

Choosing What's Important
Luke 10:38-42

We go through our daily lives making choices – all the time. Time is valuable to us all, and we are all very busy on our jobs, in our homes, even at the church, even doing things for God. We want everything we do to be the best use of time and the most efficient choice we can make. Sometimes we consider carefully what we will spend our time on, and sometimes we make quick choices, but ultimately we choose what we will turn our attention to and what we will devote our time to. Men, usually more than women, are accomplishment oriented. We will try to make sure that whatever we decide to spend time on will accomplish a task. We are men of action, and we pride ourselves on what we can accomplish.

Today I would like to look at a short story in Luke's Gospel. We are reading Luke chapter ten this week, and I would like to look at the story of Mary and Martha found in Luke 10:38-42. If you would like to turn there now, we will read this passage in a few minutes. Of course, I would like to give you a little background on Dr. Luke and his writing approach before we actually look at this passage together... Luke was a Greek, and a physician, an educated man and able to write well. He was possibly commissioned by Theophilus (whose name means "God lover") to write an account of the works of Jesus of Nazareth. Luke accepted the task and proceeded to write, what he calls "an orderly account" of these events. *"Luke uses geography as a literary and theological instrument. The center of his story is the city of Jerusalem. The whole movement of the Gospel is toward Jerusalem."*¹ It is in Jerusalem where He completes His mission at the crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus was the One, anointed by God to spread the good news of the Kingdom in the authority and power of the Holy Spirit. Things intensify as His ministry progresses toward Jerusalem and the goal. Keep this in mind as you read this Gospel and as we look at today's text.

Please follow along in Luke 10:38-42.

Luke 10:38-42

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

From our reading we remember that Jesus has sent out the twelve with authority to heal the sick and drive out demon spirits. Then He sends out the seventy-two with authority to heal the sick and drive out demon spirits. He sent them to the places He was about to visit Himself. They return to Jesus with stories to tell of their success in the ministry and power of God. Pastor Jerry spoke about this last week. And now, Jesus is on His way, with his disciples, on His way ultimately to Jerusalem. However, He makes a stop along the way, at the home of old friends. The unnamed village in this passage is Bethany, only two miles from Jerusalem – a familiar place to Jesus. **John 11:1-2 – "Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair."**

This would be His last winter alive. He has some special friends in His life during his ministry years, friends He pays particular attention to, and this is one family of friends that He loves and who love Him.

John 11:5 – "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." He comes to the home of Martha – a home He has been to before.

What is a home to Jesus? He even stated in the previous chapter, in **Luke 9:58** - *"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."* Jesus had no home to speak of during his ministry years. This was a home he could relate to – a home of people who loved Him, recognized Him as Lord, and welcomed Him. Jesus' home is with those who love and obey Him ...

John 14:23 – *"Jesus replied, 'If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'"*

Consider the times – Jesus has just left Samaria and was rejected there because He is a Jew. He went on to Galilee and Judea, but He didn't find acceptance in these cities either. It appears that the people, even his own people, did not want to open their old wineskins of tradition to His new wine teachings. So, He was rejected by His own people – harshly. At this time it had grown dangerous to entertain Him, especially so near Jerusalem. Now He comes to the home of old friends, and He wants only fellowship with friends.

He is welcomed into Martha's home, and she immediately begins preparing for His visit, with excitement. Martha is the proprietor of this home. She may be widowed in order to have rule over this dwelling, but in any event she is the domestic head. Her sister Mary and brother Lazarus live there with her. She must be used to taking charge over the affairs of the house. She waists no time in getting things started for a feast with their latest guest – the Lord Jesus, friend and Messiah. He is a special guest and deserving of all the extras - nothing but the best for their friend, Jesus.

Mary, on the other hand, takes her place at the Lord's feet, and just listens to His word. He must have had many powerful stories to tell, and rich teachings to offer them. Mary took part in this rich impartation of wisdom while Martha became more and more absorbed in the preparation. What would you do if a special guest and friend showed up at your house for a stay? Would you scurry about cleaning and fixing, or would you start preparing an outstanding meal fit for a king? What were Martha's original intentions? It seems to me that she only wanted the best for Jesus, the best meal, the best accommodations, and the best for the best. How admirable.

