

Choosing What Is Best

Luke 10:38-42

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In Luke 10:38-42, Luke says, "Now it happened..." which is one of Luke's favorite phrases on time "...as they went..." that is, "Jesus and His disciples" "...that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word." That's so typical of Mary. "But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.' And Jesus answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.'"

Now we come in our study of Luke's Gospel to one of the most-loved stories in all the Bible, and it is only found in Luke's Gospel. And so much of Luke's Gospel, even though it is synoptic, contains stories that are found nowhere else in the Bible.

Charles Erdman said, "The unfailing, human interest of Luke is nowhere more perfectly expressed than by this exquisite scene in the home at Bethany." It seems that Luke has not placed the story chronologically perhaps but topically. We can't be sure about that. But we know they were in the city of Bethany.

This story makes the point that fellowship with the Lord and waiting quietly to hear His Word is more important, or is the priority, than business in His service. It's not saying that we shouldn't serve the Lord; it's saying that we should serve the Lord out of a deep devotional life, fellowship and communion with God, sitting at His feet and hearing His Word.

It's interesting where this story appears in Luke's Gospel; it follows the parable of the good Samaritan. And the emphasis in the good Samaritan was, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). Go and be a good neighbor. Roll up your sleeves and serve other people. So there might be a danger that we may think that was all the Christian life is: just to serve and being busy and working hard. So our text balances the picture of the believer.

Actually Luke 10 starts with the 70 missionaries being sent out as ambassadors, who were preaching the Gospel; then it moves to the good Samaritan, who taught us to be loving neighbors; and then it moves to the home of Martha and Mary, where we learn to be worshippers sitting at the feet of Jesus.

Our work for God must flow out of our worship of God. This is the main lesson of our text. If we are working but not worshipping, we're in big trouble. All that we do for God should flow out of a heart of worship to God. The highest priority in the Christian life is loving God and feeding on His Word.

In this text, what we have are three movements of a story of practical devotion. The first movement is the family that Jesus loved, verse 38. Luke said, “Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house.”

It could be that this visit to Bethany near Jerusalem took place earlier than when “He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). Or it could be that He has now arrived close to Jerusalem. But now He arrived at “a certain village.” So the time is uncertain, but the village is clear. How do we know that? Because the home of Martha, Mary and their brother, Lazarus, who is not mentioned in this story, was in Bethany. Bethany is two miles east of Jerusalem on the back side of Mount Olivet; it’s on the modern-day west bank. And the name Bethany means “house of figs.”

Verse 38, “He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house.” The fact that it says “her house” leads some to believe that she owned the house, but we can’t be sure of that. Mary and Lazarus just lived with her. Perhaps she inherited it from the family, because she’s the oldest. But this is speculation.

Yet we do know, based on John 11 when Lazarus got sick, that they sent word to Jesus. After he died, “Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You’” (John 11:21-22). Then Mary came and fell at Jesus’ feet. And we know by John 11 and 12 that this family loved Jesus, and Jesus loved them. So in their home near Jerusalem, Jesus found refuge.

The Bible says about Jesus, in Matthew 8:20, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” So Jesus didn’t own a home, but He had friends. That’s kind of cool. It’s cool to have friends who are like family; they welcome you in, you can crash at their house, eat their food and hang out with them. I have friends all around the world who I feel comfortable with and could stay with. They love me and I love them. So what a blessing that Jesus found refuge in a quiet place where He could be loved and fellowship with Martha, Mary and Lazarus. So this is the picture, in verse 38: the family that Jesus loved, and He loved to spend time with them.

The second movement is in verses 39-40, the sisters who Jesus loved. It focuses on Mary and Martha. “And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, ‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.’”

It is believed—and I think it’s a good guess—that Martha was the oldest and had a “type A” personality; she was very aggressive and very outspoken. It’s believed Mary was the younger sister, and Lazarus was probably the little brother.

Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word.” Mary is seen three times in the Gospels, and on each occasion, she is found at the feet of Jesus. What a great picture! Here in Luke 10, she is

listening to His word; in John 11:32-33, she is pouring out her woes or sorrows; and in John 12:3, she is pouring out spikenard, a costly perfume from an alabaster jar, on Jesus' head and feet while He is at dinner at their house.

Warren Wiersbe said, "It's interesting that in each of these three instances where Mary appears at the feet of Jesus, there is some kind of fragrance. In Luke 10, it's food; in John 11, it's death; and in John 12, it's perfume."

But the point of the text is that the picture of Mary here, in verse 39, is teaching us the important principle that life's highest priority is the worship, the fellowship and the intake of God's Word. I'm convinced that it's so important that we prioritize our life. What is most important to you?

Sometimes the most important gets pushed out for the good or the necessary. So we don't keep the most important at the top of our list, which is my fellowship with Christ, sitting at His feet, hearing His Word and letting Him transform my life, so that when I serve my family, it all flows out of a heart of worship that I have for the Lord.

