of Christ in her esteem! Then His esteem the record publishes. The kind of "box," the

weight of "precious ointment," its value and its fragrance, all receive divine mention. Her reverence for the Son of God, attested by the use of her glory (hair) to wipe His feet, and the memorial of her act as far-flung as the gospel, all combine to characterize worship as that which our God "is seeking." May the Holy Spirit mightily move our hearts to pour out, as Mary did, our love for Him in worship!

Contrasts serve to endear Bethany to our Lord and those who love Him:

A world of foes, including temple worshippers;

A handful of friends delighting in His company at Bethany.

Mary gave to gratify her Savior;

Judas sold his Lord to acquire thirty pieces of silver.

Mary drew the attention of all to her Lord—

Judas would turn all thoughts to "the poor."

"Why this waste?" is yet the universal human verdict;

Divinely weighed, we learn love's sacrifice is never "wasted."

A chorus of accusers may still be heard below;

An Advocate to plead His people's cause lives on high.

With Martha here there is no cumbrance or complaining, calling for reproof, but unselfish love waiting upon the desires of His heart. The one thing needful learned, her ministering to Him shines now as acceptable service in the glittering galaxy of communion, worship, service, the essentials for that Bethany supper prepared for Him. Not "many things," but one object sought after, her example tells us that Christ Himself (surely our one Object in a coming eternity) should here and now win from our lives such grateful service as the love that bore the sufferings of the cross demands, viz.: that we should be at His disposal and saved for His pleasure, having hearts that covet the joy of constantly gratifying His every wish, by such service honoring Him in a scene where bold scorning or cold indifference sadly contrast with this communion, the mutual joy of loving hearts; the being in His company for the simple joy of it; with worship, the homage of the heart to which He has become "the preciousness" (1 Peter 2:7, New Trans.); with service, testimony flowing out of communion, devoted regard for His interests, serving His heart, studying His pleasure. We are warned against objectors, such as Judas; all who are mere followers of profession—betrayers as with a "kiss"—terming only that as service which regards human advantage, the "poor," etc., and as "waste" the heart's lofty purpose to gratify Him only; and such bear no such marks of true service as Paul's "humility," "tears," etc. (Acts 20:17-3;5). On the other hand we are encouraged to treasure in the secret of our souls the heavenly incentive His words, "Me ye have not always," should exercise over our lives.

In the heaven we soon shall enter, there will be no reproach, no cross to bear, or shame to suffer for His sake, no world to refuse or self to deny. It is only here we have Him to honor by identifying ourselves with His rejection, by standing for Him amidst the hatred and antagonism of enemies of the cross of Christ; seizing the brief opportunity to have "fellowship with His sufferings" before it passes forever, to be succeeded by the fellowship of His glory.

Bethany, dear Bethany! The Christ of God was there to share their happiness, and still it is His joy to manifest His loving presence where He is welcomed by hearts desiring His company because attracted to His Person. A feast for Him His loved ones spread (John 12). A feast for them He provides (John 21:9, 12). His love is not chilled by undeserving on their part. The gracious appeal of His feast for them is well calculated to lift dull spirits to His presence. They were cold; He knew it. Hungry; He knew it. Fearful; He knew it. Ashamed; He knew it. But, the same as before, their Lord was thinking of them, spreading for them a table of refreshment. Companionship—with our risen and glorious Head, desired by Him, so blessed for us, even amid Laodicean abhorrent conditions—may to His joy and ours be experienced yet. That He should be outside (Rev. 3:20) shows what recreant hearts are ours; that He should "knock" shows the measureless love that will not be denied His desire of companying with those He loves so dearly; presenting Himself and the purpose of His love to "sup with us," sharing, feeling, bearing the pressure of our earthly pilgrimage. Then to "sup with Him" in the heavenly scenes where fellow-participation in joys unending will forever satisfy the Eternal Lover and His loved ones.

—E. J. C.

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