

American Marthas

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: 09 July 2023

Preacher: Caleb Valentine

[0 : 00] Good morning. Turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 10. We're going to be looking at verses 38 through 42.

Thankful to be with you this morning. And we have a good word from God in His word to us this morning. And what we have in this text this morning is an awkward situation.

We've all been in social situations that turned awkward. Maybe we're sitting around a dinner table and somebody brings up a politically charged topic and there's a variety of opinions about it and they start speaking very opinionated ways about it.

And everybody is kind of like, I don't know, should we engage? You know, should we change the subject? Or maybe a party and, you know, people are hanging out, maybe playing games or something.

And then one of the couples there gets annoyed with each other, starts arguing, kind of passive-aggressively sniping at each other. And everyone else is like, you know, how about the Bears, right?

[1 : 19] Or the Brewers or the Packers. Or anything. Because it got awkward. Or maybe you are speaking to someone, you know that they were dating this other person.

And so you're like, hey, did you do anything fun with Rachel for the 4th of July? And they're like, we broke up two weeks ago. Where do we go from there? We've all been in these social situations that have turned awkward.

And in our text this morning, we see a social situation, a high-pressure social situation. We see two priorities exemplified there. Two different people focusing on two different things.

And then things turn awkward. There's an exchange. There's a conversation where things turn awkward. And in the midst of that awkwardness, Jesus speaks some good news for us. So let's look at this situation here.

Let's look at the setup. What's going on? We see a situation here where there's two people with two different priorities. Let's look at verses 38 through the first part of 40. It says, Now as they, that's Jesus' disciples, went on their way, Jesus entered a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.

[2 : 32] And she had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. Now as Jesus and his disciples traveled around the country during Jesus' ministry, they were itinerant.

They were moving around from place to place, city to city, town to town. And so they relied on friends and family and generous strangers in various places to host them, to give them a place to sleep, some food to eat.

And this was not unique to Jesus. It was how many traveling teachers at the time functioned. They would travel around in exchange for the teaching they provided. They would have a place to stay. And in the ancient Near Eastern society, the Middle East, where this takes place, this society was significantly oriented around the idea of hospitality.

Hospitality not meaning just having your friends over for dinner, but hospitality meaning welcoming strangers and outsiders and caring for them. It was about doing whatever was necessary to provide shelter, food, and rest to whoever may come through your doors.

[3 : 47] And a large part of your standing in society at that time, a large part of your honor among your town and your relatives and the people who knew you, was based on how well you could show hospitality.

Basically, whether you were considered a good person, a respectable person, wasn't as much based on what did you do or how much money did you make or what was your house like.

It was how well can you show hospitality. What lengths are you willing to go to to care for people who come through? So here we have a woman, Martha, and she welcomes Jesus and she shows hospitality to him and to his disciples.

And it was a big task. We don't know exactly how many people were there, but Jesus traveled around with a minimum, usually, of 12 men, and there are usually a lot of other people with him as well. And so we see how the situation is set up.

Martha is working like crazy to host this crowd and this famous teacher and miracle worker who has come to her house, and there is a lot at stake for her.

[4 : 53] Because in this situation with this particular guest and in the society and the way they viewed hospitality, Martha's reputation is on the line like it probably never has been before in her life.

So whatever stress you may feel when someone comes over to your house and you're trying to clean up and get ready and make dinner, multiply that by about 10 to account for the centrality of hospitality in this culture, which we don't share in our culture.

But then also imagine that the person that you're hosting is nationally significant and famous. And so as we see Martha here, with all of this pressure, all of this expectation, ask yourself, what pressures and obligations and ministries do you feel like you need to carry out in your life?

What do you feel like is required of you in order to be a good person or a good Christian? Or a good parent?

What do you feel like you have to keep doing in order to please God? So Martha is running around trying to be everything that she thinks that she needs to be, and she is totally distracted.

[6 : 14] It says Martha was distracted with much serving, and distracted from what? Because she's actually laser focused on exactly what everyone expects her to be doing. She's, if anyone looked into this house and saw what was going on, they would say, yep, looks right.