So the picture of Mary is that worship is our highest priority. Worshipping God and hearing His Word is not an option for quality living; it is a necessity. You cannot be the Christian God wants you to be or the person God wants you to be without having a worshipful heart toward God, spending time at the feet of Jesus and hearing His Word. This is essential for spiritual health. We need to make the priority of our lives sitting at the feet of Jesus.

Our sacrifice to God for others must flow out of our fellowship with God. Warren Wiersbe said, "What we do with Christ is far more important than what we do for Christ." If it doesn't come out of our fellowship with God, then we are in trouble.

So Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet at the house, and Martha's in the kitchen. Verse 40 says, "But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.'" The word "distracted" means "to be pulled away."

What happens is that from the best, the good drags us away from doing the best. Martha was distracted by much serving. Serving the Lord is good. This story isn't saying we shouldn't serve. The story isn't saying we shouldn't work. But our work and our service must flow out of our worship of and fellowship with the Lord.

So Martha came to Jesus and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." Notice the personal pronouns three times. She had gotten her eyes off the Lord and onto herself and her sorry plight.

This is so very common today in the church in Christians' eyes. We get our eyes off the Lord and off of serving Him in love and devotion, and we get our eyes on people and wonder why they aren't helping and getting involved. "Why don't they see what I see? Why don't they have

the same burden? Why don't they have the same vision?" So we get angry, upset, distracted and pulled away. It's possible and highly probable that if you get your eyes off the Lord and forget time in fellowship with the Lord that you get very distracted and agitated.

Martha was letting her service for Christ pull her away from Christ. I can imagine that you could feel the tension in the air. She was probably slamming cupboard doors and banging pots. And Mary just had this glow sitting at the feet of Jesus; everything was wonderful. Later in the text, in verse 41, it says that Martha was "worried and troubled about many things." So Martha lost her joy.

I've been a pastor for many years, and I can tell you that this has happened to me many times. So this sermon is all for me. I can't tell you how many times I had been serving the Lord and I hadn't been happy, I've gotten upset and mad at people and things.

Martha was even mad at the Lord! So she was serving the Lord mad at the Lord! "Come on, Lord! Help me out here!"

And you lose your joy. If you've lost your joy in serving the Lord, something's wrong. There should be joy in serving Jesus. So if you lost that joy, it's an evident sign that you're not in fellowship with Him.

Martha also questioned the Lord's love and care. In verse 40, she actually asked, "Lord, do You not care?" No wonder Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, what am I going to do with you?" (That's my paraphrase.)

We can be busy serving God and start to think that God doesn't see, God doesn't know—"God, do You care what's going on?! Do you care about the burdens I'm dealing with?!" What's the answer to these questions? Yes; Jesus cares.

No matter what you're going through, no matter what difficulty you're facing, whatever calling God's placed on your life, Jesus knows and Jesus cares. But sometimes we forget that.

Martha was also upset with her sister and had self-pity, verse 40. "My sister has left me to serve alone." She basically was saying, "Jesus is here! Certainly we should prepare a great dinner for the Lord. Jesus is in our house!" So she was upset that Mary wasn't helping her.

And then she tells Jesus what to do! "Therefore, tell her to help me." Think about that! "Jesus, I've got something for You to do! I want You to tell my sister to get off her knees in front of You and help me! Tell her to quit worshipping You and hearing Your Word and come help me, because we're going to serve You!" That doesn't make much sense.

And I believe that Martha was jealous, as well. She also wanted to be at the feet of Jesus, but somebody had to cook the meal. So her heart was not right.

Perhaps this is the main point of this text. The same danger exists today for us as believers

serving the Lord. Not just as a pastor, but also as a parishioner. You can have a ministry, a calling, a service, and many times we get tunnel vision, so that all we see is what God called us to do. The problem then is that we expect everyone else to have the same burden, the same vision. “Why don’t people care?”

Missions is a great thing, and we should all be missions-minded. We should all be praying for missionaries to be sent out. But maybe God hasn’t called you to go. Maybe God’s asked you to pray or give or something else. And sometimes people who are involved in missions is all they see. Or those who work in children’s ministry is all they see. Those who are involved in the pro-life movement—that is to be commended, and we should take a stand for life—that’s all they see sometimes. They expect everyone else to be a part of that.

So it’s sad that many times we are pulled away just like Martha from the very Lord who has called and commissioned us. “Why don’t people see? Why don’t people understand?” As a pastor of a church for many years, I’ve seen that sometimes para-church organizations, as great as they are, begin to wonder, “Why doesn’t the church do more for this cause? Why isn’t the church more involved?”

