

Luke Chapter 10 v 38 - 42

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[0 : 0 0] 8. As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 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.

Martha, Martha, the Lord answered, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed, or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her. So we'll hear more about that passage a little bit later on.

Now, we've just been singing about resting, but I wonder, in life, do you ever feel like you don't get rest? Do you ever feel like there are jobs which never get completed? Maybe cleaning the house, for example, you've cleaned the whole house, and the next day, it's a complete mess again. Maybe at work, you've got deadlines, you hand one thing in, you get one job completed, and then another thing pops up, or maybe at school, with deadlines. Life can sometimes feel like we're on a treadmill, can't it? We're continually working, and we don't find rest. Well, this story is really about balance in life. How do we figure out our priorities in life when we're so busy? Do we find time to spend with God? Do we find time to spend with God's people and with Jesus? Now, it's interesting, where's the story placed? Well, it's just after the parable of the Good Samaritan, which we looked at a few weeks ago. And now, if you were to look at what's the message of the Good Samaritan, if you were to put it in a nutshell, perhaps you'd say something like this. If we're a disciple of Jesus, if we want to follow Jesus, it's not merely about words saying we follow Jesus, but it has to show itself in action. It has to show itself in works, in good works. And then this story, it seems like a contrast, doesn't it? Martha, she gets a bit of a bad rap in this story.

And she almost gets rebuked by Jesus for her works. But I think there's a balance, isn't there? And I think perhaps Luke has put these stories together on purpose. You can say faith without deeds is dead. If we're all talk and no action, if our faith doesn't display itself in good deeds, then it's dead. But God isn't all about works. He also wants our devotion.

[3 : 4 6] He wants us to spend time with him. Jesus, he shows his works, he shows his hospitality, its importance in washing the disciples' feet. He models that for us.

The New Testament, it's full of praise for hospitality. An elder in 1 Timothy or Titus, it talks about what you need to be an elder, what are the qualifications. And one of the things is hospitality. An elder must be hospitable. It says in 1 Peter 4 verse 9, offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. So hospitality is a command to believers.

So why is Martha, why is she reprimanded for hospitality in this story? Well, I want to start by talking a bit about Martha. What kind of a person is she?

Well, Martha, she's the kind of person that she likes to get things done. So we see in this story, it's Martha who first invites Jesus into the house. She's probably the older sister.

She's probably, she sort of runs the home. It's Martha who's stuck preparing the food, maybe for Jesus and 12 disciples, for Mary, for their brother Lazarus. So there's a lot of people she's preparing food for. Later on, in the book of John, in chapter 11, Martha's brother dies, Lazarus. And when Jesus comes into the town, it's Martha who first comes out and meets Jesus straight away. And Mary, you get the impression she doesn't know Jesus is here. She stays in a house. But Martha seems like the kind of person who knows what's going on. She's on top of things.

[5 : 40] She gets things done. And it's Martha, she comes straight out to Jesus. She meets him and she says, look, Jesus, if you weren't here, if you were here two days earlier, my brother Lazarus wouldn't have died. You get the impression there's, she's an outspoken in her personality. Maybe she's a bit brash. She confronts Jesus in this story. She says, Jesus, do you not care that, I'll just read the verse. He says, Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?

Tell her to help me. And I want to make it clear, it's not wrong to have this personality. Actually, we need people like this, don't we, who see problems and get things done, get things sorted out. I think of Peter in the Bible. I think of Paul in the Bible. They were people with this sort of personality, wouldn't they? They got things done. So what was the issue with Martha in this story?

Well, to set the scene, you can imagine it in your own family, can't you? Two sisters. And you've got someone to stay, an important guest. Obviously, it's Jesus, the most important person you can have to stay. Mary's left there, you know, doing a hospitality, you know, keeping Jesus company while she's actually listening to Jesus teaching. And Martha's in the kitchen.

And she wants to put out this big spread for Jesus and his disciples. She wants to show her love for Jesus, her appreciation for Jesus in this way. And you can imagine, there's all this stuff to do. And it says she's distracted with much serving. And you can imagine her getting more and more annoyed at Mary, can't you? Maybe she, you know, maybe she comes in the room and she gives her, gives her one of those glances that only siblings can. Maybe she starts to, you know, bash the pots down. She's getting angry in her head. She's, you know, she's getting worked up, you can imagine.

And finally, she comes out to Jesus. And you probably see this in your own family as well. You don't, you don't go to your sibling. Often, if your siblings annoy you, they go to your parent.

[7 : 55] And they tell on you, in a sense. And she says, she comes to Jesus and she says, Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work? Will you tell her to help me?

And it's interesting, isn't it? Families were the same 2,000 years ago. They haven't changed much. And I think we read the story and we can feel sorry for Martha, can't we? We can see why she'd be annoyed. But what is, what's the indication here? Well, I want to point out in verse 40, it says that Martha's distracted by all the preparation that had to be made.

