

The Good Portion

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[0 : 00] Well, for the last four weeks in the morning, if you haven't been able to be here, the sermons have centered on four spheres, and by that is meant four areas of ministry related to our church life.

I think I wanted to see if that slide would pop up. There it is, yeah. So the idea, as you see in the center there, is that we as fellow Christians would be equipped for serving the Lord. This particular slide right here has to do with Colin preached this morning, this idea of equipping for service, and that involves various aspects of our life together and how we begin to apply and live out the gospel, both among ourselves but also before the world around us.

And if I'm not mistaken, the emphasis was really the idea that there is room for all of God's people to be at work within God's kingdom, that there isn't this heavy-duty hierarchy where you only get a little blessing every once in a while to go and do something, that rather you are free, desired, encouraged to be equipped to serve God and to serve Christ's purposes in his kingdom.

There were four, you can take that down, thanks. There were four different spheres. One is worship, that was the first one, and in that Colin suggested that worship should focus on God.

[1 : 29] That might sound like an odd thing to say, but, you know, far too often sometimes worship is focused on us, how we're feeling, how we're enjoying it, rather than whether God is really the object of our devotion.

And also that we want worship that lifts up the salvation to God, the salvation-shaped worship that is bringing us to the cross, reminding us of what God has done and how much we need him for eternal life.

And then worship would also be something then contemplating on the reality of God and what he has done, in which our response is one in which we bow down our souls before God. That that is really worship, when we bow down our souls before God.

Again, it's easy enough to bow down with your knee before God, but to have your soul, reality, dealing with that reality, that's the object of worship. Then I preached on mission, and we considered mission as an assignment.

What has God assigned people to do? Well, you know, we looked at what's called the cultural mandate. How it is that human beings are made, they're made for an assignment. Be fruitful and multiply, have dominion, fill the earth, subdue it, tend and keep the garden.

[2 : 35] And we're created, it's our existential DNA as human beings to be given assignments and to go out and to do it. Well, of course, we know what happens. Sin comes along, and we take all that capacity, all that authority and power given to us to carry out that assignment, and we make a mess of it.

We do all kinds of horrible things. Some wonderful things, but also tinged with a lot of not-so-good things. And that's why we need the next assignment we were given, which is the Great Commission, to go out and make disciples of the nations, bringing them into relationship with God through baptism, symbolized through baptism, and then also teaching them to observe all that Christ has taught, to do it, because that's how we're supposed to live.

And then Nate talked about discipleship, that whole process by which we are formed more and more to be like Christ. And he says it's an essential part of what it means to be a church, is that discipleship is taking place.

It isn't just enough for people to come in the door. It's enough for people to come in the door and to learn about Christ and have their lives more and more shaped by him. He also talked about discipleship as being relational or covenantal, and it's all-encompassing.

It's all of our lives. We don't have this split between, oh, what we do on Sunday and what we do on Monday. No, what we do on Sunday affects what we do on Monday, and how we live out our lives on Monday might be something we need to repent of when we come back to church on Sunday. [3 : 57] But we need to understand that discipleship is something that's all-encompassing, and ultimately it's about Jesus, because we are becoming more and more like Jesus.

That's what our discipleship is about. And then today Colin talked about service, how it is that we respond to God's grace, fulfilling the call that he has on all of our lives to bring glory to him in and through church.

So today I want us to build upon a little bit of what Colin said this morning and also hopefully to kind of reflect back on these four spheres and what I have to offer tonight.

But let me first stop and pray, because I know I'm talking very fast, so let me just slow down a little bit. I know I get that complaint. We Americans get a complaint that we talk too fast.

So let me pray, and we'll go from there. Thank you so much that we can spend time together in your word, and I pray you help us to have ears to hear, hearts ready to receive to your glory.

[4 : 56] In Christ's name, amen. So the main passage we're going to be looking at is this one from Luke chapter 10, this meeting of Mary and Martha and Jesus and his disciples.