We just had an election, and some church got quite politically active. I’m fine with that on moral issues. But they began to criticize other churches and other ministries. “Why aren’t they more politically active? Why aren’t they speaking up?” Instead they should be keeping their eyes on Jesus and doing what He has called them to do and realizing that God has not given everyone that same calling.

There was a very difficult time in my ministry, over 20 years ago, at my former church when we were moving out of one building into another. We had a lot of construction to do that took us a year to do. Seven nights a week we were hanging drywall, running electrical and doing construction. I was physically tired from working hard. That was the closest, in 50 years of ministry, that I came to just crashing in ministry. God, by His grace and goodness, brought me back to the feet of Jesus and checked my heart. “Why are you doing what you’re doing?”

“Well, why don’t more people come down and hang drywall?! Why aren’t more people getting involved in getting the building done?! Why aren’t more people giving and serving?!”

So we shift our focus from worship to working. We need a balance of both. Martha’s self-appointed responsibilities distracted her from what mattered most. Don’t let that happen to you. Keep your eyes on the Lord.

Now we move from the family Jesus loved; from the sisters Jesus loved, Martha and Mary; to the loving correction that Jesus gave, verses 41-42. This is so wonderful. “And Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha.’” I used to think that when Jesus said that to her twice, it was because He was upset with her. I don’t believe that anymore. I believe Jesus was sad for her; that He loved her, He cared about her and He wanted the best for her. That was why He said her name twice, probably with a sigh. He was so broken-hearted for Martha,

because she had forgotten what was most important.

Jesus said to Martha, "...you are worried and troubled..." which means upset "...about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

Have you ever been pulled away from the priority of devotion to Christ? Have you ever been worried and upset? We should not let anything keep us from what is best.

There is an intended contrast between "many things," verse 41, and "one thing," verse 42. Isn't it great that life can be reduced to the simple equation of one thing? One passion, one desire: to sit at the feet of Jesus to worship Him, to hear His Word and to serve Him gratefully.

The fact that Mary "has chosen" indicates that we have free will. We can choose to make the priority of our life time alone with Jesus. Some people say, "I'm too busy! I've got too much to do! I got too much on my plate! I'm too stressed out! I don't have the time!" It's a choice. You can choose to make it a priority. When you get up in the morning, before you begin to think of other things, before you check your phone, before you listen to the news, before you respond to texts and emails—talk to God, open His Word and hear God's voice. It's so very important.

Remember that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). But you say, "I gotta make a buck! I gotta work hard! I gotta get the bills paid!" You have to stay connected to God.

It's gonna affect your marriage. Nine times out of ten when couples come with marriage problems, they haven't been praying and they haven't been reading their Bibles.

"Our marriage is a mess; we're not getting along."

"Are you praying?"

"No! I'm too mad!"

"Are you taking time to read the Bible?"

"No! I'm too stressed out! Tell that husband of mine to help me!" "Tell that wife of mine to get busy!"

We get our eyes off of Jesus and get them on people. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus said, "Seek first..." that's the priority "...the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." One thing is needful and David said it in Psalm 27:4. "One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." And Paul the Apostle said, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Philippians 3:10). Paul said this 30 years after his conversion, and he was still seeking after God.

It's an interesting contrast between Martha and Mary. Mary was resting; Martha was restless. Mary was worshipping; Martha was worrying. Mary was sitting; Martha was stewing. Mary was listening; Martha was lashing out. Mary was commended by Jesus; Martha was corrected by Jesus.

It's so simple that we stumble over it. We're looking for all the answers to life's problems, and it could be as simple as the priority of time alone with God.

Do you spend time alone with God before you rush into your day? Do you get up and say, "Good morning, Lord"? Or do you say, "Good Lord, it's morning"? Do you take time to hear God's voice first? When you talk to God, do you share your heart with Him? Do you cast your cares upon Him (1 Peter 5:7)? Do you roll your burdens on the Lord, and He sustains you? Do you open His Word, and He speaks to your heart to comfort you? So we need to pray and spend time sitting at His feet and reading His Word.

There is a book by Warren Wiersbe called *With the Word*. It's a great tool for applying God's Word to your life. You read a chapter in the Bible, then you read a chapter in this devotional commentary and it puts what you read in shoe leather. So spend time with the Lord in the Word. Let Him change your life.

It's like bringing a picture into the dark room; He's trying to develop His image in our lives as we spend time alone with God. He's imprinting Himself upon us. So it's by prayer, reading the Word, taking time to worship and taking time to be holy.

This is not an either-or. People have said to me, "I know I shouldn't be a Martha." There is truth to that, but don't stop serving the Lord. But do it as an act of worship flowing out of your heart and life. Charles Wesley wrote:

"Faithful to my Lord's commands,

I still would choose the better part.

Serve with careful Martha's hands

And loving Mary's heart."

I like that.

Take time to be holy.