And I think maybe the idea is that Martha, she's going overboard with the preparation. She wants, she wants to serve Jesus in this way by, by giving the best meals she can. But what's the important thing? What's the important thing on this occasion? You know, Jesus isn't around very much.

I'm sure Jesus would be happy with a simple meal. He says, he says to, he says to Martha, Martha, Martha. And you don't get the impression it's in anger.

I think, I think this is an affectionate Martha, Martha. Martha, Martha, the Lord answered, you're worried and upset about many things. And it's never right to worry. It's never right to let things overwhelm you. Worrying is wrong in the Bible. But few things are needed, or indeed only one.

[9 : 22] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will be not, it will not be taken away from her. And so he doesn't even say that Martha, the thing you're doing is a wrong thing. But it's not the best thing. And so I think this story is a story about priorities.

The best thing in that moment was to spend time with Jesus. That was the right thing to do. So I wonder, can we, are we too busy in our lives to spend time with God, to spend time with God's people? Do we ever get distracted from the main thing? And even service to God, even getting involved in church work, it can become an idol in itself. If it's taking away from our spending time with God, it's a distraction, isn't it? It's not the main thing.

Mary, she wanted to give Jesus something. She was working all she could to provide something for Jesus. But Jesus wanted to spend time with her. It wasn't so much about what Martha could give Jesus, but what Jesus could give Martha. Martha needed to receive from Jesus.

Jesus wants our time. He wants us. And what's the lesson here in verse 42? Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her. And you know, everything we work at in this life, it will go, won't it? But the one thing that will remain is our relationship with God. That's the most important thing. That's the eternal thing. That's the thing of eternal worth.

And work in itself is a good thing. We worked in Eden, didn't we? In perfection. We worked in the garden. I'm sure we'll work in heaven. Colossians 3.23, it says, whatever you do, work with all your might, as if for God and not for men. And so our work is actually part of our worship to Jesus.

[11 : 27] But it should never distract from our spending time with Jesus. So I wonder in our lives, do we find ourselves too busy doing and not receiving? God wants our devotion to him. And I think we live in a Martha world. It's all about go, go, go. It's all about what can we do? How much can we pack into a day? But I want to think of Jesus in perhaps the busiest period of his life. Gareth, this morning, he said in Jesus' second year, didn't he, of his life, that was when he was at his most popular. And that's when crowds would surround him.

And in Luke chapter 5, verse 15 to 16, it says this. And this is in that period. Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him, speaking of Jesus, and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. And on a human level, we'd probably think there's crowds of people wanting to hear God's word. There's crowds of people needing to be healed. What's the important thing?

What's the pressing matter at this time? But Jesus made it a priority to separate himself from the crowds and to spend time with his heavenly father. I think of the parable of the sower.

And some of the seed, it fell among the thorns, didn't it? And the thorns grew up with the seed and choked it from being fruitful. And Jesus says this. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear. But as they go on their way, they are choked by life's worries, riches, and pleasures.

And they do not mature. Now I wonder, does this describe any of us? Are there things in our lives which are choking, are choking our growth, are choking, are distracting us from spending time with God? Are we too busy? Are there too many worries in our lives? Even pleasures, it says, life's worries, riches, and pleasures. Are our hobbies, are our pleasures, are they distracting us from Jesus?

[13 : 41] Martha was probably trying to do too much. She was being elaborate in her hospitality. And so perhaps a practical tip for us is, should we reduce in our lives? Should we cut down?

You see, it wasn't that Martha was doing a wrong thing. But a good thing can become a bad thing if it's not the best thing. If it's taking away from the best thing. If it's becoming an idol. If it's replacing our time with Jesus.

So are there things in our lives which perhaps we could cut down? Are we trying to do too much in a day? Do we come to the midweek meetings? Do we come to the Sunday services? Or are we too busy? Perhaps with work?

Perhaps with, you know, revision? There are many things. Perhaps with hobbies. There are all sorts of things. And you know what that is for you. Are there things in our lives which we can cut down on?

The second thing I want to say is this. Are you giving your best time to Jesus? You know, Jesus, he was only in Bethany every so often, wasn't he?

[15 : 00] And when Jesus is there, the best thing for Martha would be to spend time with him. Now some of us are morning people. Some of us are evening people.

For me, I'm an evening person. So I'll try, I'll do, I will do a short devotion in the morning. But my main quiet time is in the evening.

Because that's when my brain switched on. That's when I get most, you know, most out of a quiet time. So I want to say this. Give your best time to Jesus. Plan ahead.

If you know you've got things on in the evening. You know you've got a busy morning. Plan in your quiet time. You know, when you know you won't be busy. What's your priorities in life?

Is it the time you spend with God? Or is it other things? What's the eternal thing? What's of eternal worth? It's our relationship with God. So we need to make that priority.