It's a domestic scene, right? One that we can kind of grasp more easily than some of the others that we encounter in Scripture. Some of the miracles and other kind of extraordinary things that go on, the parting of the Red Sea.

It's like, oh, I guess I'd remember that if I was there. But here's just a straightforward kind of domestic scene where Jesus is traveling with his disciples. Martha invites them into her home, into her and Mary's home.

Martha obviously seems to be the hostess or the person who's in control of this kind of activity within the house. She invites them in, and upon entering, two decisions are made.

Martha goes to the kitchen, starts preparing a meal. Mary sits down at the feet of Jesus, listening to him teaching. Now, the posture that Mary has taken is that of a disciple. That's what you do.

[5 : 57] You sit down at the feet of the teacher in order to learn from him. So those two decisions are made, and it becomes to be a problem for Martha.

She starts to get things ready for a meal, as I said, and Martha's feeling a lot of pressure. I mean, here's Jesus, whom she wants to do a good job for. There's his disciples, likely there too.

This is not a small crowd. It's a big group of people that she's invited into the home. And hospitality in this culture is very, very important. It's really a mark of whether or not you've been, frankly, a good neighbor.

If you know the incident of when Jesus was invited into Simon the Pharisee's house, and as he's there, this woman from the city who's called the sinful woman comes in, and out of gratitude for her forgiveness of sins, for salvation, she begins to weep and wipe off Jesus' feet with her hair, wipe the dirt off of his feet with her hair, as Jesus is an object of her veneration.

And Jesus reads the room, reads Simon's expression on his face, and he goes, Simon, let me ask you something. You see this woman? Since I've come in, she has not stopped weeping and cleaning my feet, and yet you've offered me no kiss, welcome, you've given no anointing oil for my head to refresh my face, you've done none of that.

[7 : 17] And so this idea was that here is Simon the Pharisee not doing this basic rule of hospitality for any guest that comes into your home.

And so the pressure then that Martha's feeling to do a good job for Jesus, to do a good job as a hostess, I mean, she wants a little positive feedback, right? You have somebody over, you prepare a nice meal, you put out the drinks, you enjoy all the time together, they go out the door on their way home, they say, thank you, it was such a wonderful time.

And you go, oh, no, no, it was okay, but really, it was pretty good, wasn't it? The food was good, the drink was good, it was a good time. So there's part of it too that we can assume that somehow Martha is also tied into this event with her identity, with her sense of purpose, her sense of worth even, I'll be so far as to say.

Well, because of all this activity, because of this pressure, she becomes more and more consumed with the task of serving. There's a lot of things to do, a lot of things to prepare. Luke describes it as distracted with much serving.

She's distracted with much serving. And what's she distracted from? Jesus. She's distracted from Jesus. She wants to hear what Jesus has to say too, and she probably has got, you know, one ear over here, and over here she's trying to get the meal ready, and so she's distracted.

[8 : 38] And in the middle of all that, what does she do? She looks over, and she sees her sister, Mary, sitting on the floor. And this inner dialogue kicks in. What's she doing sitting on the floor?

We've got all this food to prepare. Look at all these people in this house. What's she doing sitting on the floor? And so she gets more and more agitated to the point of where she goes up to Jesus and makes a demand of him.

Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me. That then is great. Right? Tell her then to help me. She presumes the rightness of her demand.

She presumes that Jesus will agree with her. Don't you want her to come and help me? Of course you do. So just tell her to get up off the floor, come over with me, and help me prepare this meal. But she doesn't wait for an answer. She presumes. So again, there's the contrast. Mary sitting at the Lord's feet listening. Martha distracted with much serving.

[9 : 41] Finally, Martha can't deal with the situation anymore. She goes up to Jesus, makes her demand. And how does Jesus respond? He responds firmly, but with gentleness.

Now again, imagine this scene. Jesus is in a posture of a teacher. That means he's sitting down. The others listening to him are in the posture of a disciple, which means that they're either sitting, or if they're declining or reclining at a table, they're, you know, stretched out with their feet behind them and so on.