She's focused on hospitality. So what is she distracted from? Well, she's distracted from Jesus. And meanwhile, Martha has a sister. And in the midst of this rush of serving Mary, what is she doing? She's not helping. She's sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to his teaching. In other words, based on the perspectives of the day and of that culture, Mary has completely abandoned her position as host. She's totally neglecting the principle of hospitality. She's being rude. And she's actually taking up the position of a disciple, sitting at his feet, listening to his word.

And it's a pretty gutsy move on Mary's part to say, well, no, I'm not going to serve you like everyone expects. I'm going to take up my post here as if I was one of your 12 disciples. So in this situation here, anyone looking at this scene would have said that Martha was an honorable, righteous person, doing exactly what was expected of her, being a good person, caring for this guest.

[7 : 40] And Mary was a presumptuous person who was insulting both herself by not fulfilling her obligations and her guests. But then, Jesus and Martha have an awkward exchange.

And Jesus gives his perspective on this situation. So we've got the social setup here, and then we have this situation that turns awkward with this conversation. Look at verse 40.

It says, She was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and she said, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?

Tell her then to help me. Imagine that. Imagine the situation.

There's a crowded house. Jesus is there teaching an attentive group. There's probably little clusters of people in the corners and just outside having quiet conversations. People are eating.

[8 : 47] And Martha marches up to Jesus and says this. We don't know whether she said it loudly or whispered in his ear, but in whatever case, Jesus has stopped his teaching to listen to her.

And now everyone is looking at these three, wondering what's going on and what's Jesus going to say. And even if they did not hear Martha's words, they could probably tell by her body language and just by knowing what was going on that she's probably upset with Mary.

Do you hear the frustration in Martha's question? My sister has left me alone to serve.

Mary should know better. I know I would be frustrated in a similar situation. Why am I doing everything by myself here? Do you hear the accusation of Jesus in her question?

Do you not care that this is going on? Not only should Mary know better, Jesus should know better.

[9 : 53] Jesus, Martha is saying, is actually in the wrong here for allowing Mary to sit at his feet instead of helping her sister. As a teacher of righteousness, Jesus should have reminded Mary, hey, you need to get up and go help your sister.

It's unfair for you to leave all that work to her. She's doing what a good person should do and you need to help her. And if Martha was anything like us, there's probably in her questions here also the accusation of Jesus that he cares about Mary more than her.

That Jesus is playing favorites and Martha's not important to him. Do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?

But she doesn't just make a frustrated accusation, she also gives Jesus a demand. Have you noticed how assertive Martha is? We see that also in another place in the gospel when Jesus comes to visit her and Mary after their brother has died.

And Jesus never minds it, by the way. It doesn't bother him. The way Martha confronts him in both situations. But with all of her frustration overflowing, Martha demands that Jesus order Mary to help her.

[11 : 19] She's so sure that she's in the right and Mary and even Jesus are in the wrong that she decides she's going to tell her famous, miracle-working, scripture-teaching, prophetic guest what to do.

And now in the awkward silence as everyone waits for Jesus' response, everything is on the table. Martha's choice and Mary's choice of what to focus on, what to prioritize, are shoved in Jesus' face in front of everyone for him to evaluate, for him to respond to.

And here's his response, starting in verse 41. For the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary.

Mary has chosen the good portion which will not be taken away from her. the message of this text from God's Word from Jesus for us today.

Choose closeness to Jesus over every good thing. Choose closeness to Jesus over every good thing.

[12 : 46] not instead of every good thing, but choose closeness to Jesus over every good thing. Jesus responds to Martha's confrontation with great gentleness and affection.

He says her name twice because he really loves her and he wants her to hear what he has to say. He knows the anxiety and the stress and the frustration that she has and he wants her to be free of it.

Martha, Martha. He contrasts the many things that are troubling Martha. The practical logistics of hosting a crowd.

Societal expectations for perfect hospitality. A desire to be that person who always does their duty. hope for favor and respect from a person, a guest of high status like Jesus.

And a desire, we can assume a genuinely good desire to serve God by welcoming one of His prophets. All of these things that are troubling her, he contrasts all of those with the one thing that Mary has prioritized, which is to be close to Jesus.

[13 : 55] And he says that Mary has chosen the one thing that is better than everything else. Choose closeness to Jesus over every good thing.

