

One Thing Is Needful | A Deep Dive into Mary, Martha, and the Heart of True Devotion (Luke 10:38-42)

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[0:00] One thing, one thing is needful. Think of life, it's sometimes very busy isn't it?! And we get life's troubles, we get demands. Life can be full of lots of responsibilities, of family, of work, they press upon us daily and we can feel like we've got a lot going on and feel like maybe life can feel like a juggling act. I don't know if anyone's ever seen that kind of display where someone's spinning plates and they've got to spin a plate and then they've got to spin another plate and spin another plate and they've got these multiple plates spinning and they've got to keep them all spinning at the same time. And it's like that sometimes with life that you're tossing plates in the air, whether it be family, work, other responsibilities and you think you've got it all under control, then someone hands you another plate. That's where we find Martha in Luke chapter 10. And Jesus had come to their home, to Martha and Mary's home. And Martha, it would seem, was the older sister. And they came to meet the Lord Jesus and the disciples came to meet with Mary and Martha. And Martha lived in Bethany with her sister Mary and of course her brother Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So we're going to pick it up there from Luke 10 and verse 38. Now it came to pass as they went that he, Jesus, answered into a certain village and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. So here's Martha. She welcomed Jesus. She rolled out the red carpet for him. She wanted to make him feel especially welcome. She received him. Verse 39. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word. So Martha's here bustling around serving and stressing while her sister Mary is just calmly sitting down at the feet of Jesus. Martha here busy with all the tasks of hospitality. She had important work to do. Mary sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to his teaching. Verse 40.

But Martha was cumbered about with much serving and came to him and said, Lord, does thou not care that my sister have left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful. And Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her. We see Mary and Martha, Mary and Mary. Mary. Mary. Mary. Mary. Mary. Mary. Mary. Mary. Mary. Mary. Mary. Both of them did. They both wanted to serve and honour their Lord. Martha was sincere and devoted. She loved Christ and she was beloved by Christ. She was doing a good thing. She was getting the place ready. She had lots on her plate, maybe lots of plates. But she allowed it to consume her, to consume her focus to the point where she got anxious and troubled.

[3:33] Martha really wanted to be a good hostess. She was active. She was a doer, not just a hearer. It was good that she was doing. But she got to this place where she was feeling overwhelmed and maybe a bit resentful.

We see Martha's burdened heart. She asked Jesus, tell Mary to come and help. In our fast-paced world, distractions are everywhere. What matters to us?

Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. Jesus is saying, Martha, you're worried, you're upset. There's lots going on.

I understand. He sees that Martha is full of these cares. She's careful, worried, full of cares. And it's saying she's anxious or really overly concerned about these things.

And it was a preoccupation for her that she was getting all consumed with what had to be done. And she's troubled with these cares. And it describes the occupation of the mind.

[4:38] Her mind was just swirling with all of these things that she was distracted by, really. And it was taking her from what truly mattered.

So her heart was divided. She was serving, but she was also anxious. And the word troubled or full of care, it means that she was disturbed. She was agitated.

It implies this restlessness. Her heart was unsettled. It's talking about a stirred up or troubled situation. A picture of inner turmoil, of agitation.

And the Lord sees, Martha, you're troubled. He sees how she's upset. She's inwardly troubled, like this boat tossed by a storm on the waters. And Martha's not just busy, but she's emotionally shipwrecked by her busyness.

Martha was distracted, working so hard. She wanted her to be just schmick, you know, just so. And that was a good desire she had, to have everything in place to serve the Master.

[5:39] But we see the trouble was that she was stirred up in a state of mind, anxious, troubled by the many tasks at hand. And we can be like Martha, burdened with many things.

Life gets busy. You know, we're supposed to have so many time-saving devices now, but it seems like we're busier than we've ever been. Like, looking back, I think whether there was a time when I was younger that I used to actually say, I'm bored.

I used to say that to Mum and Dad, didn't I? I'm bored. I don't have anything to do. I wish I could say that now. But we can think, well, we've got lots to do. It's just deciding which ones do we do and not do.

And some, it seems that they're overwhelmed or overburdened with pursuing, whether it be wealth or success or family responsibilities, all the plates swirling in the air, the cares of life.

And while these are not wrong, of course, caring for our family, being a good breadwinner, these are not bad things, but it's when that we lose the focus from our Lord.

[6:41] We prioritise our time away from spiritual wellbeing and our time with our Lord that we ought to have front and centre. And so the message in a nutshell is intimacy with Christ is more important than busyness for Christ.

We can lose the intimacy, the closeness with our Lord because of the busyness and even busyness doing good things. You could imagine, for example, a mother preparing a big meal for guests to come and she wants everything to be just right, perfect, but in her striving, she gets irritated, irritable.

The meal is served, but there's a cost there of joy and of peace. It's like Mary, so busy with the work that she lost sight of the presence of Jesus.

Martha's work mattered, but being with Jesus ought to have taken the first place precedence.

Notice the wise choice of Mary.

But one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her. The phrase one thing, one thing, one thing is needful.