But all that to say, they're on this level, and Martha comes in on this level. Not only physically, but emotionally. She comes in on this level. So there's Jesus sitting down teaching all the people around her.

She comes in, towering over, and she says, Jesus, don't you care that my daughter is not helping me to serve? Tell her then to come and help me. Now, Jesus begins to describe her as being anxious and troubled.

Now, that term troubled, if you look at it, has a word group within the Greek, and it really means something like turbulent, noisy. I suspect Martha's been banging pots in the kitchen for the last 15 minutes.

[10 : 50] A little passive-aggressive stuff, right? Boom! Like to sit and listen to Jesus. Boom! Back to another pot. So Jesus, here he is, he's trying to teach, and all this noise is going on, and he just looks out of the corner of his eye and see, she's really a mess.

She's really getting worked up. And finally, she comes over, and he says to 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. Now, that repeating of the name is care. You know, he cherishes her.

He says her name and says it twice, so it's not so much, I mean, it is a rebuke, but it's a gentle one. It's more of a corrective. It's a teaching moment.

I appreciate all the things you're doing for us, Martha. I know you're working very hard. I know it's a lot of work, and I know it's important to do a good job, but there's some things that are more important at this moment, and that's for you to come and sit down with your sister.

[12 : 04] I'm not sending her into the kitchen to help you. Now, the defining statement of this, the defining statement is when Jesus says, one thing is necessary.

Let's pause over that for just a minute. If something is necessary, it means it's essential. It means that it cannot be done without. What do you need to run an automobile?

Petrol. You get in your car, you don't have any petrol, you've suddenly realized the car's not going to do what it's supposed to do. It is absolutely essential that there's petrol in the car.

If you've been given a business portfolio to analyze, let's say that's what you do. You're in the financial district and they put it on your desk, you open up the folder and it's empty.

And you say, okay, I need the data. I can't give you an analysis if I don't have the data. And if you're going to have people over to your house and you want to serve them a nice spaghetti meal with tomato sauce on it, what do you need?

[13 : 13] Tomatoes! You can't have tomato sauce without a tomato. And I said tomato, not tomato. You know, I almost didn't. I almost didn't, but I did.

I'm trying to accommodate. So, a human being, we can get by without food and water for a little while, but air, you don't have air.

You're gone. See, things that are necessary are things that you need them, otherwise what something's supposed to do can't be done.

Or, or their very existence might not be able to, to go forward because you don't have what is necessary. So, in the midst of this very ordinary domestic scene, one with which we can readily identify, one that portrays a woman as being distracted by all the obligations of it, so much so that she makes demands of Jesus about which later she'd probably be embarrassed to think about, Jesus makes this assertion about what is essential.

One thing is necessary, and what is that one necessary thing? It's the good portion that Mary has chosen to attend to Jesus, to sit and listen to Jesus.

[14:30] Now, these are both legitimate activities, showing hospitality, preparing, wanting to do a good job, that's a legitimate activity. But also, sitting at the feet of Jesus is also a legitimate activity.

What elevates that one over the other? Well, what elevates that one over the serving one is the fact that it's Jesus. What's the back story to this?

Do you remember at the beginning of Luke, what does Mary learn? That the Holy Spirit will come upon her and the power of the Most High will overshadow her, and therefore she will bear a child, and that child will be called Holy, the Son of God.

That's the back story. This is Emmanuel, God with us. And he has come to reveal the Father. All things have been committed to me by the Father, he says. No one knows the Son except the Father.

No one knows who the Father is except the Son, and to those whom he chooses to reveal him. Jesus tells us, so if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. And Jesus brings the kingdom of God.

[15:32] This is why Mary's choice was the better choice. Why it was the good portion of all the things that could be done at that moment in that household. What she chose to do was the good portion.

One thing is necessary, Martha. Mary has made the good choice. I'm not sending her to you. She's chosen the good portion. I'm not going to take it away from her to help you in the kitchen.

You need to sit down beside her. What do we want to take away from that? Let me suggest that doing things for Jesus must not distract us from Jesus.