Because it's one thing to choose Jesus over sin, right? Over things that we know are wrong and that we need to leave behind. It may be hard to do that, but it's clear, it's obvious.

It's much harder to recognize when we are choosing genuinely good things over closeness to Jesus. It's harder to see that, parse it out. And even when we do recognize it, it can be very difficult to reprioritize because reprioritizing means deprioritizing something else and doing that feels wrong. It's not just that, oh, yeah, we should say no to sin. It's like, no, if I lower this, I'm failing something or I'm failing someone, maybe even I'm failing God, if I deprioritize this other thing.

He wants me to do this. So here's an example. If it doesn't apply to you, that's okay. Just an example. It's a very good thing to be a parent, to be a devoted, attentive parent who is passionate about the growth and health and maturity of your children.

[15 : 18] what if in the midst of all that, some of those commitments of time and schedule and energy and focus are keeping you from having any closeness to Jesus?

What if there's no space left as you run from place to place, thing to thing? Now, for those who might be over-invested or over-committed in these ways, doing less for your child is probably going to feel like a little bit of failure or a little bit of neglect.

So you have to ask the question, does my current schedule allow me to be close to Jesus? In the end, that's what your kids need more than anything else anyway.

Choose closeness to Jesus over every good thing. Now, what does closeness to Jesus look like? What does that mean? Well, at minimum, looking at Mary's example in the text here, we can say closeness to Jesus is going to include giving Him the best part of your focus, relating to Him in humility and eagerness like she was sitting at His feet and being attentive to His word, hearing what He has to say.

Knowing what's important to Him. Knowing Him. Closeness to Jesus means knowing Him. Because it's one thing to say you believe in Jesus.

[16:53] It's one thing to say you've trusted in Him for your salvation. But do you know Him? Are you close to Him? Jesus calls Martha and He calls us to prioritize closeness to Him over any of the many good things that fight for our attention.

and He gives us three reasons why we should do this. Why should we choose closeness to Jesus over all these other good things? Three reasons. First one, closeness to Jesus is necessary. You see that right in His words, verse 42? One thing is necessary. Out of all the good things that you might give your time, energy, and focus to, closeness to Jesus is the one thing that is necessary.

It's the one thing that you really need more than any of those other things. The word necessary here is the same word that's used elsewhere in the New Testament to describe how sick people need healing or hungry people need food.

It's essential. For someone with a debilitating illness, the need for relief and healing is paramount. There's almost nothing that they would not do or nothing that they would not give up to be rid of this debilitating illness.

[18:09] For someone who is genuinely going hungry, the need for food is paramount. Everything else gets deprioritized. Gotta eat. And for followers of Jesus, closeness to Him is the paramount need of our lives.

Author Rosaria Butterfield often says that modern American Christians live in what she calls a starvation diet of community. She means that we lack relationships and connections in our churches.

She calls it a starvation diet of community. Now when you hear the word starvation diet, what do you think of? I think of World War II soldiers in Japanese prison camps.

You've seen the pictures, right? Men who were given so little to eat that they ended up looking more like walking skeletons than living humans. And you wonder as you read the stories and see the pictures how it's possible that they were even able to stand up and walk around.

A starvation diet. And when Jesus says that closeness to Him is the one thing that is necessary, I can't help but think that many American Christians are living on a starvation diet of Jesus.

[19:30] if you looked at many churches and you had the lenses to see, you might see a bunch of walking emaciated people.

How can you tell am I on a starvation diet of Jesus? Here's one diagnostic question. What do you love about Jesus?

The question is not do you love Jesus? It's what do you love about Jesus? And if nothing or very little comes to mind in answer to that question, you're probably living on a starvation diet of Jesus. You're not close to Him. And Jesus tells us that closeness to Him is the one thing that is necessary in our chaotic lives. Three reasons why we should choose closeness to Jesus over every other thing.

First of all, closeness to Jesus is necessary. Second, closeness to Jesus is better. Jesus says, one thing is necessary.

[20:46] Mary has chosen the good portion. Jesus tells us that Mary just straight up made a better choice. that term good portion evokes a variety of ideas.

It's like there are some really good cuts of meat and there are some very tough cuts of meat that only really work in the slow cooker or something like that. One is better than the other.