[15 : 59] Finally, I want to say this. We can... Often in life, we can get tired, can't we? By the amount of things we do. And just a practical tip for your quiet times.

Praying in bed, I found, is not a good strategy. But, you know, if we're too tired, maybe go for a prayer walk.

Maybe walk around and read your Bible. You don't have to sit on a chair. You know, find what's best for you. If you're too tired, then move. If we can be practical about this.

Now, I want to look at Mary's example. We've looked at Martha. And depending on whether you think Mary is the same as Mary Magdalene or not, she's mentioned three times if she's not Mary Magdalene.

But it's interesting. Every time she's mentioned, she's at Jesus' feet. So there's here. She's sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

[17 : 07] In the story of Lazarus, when Jesus comes and he raises Lazarus from the dead, Jesus calls Mary out. And we saw before that Martha came out and she questioned Jesus.

She said, if you were here before, Lazarus wouldn't have died. Now, Jesus calls Mary out. She comes out and it says, she falls at his feet and she weeps.

And she asks a similar question. But you can see her reverence by her falling at Jesus' feet. And finally, in the next chapter of John, in John 12, she comes into a busy room.

It's her own house. But there's people eating there. And she comes in with a flask of pure nard worth a year's worth of wage. And then she gets down.

She pours the nard on Jesus' feet. And she wipes his feet with her hair. And so you get the impression of Mary that she's a woman that's consumed with Jesus.

[18 : 06] It's almost like she's got tunnel vision, you know. She's in busy places. She doesn't care what the crowd thinks. In the story of Lazarus, she falls at Jesus' feet.

There's many people weeping around her. She falls at his feet. She goes into a busy room where people are eating. She does this extravagant procession, in a sense.

And she gets down and she pours this expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. She wipes his feet with her hair. And here, maybe, I don't know if she's even thinking about, you know, Martha preparing food in the other room.

But here, you know, she's gazing at Jesus. She's sitting at his feet. She forgets all else. And perhaps we need to refocus. Perhaps we need to get a glimpse of who Jesus is, as Mary did.

Now, it wasn't hard for Mary, you don't get the impression, to make Jesus her priority. She was going to be right there at his feet whenever he came.

[19 : 14] And, you know, if we get this glimpse of Jesus, as Mary did, our priorities should change. And it should, you know, our quiet times, there shouldn't be an extra thing, but there should be the most important thing.

And I don't know about you, but I found in my life, the more discipline I have in my quiet time, in spending time with Jesus, the more it's something I actually look forward to in the day, the more it's something, it becomes the most important thing.

And so it can become the most important thing because Jesus is better than anything. And when we truly experience that, it's natural that we want to spend time with him.

But sometimes it takes discipline, doesn't it? It takes routine. And the final thing I want to say, just as a side, is I think the example of Martha, in a sense, it's a call for humility.

Because Martha, she was very sure about herself, that she was in the right, wasn't she? And obviously, coming to Jesus and saying what she said, she wasn't expecting Jesus to rebuke her, she was expecting Jesus to rebuke Mary.

[20 : 28] And I think, when we focus on works, we can become self-righteous, can't we? And it's easy to look at other people's lives and think they're doing less than us.

But there's a call for humility, isn't there? We need to take a step back and think we might be in the wrong, we can be in the wrong. We're not always in the wrong. But we're all fallen people, aren't we?

And we can, at the times when we most think we're in the right, that might be the time we're in the wrong. I think of Philippians 2, and it's a passage about humility, and Paul's talking about unity in the church, and he says this, in humility, count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to the interests of yourselves, but to the interests of others. And I think if we have this mindset, you know, this person's more significant than me, we'll be slower to judge wrongly, won't we?

Yeah, and I suppose equally, we can be, in our religion, in our prayer life, if we do that for the wrong motives, if we do that, we can do that with a self-righteous attitude, can't we?

[21 : 48] We can do that to be seen before men. So whatever we do, we need the right attitude of heart. Mary, she was focused on Jesus. She wasn't bothered about what other people thought.

She was focused on Jesus. In our works, if we're doing it for the right motives, and we're doing it out of love for Jesus, if we're doing it out of love for others, we won't be so bothered that they're not helping us, will we?

Because we're doing it to serve others. We're doing it to serve Jesus. So we need to be careful not to become self-righteous, not to let our works become something in which we're trying to earn points with God, almost earn salvation.

So we need to check ourselves. I'll just finish with this verse. John chapter 6, verse 27. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

For on him, God the Father has placed his seal of approval. So what's the thing that matters? What's the thing that will last? The food that really matters. It's not the physical food.

[23 : 02] It's not the food of service. It's the food that Jesus will give us. What are our priorities in life? Is it spending time with Jesus?

Or is it other things? We'll finish with 639.