Doing things for Jesus must thus distract us from Jesus. Why? Because Jesus is the one necessary thing. So if the ministry we offer from this church to the world around us, if the ministry we offer is not emanating from our relationship with Jesus, then our ministry is not drawing people into a relationship with Jesus.

And yet that's what our ministry is supposed to be doing. In some way, shape, or form, it adds up to a relationship with Jesus. And if it's not doing that, it's a problem.

[16:49] Why? Because Jesus is the one necessary thing. He alone is Emmanuel. He alone is the way to eternal life. It's his sacrifice alone that's sufficient for our righteousness.

He alone has the words of eternal life. He alone is the exact imprint of God, the writer of Hebrews says. And frankly, it's into his likeness that we are being formed as disciples of Jesus.

C.S. Lewis gets quoted all the time. You know why? Because he's very quotable. C.S. Lewis writes about this. This is where the church can get very muddled on this. That's the term he uses, muddled.

It's easy to think that the church has a lot of different objects. education, building, missions, holding services. But the church exists for nothing else but to draw people into Christ to make them little Christs.

If they're not doing that, all of the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became a human being for no other purpose.

[17:58] Remember what Paul says? Those who are in Christ are those chosen in him before the foundation of the world. Our business is to draw people to Jesus, to draw those whom God has put his hand on and draw them to Jesus.

And if our ministry is not focused on that, then if it doesn't anchor our ministry in that call for people to deny themselves, pick up their cross, follow him, to follow him into the reality of what it really means to be a human being, it will prove to be little different than other well-meaning cultural institutions who go about doing good.

Christ and his purpose is what sets us apart in the church. And to be muddled, to use Lewis's term, on that foundational point can cause the efforts of the church to become an end to themselves. They're not a means of drawing people to Christ. Now just to reinforce this a little bit, if you were to look how Luke has organized his gospel, just prior to this incident is the parable of the Good Samaritan.

And what's the parable of the Good Samaritan? But a lesson in how we need to be ready to serve those around us, those who have been beat up and bruised by the fallenness, the corruption that's in this world.

[19 : 18] We need to be ready to respond and with generosity. And so that's kind of the second part of the Great Commandment, right? to love our neighbors, we love ourselves. But some argue that Luke has taken this incident with Mary and Martha and put it right up against that so that we see the first part of the Great Commandment, to love God with all of your heart, soul, strength, and mind.

So in these two incidents together, we have that reinforcement that yes, being a Good Samaritan is vitally important, but it gets tempered, it gets focused, fleshed out by the relationship that we have from sitting at Jesus' feet and learning more from him.

So, how will what we do differentiate us from others who are doing similar activities out in the world? Well, we want to know that because some of our activities will overlap, right?

There are those who work in a food bank here, a couple of them, and that's a wonderful thing. There's other places that are food banks and they're not Christian, right? There's other places where they'll be offered some opportunity as we did here for a warm space during the winter months, open the door so people could come in.

Other people would be doing such things. What differentiates us in doing them? Well, for us to do them in a way that draws people to Christ, they must have the aroma of Christ, the tinge of Christ, the life of Christ in them.

[20 : 53] Let's think about Jesus and how he interacted, how he lived out his life among people. I've got a short list here, and you might think of others, and they're in no particular order.

But first, humility. He carried out all that he did, even though he was the son of God, second person of the trinity, clothes himself in flesh and walks among us, but he didn't consider this position that he had as something that he would use to his own advantage, or something that he needed to hold on to.

Rather, he empties himself and humbles himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. What does he say? Come, learn of me. I'm gentle and lowly. Jesus also operated with deep compassion for the brokenness of the world.

Do you remember at one point when he was described as looking at the crowds and had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd? shepherd. You know, there's all kinds of people shepherding all kinds of other people, and they're not always in the church.

That is, there's plenty of secular shepherds, just directing people, this is how you ought to live, this is how you ought to live. And they're being harassed and helpless. It's not a place that they've been created for.

