

Only One Thing Is Necessary

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 September 2024

Preacher: Johan DeJong

[0 : 00] Let's just pray, shall we? Lord, as we've just been singing, would you please speak?! Because it's your voice, your voice that we need to hear, not mine. Father, will you make good your! Will you test our attitudes? Will you grow us in grace as we come to listen to you this morning?

In Jesus' name, Amen. We've been thinking about Meals with Jesus over the last few weeks, so here's a food-related question. Are you happy with what life has served up for you?

Are you happy with your portion? What's on your plate? I think we probably all believe that the things that we're doing or trying to do are good, right?

And we're probably all trying to do those things really well. But then sometimes we're in the middle of doing those things and we're in the thick of them and you kind of get tired, don't you?

And everything seems to slow down and it feels a bit more like drudgery than anything else. Or maybe you enjoy what you do, but sometimes, you know, it's just too much.

[1 : 14] And you feel pulled in so many different directions that you can't seem to make any of it really work. Kind of bits of you are all over the place. You ever feel like that?

Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, you're not quite wholly present in that thing. And perhaps, like Martha, you end up saying to God, God, don't you care that I have all of this stuff that I have to deal with?

It's not fair. Can't you do something about it? And maybe this thought kind of creeps in as well when you're thinking like that.

Why does that person seem to have it so easy all the time? How come they seem to have time to themselves in quiet and peace and, you know, days with their family? Well, if you've ever felt like that, and I think at some point in our lives we probably all will, then God has an answer for us in this passage about Mary and Martha and Jesus.

There is someone who knows those feelings and understands them. Someone you can take those things to. Somebody who wants more of you and more for you than just your output.

[2 : 32] Spoiler alert, it's Jesus. And if you feel like that, then from this passage what we're going to see is that he wants you to tell him like Martha did.

And he wants you to listen like Mary did. But most of all what Jesus wants us to know is that actually only one thing is needed. And that's to come and feed on him.

Alright? So you know what I sometimes say. If you're the tired person in the room and you know you're not going to last the full 25 minutes, then you've just had the snapshot. This is what it is.

There's only one thing that is needed.

And that is to feed on Jesus. How does that work? Well, let's start by thinking about Martha, shall we? Martha. Let's look at verse 40.

Verse 40. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. So here she is, fragmented.

[3 : 32] That's literally what the Greek means. Split into little bits and scattered everywhere. Distracted. And far away from Jesus. She's slaving away in the kitchen. And where's Mary?

Mary. Nowhere to be found. And Martha's so frustrated. You can imagine she's right in her head, isn't she? What's gone wrong here?

Well, in order to answer that question, we have to look back a little bit. Because the passage that comes immediately before this passage is the parable of the Good Samaritan. And you remember how Jesus came to tell that story? There's a lawyer.

It's always the lawyers, isn't it? There's a lawyer that comes up to Jesus and says, Teacher, what must I do to be saved? What must I do to be saved? And Jesus takes him to the heart of what it means to be with him.

Which is love the Lord your God with all your heart, your mind, your soul and your strength. And love your neighbour as yourself. And what does the lawyer ask? Skips straight past the loving God bit, doesn't he?

[4 : 33] And he said, who's my neighbour then? And then Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan, doesn't he? The lawyer's busy with what must I do to be saved?

And Martha's problem here is that she's busy with the same question. What must I do to be saved? And so her complaint is, Lord, I'm doing it all.

Aren't I? Why am I not recognised? And she's not doing anything. Why haven't you told her off? But you see, that approach actually pulls her away from Jesus.

She's not where Jesus is, is she? The real question that the lawyer skipped straight over and that Martha has missed here is, what does it look like to love the Lord your God?

And we can get caught up in that way of thinking, can't we? And then eventually, the work schedule or the church rota or whatever it is, that's just the loudest voice in our lives. What's next on the list?

[5 : 45] But then we've forgotten what Martha has forgotten, which is that in the relationship between me and Jesus, who is the main doer?

It's not me. Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. That's what Psalm 127 says, isn't it?

See, because if the most important thing is to love God, then the next question shouldn't be, show me the job list or where can I sign up on the rota? The next question should be, show me God so that I may know him and love him.

Right? Otherwise, we end up in this place where we start to believe that God's message to us is, I would like your service and your work product and your good behaviour and your stuff.

That is not God's message to us. So what is Martha to do? What are we to do when we find ourselves in that place?

[6 : 55] Let's keep reading. Martha came to him, verse 40, and asked, Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?

Tell her to help me. So she tells it to Jesus, didn't she? Now, Martha is the one who's invited Jesus in. So the first thing she's actually said to him sometime earlier is, you are welcome here.

Please come. Please stay. The only reason that he is in the house is her. She's the owner of the house. But now, she sort of storms into the room, doesn't she?