Then there's Mary. Mary just sits there at Jesus feet listening to His stories and teachings. His words must have been captivating. I'm sure Martha wanted to hear what Jesus had to say too, but there was so much to be done, so much to prepare, and so much to think about especially if she had to deal with all this alone. It is no small task to whip up the finest meal for Jesus and His disciples. Who does Mary think she is anyway? Sitting at the feet of the Rabbi was a special place in this culture. This is the place where a disciple sat, in humility, under the teaching of one in authority. Paul is represented as having been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel – learning under him (Acts 22:3). This was no place for an ordinary person or even a friend let alone a woman, but Luke has a special place in his heart and his writing for women. In fact, every man in Luke's writings has a woman counterpart. Luke not only mentions women in his works, but also gives them special place in the story line. Here we see Mary, now being shown as a disciple of Jesus, the Messiah. All three times we see Mary in Scripture, she is at the Lord's feet:

Luke 10:39 – this occasion and story – *"She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said."*

John 11:32 – At the death of her brother, Lazarus – *"When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'"*

John 12:3 – and when she anointed Jesus for His burial - *"Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."*

She was humble, reverent, teachable – all the qualities of a good disciple. **1 Tim 4:8** – *"For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."* This is what is most important to Mary.

Meanwhile, Martha is still in the kitchen, preparing, alone. Can you imagine the thoughts going through her head at this time? We can talk about personality profiles and recognize that Martha and Mary are probably opposite personality types, but there still has to be some common ground that Martha can count on here. After all, Martha probably started out hearing what Jesus had to say – with enthusiasm, but there were many things to prepare and fuss about. The more time passed, the more Martha must have focused on the work she has to do, and the less she could hear what Jesus had to say. After some time, Martha could hear the voices in the other room but could no longer make out the conversation going on. In fact, she was obviously getting a little annoyed by this time. Here she was doing all the work and her little sister was just sitting there – listening to Jesus. Anxiety begins to mound up within her. To Martha, taking care of Jesus and the others by serving them and preparing for them is most important. Maybe she has gone overboard. They could have enjoyed a simple snack and fellowship, but Martha chose to go all out for Jesus, and now she's grumbling about Mary and Jesus in the very choice she has made.

Something very special is happening here, but not in the kitchen where all the action is. An eternal event is going on the other room where Jesus and Mary are engaged in deep spiritual conversation. The extravagant meal will be gone in a matter of minutes, but the effects of the intimacy with Jesus will go on forever. While Mary drinks in all that Jesus has to say, Martha is getting caught up in a whirlwind of activity in the kitchen. BUT – Jesus doesn't want food – He wants Fellowship – and that's what Mary provides. Martha is getting herself all twisted up in frustration at this point. Is He going to allow this all day, or what? I could use a little help in here you know. Why does He keep talking to her as if they are the only ones alive in this house? She bursts in ... LORD – DON'T YOU CARE that I am doing all this work alone? Tell her to help me!

Pastor Jerry spoke a couple of weeks ago about the disciples waking Jesus up in the boat during a storm and saying to Him, "Lord, don't you care if we drown?" We saw how much Jesus does care about our circumstances. Here again, we will see how much the Lord cares, but He has a different standard that He goes by than what our mind reasons. Martha, in her anger and frustration feels the situation is unfair. She can't understand why Jesus isn't doing something to correct this unfairness. She even entreats Him to act on her behalf. She can't even address Mary by name, but rather refers to her as "my sister." In her anger she accuses Jesus of lacking concern for her, and also accuses Mary of laziness and neglect. Martha allowed her concern for details to interfere with her spiritual well being and her relationships (with her sister and with Jesus). It's so easy to let spiritual things slip, especially when there are so many legitimate tangible things to worry about.