Or in these terms, one is a good portion, one is not. Or think of like an estate inheritance situation. One family member gets the car, one family member gets the toaster oven.

Right? One is better than the other. It's a good portion. Martha's choice of prioritizing all these other things means that she's losing out. The better portion is what you would choose if you could really see all the factors and all the outcomes.

We've all made choices where we've chosen something that didn't turn out quite like we wanted or something we didn't know about at the time and that it wasn't what we were hoping for. When Jesus says that closeness to Him is the good portion it means that it's what you're looking for and you won't be disappointed.

[22 : 03] If you choose closeness to Jesus you'll never wish that you could get a redo and make a different choice. Closeness to Jesus is necessary.

It's better. The third reason Jesus gives us why we should choose closeness to Him over every good thing is that closeness to Jesus is secure. He says one thing is necessary Mary has chosen the good portion which will not be taken away from her.

Very, very few things in life are secure. Health can be lost in one accident or one unexpected diagnosis from the doctor.

Finances can be trashed in one bad economic year or one job loss or one major home repair.

Family members can be lost to death or family conflict.

Reputation can be lost in one day whether because of the truth or a lie. our lives are very insecure.

There's almost nothing in our lives that's truly secure.

[23 : 23] But Jesus says that if you choose to be close to Him that's something that you will never lose. It's secure and He guarantees it Himself. Your close relationship with Jesus cannot be taken away by others or lost to some disaster and Jesus is personally invested in making sure that it remains yours.

You see what happens here with Mary and Jesus as Martha confronts them? Have you ever felt like you put yourself out there for someone?

Made yourself a little vulnerable? Invested in somebody? Took a relational risk? And in the moment of testing that friend leaves you out to dry?

When the social pressure is on they take a few steps back? Jesus doesn't do that. Mary took a risk to be close to Jesus.

She left her socially expected duties of hospitality and she was bold enough to place herself among Jesus' disciples sitting at his feet and when she faces the prospect of public humiliation and rebuke in front of all these people Jesus says no Mary's not going to be shamed here no one's sending her back to the kitchen I've got her back Jesus is a really good friend to have Mary chose close close close close close close to Jesus and Jesus says that cannot be taken away from her I don't care what the people here think so choose closeness to Jesus because it's secure today and this week I want you to think about this whatever we give to

[25 : 34] Jesus and whatever we receive from him is ours forever and he guarantees it himself whatever we give to Jesus and whatever we receive from him is ours forever he guarantees it so I say whatever we give to Jesus I mean whatever time and whatever priority and whatever attention we give to Jesus is never lost we all know that there are plenty of things that we can invest time and energy and focus into and at the end of the day or the end of the year or the end of our lives it's all washed out didn't come to anything and they may be good things that we need to attend to but there's whatever we give to Jesus whatever time we invest in being close to him is never lost it's not even lost at the end of our lives like so many things are it's ours forever and whatever we receive from

Jesus is ours forever so whenever he draws near to us and gives us comfort and gives us his friendship and gives us hope and gives us courage insight into who he is that we didn't have before when he helps us through a situation that we can only endure with him with his strength whatever Jesus gives to us is ours forever and he guarantees it himself whatever we give to Jesus and whatever we receive from him is ours forever so choose closeness to Jesus over every good thing because it's necessary because it's better than anything else because it's secure there's so many good things in life family and friends meaningful work ministry service to others rest food hobbies art fitness health so many good things in life and part of the message of the Bible is that God loves for us to engage with all of these things and enjoy them and find fulfillment in them he created them for us and the point of what Jesus is saying here in this text is definitely not that we should avoid doing all sorts of good things in fact look at the passage that where Jesus makes it clear that he expects his disciples to be neighbors to everyone to act in concrete ways of care and service for them so the point is not that we avoid doing good things in our lives the point is not that we cease all service and all activity but in light of God's word for us today you take a minute to reflect on your daily and weekly life so far this year we're halfway through the year reflect on your

daily and weekly life so far this year and with a lot of honesty ask yourself is there space in my life for developing closeness to Jesus and if there's not what do you need to deprioritize so that you can choose closeness to Jesus over every other good thing it's necessary it's better and it's going to be yours forever let's pray father thank you that you are good enough and big enough that we can give you the best hope news