Barges in and tells him to sort it out. Breaks right into the discussion that the people are having in there and she complains. And now you've got to imagine Aretha Franklin in the Blues Brothers.

The picture that's up there. She comes into the room and says, you better think. That's what Martha's doing. She comes into the room where they're talking about philosophy or theology or whatever it is and tells him a few home truths.

[8 : 04] That's not exactly the way that you're supposed to behave. Not even back then. Pretty rude. She's right to welcome him into her home, isn't she?

And actually, she's right to bring that frustration to Jesus. even if the way that she hasn't done it, has done it, is not maybe ideal. And when we get like that, we have to do the same.

Worry later about whether you've done it quite the right way. First, tell it to Jesus. Right? He wants to know. He wants to know.

And if we don't do that, what we do is we create room or leave room for us to become bitter and for unbelief to creep in. If we don't tell Jesus when we feel like that.

So I just want you to take a moment and think, what is the thing or things that have upset me most this week? That this week have left me feeling the most like Martha in bits all over the place.

[9 : 12] Just think about that for a moment. What is that thing? If you're like me, it didn't take you long to think about what it was.

Just take a moment now to tell Jesus about that thing like Martha did. How do we know that it was okay for Martha to talk to Jesus even though he talked to her like that?

She talked to him like that, I should say. How do we know? Well, it's in his reply. Let's look at verse 41. Martha, Martha, the Lord answered. You are worried and upset about many things.

Now, notice what he does not say, right? He doesn't rebuke her. He doesn't tell her off for the way that she spoke or for the way that she came into the room.

He doesn't show any outrage even though he's been interrupted. There are no hard words, are there? For Martha's harassed heart. No hard words.

[10:30] He doesn't say, what you're getting all upset about, love. There's none of that. And he doesn't say, all that stuff you're doing in the kitchen, well, that was a waste of time, wasn't it?

But he also doesn't just do whatever Martha tells him to do. You notice that Martha said, basically, you should tell Mary to come and help me in the kitchen. Jesus doesn't do that either.

The first thing he does is he just gently recognises that she is troubled. He says, I can see that you are upset and worried.

Verse 42, but few things are needed or indeed only one. So he recognises that she's upset and troubled but he warns her too, doesn't he?

Only one thing actually is needed and there is a danger here. The danger is she misses the one necessary thing in the middle of all of those other urgent seeming things going on in her life.

[11:42] The parable of the sower, this is faith getting choked by the cares of the world. By everything else that's going on, career, house, marriage, kids, whatever it is.

That's the danger. So is doing wrong then? Is doing lots of serving in the kitchen like Martha was doing, is that wrong? No. But doing that drives you to distraction, that's wrong, isn't it?

Avoiding intimacy with Jesus, really getting to know him and giving yourself to him, or avoiding getting to know anybody else in the room by being busy.

That's not good. And that's a question, isn't it? Do we do that vulnerability with Jesus and with each other? Do we do vulnerability or do we just do tea biscuits and small talk for half an hour after the service?

If you are feeling that fragmentation, then the Bible says, tell it to Jesus like Martha does.

[12:57] Because only in his light, only in his presence, will you get perspective. Will you see how to prioritize things right and pick Jesus over doing stuff for Jesus?

We all believe we're spending our lives doing good things, don't we? And trying to do them well. But there's a warning here too.

Martha believed that, but she was in danger of missing the one thing that was truly necessary. The warning is, don't be so busy with things that you believe are good that you miss out on what is absolutely vital.

Jesus. Right? Let's move on to Mary. Here we are in the sound of music.

Do you know the song? How do you solve a problem like Maria? Sorry if that's now in your head for the rest of the week. It will be in mine, for sure. And it's a bit like that here.

[14:07] How do you deal with a problem like Mary? Because she is a problem. If you're an achiever or a doer or somebody who holds responsibility or has a list and likes to do the list.

Because what does she do? Verse 39. She sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. She just listens.

How do you deal with someone who just resolutely says no to the job list in favour of time with Jesus? And you think, I'm left with all the work.

What about my well-being? There's another problem that actually we'll completely miss because we don't live in second century Israel or even first century Israel.

Mary shouldn't be sitting there at all. There weren't any women disciples in Jesus' day. Women didn't get to discuss faith or right and wrong or politics or anything like that with men.

[15:12] As the unmarried younger sister, she's supposed to be obedient to her older sister, the mistress of the house. She certainly shouldn't be presuming to sit at his feet. That's how their culture would have thought about it.

Right? So what will Jesus do? Send her back to a proper place? Reinforce the social stereotypes?

No. He protects her, doesn't he? Mary has chosen what is better. That's what he says. So why does he do that? Is it because he's crusading for equal rights and social justice?