Jesus gently and lovingly corrects Martha with words that stop her in her tracks. He says, "Martha, Martha." Jesus speaks her name twice, getting her attention with His deep concern and using this approach to indicate the importance of what He is about to say to her. He has done this other places in Scripture when gently correcting those He loves. In Luke 22:31-32 - *"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."* In Acts 9:4 – Luke records an event on the road to Damascus between Saul of Tarsus (Paul) and Jesus - *"He (Paul) fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"* Jesus captured Martha with His approach, *"Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."* God disciplines and corrects those He loves. *"There are times when it is proper to suspend worldly involvements and to attend to the affairs of the soul."*² The worldly things will all die off and be left behind, but the things of the soul will live forever.

He brings His point gently home – **Fellowship with Him is a matter of priorities and is a matter of choice.** Jesus says something about Mary that lives on for all eternity – she chose the better thing. All she did was sit there, but it's where she sat that is important. She sat at the feet of the Master listening to His word and learning from Him. It was because of this approach that she could grasp the deep things of God.

While the disciples sat and argued who would be greater in the Kingdom of God, Mary sat at Jesus feet and poured perfume on him and cried because he would be leaving them as she prepared him for his death.

God desires so much to have intimate times with us. He has so much to reveal to us, and so much to teach us. We can't learn from Him without giving Him our undivided attention. He doesn't want us to simply catch a word now and then, but to receive all that He has for us. Sitting at His feet signifies a readiness to receive from Him. If I were to receive instructions from someone about how to take apart my engine, for example, and I decided to build a model airplane while the instructor was teaching me about the engine, I would eventually devote my attention to one or the other, but not both. It's impossible! Of course we have to attend to matters of daily living. We all have responsibilities and duties, but we cannot allow them to keep us from time with the Lord, listening to His Word. We sometimes think that if we just lived back then we would not have so many distractions, and we could spend more time with God learning and growing in that relationship. Obviously, Martha shows us that people have always been the same. The problem is not the era we live in. The problem is how we choose to spend our time. If we have the tendency to be busy and try to accomplish lots of things (even for God), or if we are the type that has to have everything perfect (the table, the meal, the house, the car, the affairs of the home, etc), we may have to discipline ourselves little by little to choose to spend quality time with the Master, sitting at His feet and learning from Him. At His feet are peace, purity, and joy.

Martha could have experienced these blessings as well, but she chose different priorities. She should have commended Mary for choosing what was needed, but instead she becomes angry with her. Those who are entangled in the affairs of this life are not easily disentangled. Instead of distractions, God wants oneness – one thing is needed. *“Nothing with out this will do us any good in this world, and nothing but this will go with us into another world. Those who choose this good part shall not only have what they choose, but shall have their choice commended in the Great day.”*³ There is nothing more important.

A man named Bill told a story about the time his son's sixth birthday was approaching. He had mentioned he wouldn't mind a party, and as his son usually was very specific about the kind of presents he liked. The dad asked him what he could get him. Bill expected a well-planned reply, such as, “I'd like a baseball glove; you can find it at Toys'R'Us®, aisle six, below the batting helmets, or a Parcheesi board; the games are in alphabetical order in aisle 1; it's between Pac Man and Pay Day.” But his son's request was a bit different. He said, “Dad, I'd like a ball to play with for my birthday.” Bill said, “Great, what kind of ball?” “Oh, I don't know, either a football or a soccer ball.” “Well, which would you want more?” “Wellllll,” he said, “... If you have some time to play ball with me this year, I'd really like a football so we could throw it back and forth in the yard together. But if you're gonna be real busy this year, maybe you just better get me a soccer ball, because I can play soccer with the rest of the kids in the neighborhood.” The dad thought about this and said, “Let me surprise you. How does that sound?” And the boy smiled and said, “Oh that would be great, Dad. I really love you.” Then Bill went in and shared this little encounter with his wife and together they agreed, their son was not so much interested in the gift. He was interested in the giver!

What are you interested more in today? The gift, the work, and the things you can accomplish? Or the giver – God – your relationship with Him and sitting under His teaching and instruction to you personally? The true test is what you choose to do. Jesus was more interested in Martha's company than He was in her cooking. We spend so much time choosing to be busy instead of choosing what's important.

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