[7:55] It suggests that there's many concerns, there's many good things, but there's only one thing that truly matters. And Mary understood this. And the sense of it, apparently in the Greek, is that Mary made a deliberate choice.

She had a smorgasbord of choices and she chose that. Out of numbers of choices, she chose that. That one thing, that good thing, that best portion.

She made a deliberate choice. It was an intentional decision to prioritise Christ's presence over all the other things she could have been about, over everything else.

And it speaks of priorities, doesn't it? And I was talking with a gentleman earlier, how he's narrowed down the days that he works so he can have more time with his family. He's decided what the priorities ought to be for him.

Now, we don't always have that capacity. But you could think, how can I put my time, my energy, my focus, my love, my devotion into the one thing, the things that really matter?

[8:58] And we could think of two men who might receive an inheritance. One invests it in fleeting pleasures, you know, goes on a holiday, whatever, and blows it all. Not that that's necessarily a bad thing.

But then the other invests his portion in a way that lasts. He makes a significant investment that actually lasts. He keeps that going into time ahead.

He invests his portion in a way that lasts. And when you look at Mary's choice, it says that our Lord says that choice that she has made, that decision that she has made, was the good part, it was the best decision, and it shall not be taken away from her.

So there's something here about, it's got a longevity to it. There's something that's going to carry on. And of course, we're still talking about Mary today because of exactly what she did. Mary chose that which was eternal.

Communion with Christ. That was what counted. She could have had all the niceties of maybe the extra bit of condiments on the table and maybe a bit more flavours and selection of food on the table.

[10:10] But actually what mattered was the communion with Christ. That was the matter that was going to count. The choice that counted. Communion with Christ.

It was an eternal dimension. One thing is needful. Mary sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word. Think of it, of a heart that longs for God.

To have a priority of spiritual things. A hunger for the word of God. These are things that count. And Jesus commended Mary for choosing that, the better part.

What about you and me? Our highest priority, oughtn't it to be, to have fellowship with our Lord, to know him, to go to his word. We see how Mary loves Jesus.

She wanted his word. She wanted to sit at his feet. What about us? Do we wait upon the Lord? I know I could do more of that. I know I'm very neglectful when I look at my own self, that how much more I ought to have that heart.

[11:13] When the busyness consumes, even good busyness. And our Lord says, come. He says, come and sit at my feet. Come into my presence. Know my love. And this is Mary.

She wanted to hang on to his every word. She wanted a closeness with her saviour. She was feeding her soul. And she wanted to catch every word. So there she was, where she could hear it. Every word from his lips. What a precious privilege to be at his feet. And we can still sit at his feet today, in that sense that we have his very word to take heart of, to take hold of, to heed it, and to act upon it.

And we can be like Mary and sit at his feet, and catch every word. But Martha was distracted. Martha wanted to tell Mary to get off her knees and into the kitchen.

You could picture it of Martha. Apparently the language here has the sense that Martha, she was really, you know, a bit fired up. And she marched up to Jesus.

[12:18] You could imagine rolling pin in her hand, and a bowl of green beans in the other hand, and said, Lord, don't you care that my sister has left all the work for me? Tell her to help me.

And our Lord gently rebukes Martha. He does not rebuke her for her service. It was a good thing. But the problem was her misplaced priorities. He points out that while many things seem important, only one thing, one thing is needful.

One thing, to sit at his feet and to hear his word. The word for needful implies something that's necessary. It's essential.

It's vital. It's fundamentally important. What is that relationship with our Lord, isn't it? Isn't that what counts in all of life? In all of life's busyness, we can miss that whole point.

That relationship with Jesus is the one thing. One thing that is needful. And we can get detoured by many different kinds of things that can intrude and miss out on what matters.

[13:25] His presence. Martha was so frantic in her business that she missed the priority. Think about it. Martha wasn't wrong. Especially in the culture of the day, hospitality was a big deal.

Someone special, someone important's coming. We want to pull out all the stops. And I know people like that, when you get the privilege of going round to their place for a meal, that, you know, it's going to be just, just blows your mind.

I know how they do such a wonderful job. And hospitality was a big deal. Hey, we don't want to scrimp and save. We want to give the very best for the master to spread this table full.

So it wasn't wrong of Martha, but she let the good crowd out the best. And the best really is time with Jesus, isn't it?

To simplify, to focus, what really counts, what really matters. Imagine, for example, that you're going hiking, you've got your backpack and your tent and your food, your water, you've got a compass.

[14:29] And you're going hiking in the mountains. Well, if you ignore the compass, you're going to wander around in circles. The one thing of all the stuff in your backpack is the compass, isn't it?

And the one thing really of the Christian walk is the presence of Jesus. It's knowing Jesus. It's hearing his word. It's his presence. You can carry all the gear that you want, but without the compass, without direction, you're lost.

And we think of Christ is really that compass, isn't he? That he sets the way, and really that is what matters the absolute most. How can we be more like Mary?

Maybe we could start more with time in prayer, with saying no to the extra things that crowd out our Lord, that crowd out time with God, extra commitments.

Maybe you could trim some things from our schedule and keep to that which is essential.

Sometimes we can feel like we've got too much to do. Think about, as David cried, One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.