No. No, but because Mary has chosen the only thing that is needed. I guess most of you probably have heard of the Lord of the Rings films.

It's a bit of a cultural phenomenon, isn't it? In the Lord of the Rings films, Frodo has one job, doesn't he? He's got the ring, he's got to take the ring to the fires of Mount Doom so it can be destroyed.

[16:19] That's his one job. And along the way, all kinds of other things happen to him, and we meet all kinds of other people, and there's all kinds of other little stories, but really, that whole book, that whole world, that whole series, it's just about one thing.

Get the ring destroyed. And that's Tolkien's message. Tolkien's message is that all of life, with its adventures, and joys, and sorrows, and subplots, really is about one thing.

And so when we come to Jesus, he puts one thing at the top of the bucket list. not what you should do first, but what you need first, and that is to be with him, listening like Mary.

But to feed on him first. He's the main meal. And what does that mean? Well, it means in your personal life, you open the Bible, and you pray. That's what it means to be with him and feed on him.

And you listen to him. And because our faith is personal, according to the Bible, but it's not private, also according to the Bible, we come to church, don't we?

[17 : 38] And there together we listen to his voice, because where two or three are gathered, there I am. That's what he says. God's real desire in sending Jesus then, when he dies on the cross to deal with our sin, is not to get our stuff or our service.

God's message in sending Jesus to die on the cross for our sins is I want you. Which is a much bigger demand, isn't it?

And that's what the lawyer didn't want to give. He didn't want to give himself. because it doesn't just mean service, it means surrender.

Mary gets that. And so she's sitting at his feet. She's listening. And we're just to take a moment, think about what it is in your life that stops you listening to Jesus.

what distracts you from him. I can tell you what it is for me, it's the job list.

[19 : 13] It always seems to shout louder than Jesus. so the next thing I think would be good to do is to just decide now, here, with his help, what you're going to do about that thing that distracts you from him, that stops you listening to him, and ask his help in doing that thing.

Thank you. So we need to listen like Mary, and we think, yeah, but what about all the good things that won't get done, with that time that I spend listening instead?

And Jesus says, but what is good? Good is the portion that Mary has chosen. That's what it says in verse 42, isn't it?

Mary has chosen what is better, literally, the good portion, and it will not be taken away from her.

See, before we answer the question, are you happy with your portion or your lot in life, actually, the Bible invites us to ask a deeper question, which is, what is your portion?

portion. Now, if you follow that word through the Bible, what you find is that portion means someone's part, someone's place, their land, their future, their destiny, the thing that occupies their thoughts, that inspires them, it's their daily bread.

[21 : 01] That's what your portion is, your daily bread. So, what is the meal that you have chosen to feed your soul? And I think Jesus is saying to Martha, you must choose wisely what that is.

Mary chooses the good portion, and Jesus protects her choice, doesn't he? We know Martha hears Jesus' words, but we don't know actually how she responds.

Will she choose well? Will she choose what is better? Luke kind of leaves us on a cliffhanger because he wants us to ask ourselves that question.

What will you choose for your portion? Because the main meal that we prepare in this life actually isn't the one that we prepare with our own hands. That's what Martha was doing, wasn't she? the main meal in this life is actually Jesus. Like we said last week, he's the bread of life. He is the living water. Man shall not live by bread alone, as we said at the start.

[22 : 16] So we don't need to be concerned about feeding him. Instead, we need to ask him to feed us. We feed on him first. we need to choose Jesus for our portion.

Then you're choosing the master of the feast. The one who will satisfy you always and eternally. Instead of always having to top up our little list of achievements, we can leave that to him.

So if you haven't already chosen, then listening to Jesus on this matter is the one thing that is needed. He is what is better. He is the good portion.

So we need to fix our eyes on him and keep them there, don't we? And if you've already welcomed him into your house, like Martha has, then make being with him and listening to him your number one priority.

Because then you're sticking with the one thing that's necessary, aren't you? And friends, if you do that, there's a promise here too. Because what are the final words of Jesus? Jesus, it will not be taken away from her.

[23 : 28] Every other portion that you can give yourself in life, it eventually can be taken away, can't it? If you choose Jesus for your portion in life, he will never be taken away from you.

So Jesus says, only one thing is needed, and that is to feed on me first. Christ. Let's pray. Some words from Psalm 142, very like Martha's words.

Look and see, there is no one at my right hand, no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge, no one cares for my life. So much like Martha.

I cry to you, Lord. I say, you are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living. Lord, will you help us to feed on you first, instead of making the mistake of trying to feed you.

Will you please be our portion now and forever? Amen. amen. If that's something that you want to talk about with me or with somebody else, then please come and grab us after the service.

[24 : 50] We'd love to do that. We're going to sing in response. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Let's stand and sing. Let's sing. Let's sing.