[22 : 08] And so Jesus had compassion upon those who were harassed and helpless because they were like a sheep without a shepherd. Jesus was incredibly long-suffering, incredibly long-suffering.

How often do you read, when you read through the gospel accounts and they go, they didn't get it, they didn't get it, they didn't get it. One of the best, one of the best is when he feeds all these people with a couple of loaves of bread, then they're in a boat and he says, beware the leaven of the Pharisees.

And they go, he's mad because he didn't bring any bread. And he goes, were you there when I did that? Really? That's kind of my paraphrase. Were you there when I, what happened with the loaves and the fishes?

They just couldn't get it. But even to the point of where Peter denies him, Jesus' long-suffering carries over into his post-resurrection state, sits down with Peter and says, do you love me, do you love me, do you love me?

Also, Jesus' ministry was incredibly generous. Right? Greater love is no one than this, and he laid down his life for his friends. That is the mark of something that's a statement that, of course, alludes

to what he's about to do on Calvary, but also encompasses all of his existence.

[23 : 19] He was generous. And, of course, his life was sacrificial. I'm the good shepherd. The good shepherd laid down his life for the sheep. There was sacrifice involved.

It wasn't just something that was, just, you know, we'll do a little bit of that. He was all in, as they say, for all that had been called. Perhaps this is the most challenging for us, is that his ministry was truthful.

Do you know, again, with the feeding of the loaves and the fishes, when he's in the Gospel of John, they get in the boat, they go to the other side of the lake, and people follow him there, and they're there, and he looks at them and goes, you know, the only reason you're here is because your stomachs are full.

That's why. So, I'm sure that he meant that as a provocation for them to think about what it was that brought them here, but he spoke the truth in that moment.

That is really what their motivation is. It's not because you saw the sign. You're not coming here in order to know about who I am. It's because I filled your belly with food. And so we want to be truthful about what we're offering.

[24 : 24] We are really offering Jesus to people. And lastly, I suggest that what he offers is appropriate to the need. You know, the rich young ruler shows up and says, what am I trying to do to inherit eternal life?

He says, well, what does the law say? It goes through it all. And Jesus says, you know, you're right, but one thing you need, you need to sell everything you have and give it to the poor. And the guy goes, all right.

Yeah, all right, that sounds good. And he walks away sorrowfully because he had many goods.

See, Jesus just put the nail right on the head with what this guy needed.

He needed to learn that his money is an idol, his comfort is an idol, and all of his law keeping is not going to do it. He needs a heart that is yielded to the reality of God.

So Jesus' ministry was marked by humility, compassion, long-suffering, truthfulness, generosity, sacrifice, and also appropriate. And if somebody comes and they have a particular need, and we give them something else, they go, thanks, thanks, but that's not my need.

[25 : 34] So, what will differentiate us from going about and doing the business of the kingdom? It's going to be that we do it like Christ, because Christ is in us, transforming us so that our responses are more in line with what Christ's responses are.

That can be a long haul to get there. That's that process of sanctification by which we are more and more shaped into the image of Christ, but that is the goal, that God is making us to be more like Christ, and we are drawing other people into that same process, that they all might become little Christs.

Now, what I'd like to do is jump to John chapter 12 for just a minute and ask this question, what happens when Jesus is the one necessary thing? John chapter 12.

So here, the same people are involved. Jesus, his disciples, Martha, Mary, and also Lazarus, their brother. Same people involved.

And there's some of the same activity going on. Look at what it says. Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there.

[26 : 48] Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. What's Martha doing? She's serving. And what's Mary doing? Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair.

And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. this is an act of just unabashed worship. Here is Mary in the midst of all these men.

She lets her hair down. In the middle of it, she takes this very expensive ointment. It was worth a year's wages. She takes it and she anoints Jesus with it. She wipes his feet with her hair.

And the perfume fills the house, John says. What a great detail. Can you imagine when this is all over and Mary leaves and she's walking down the street and everybody's going, what was that? Did that woman have nard in her hair? What was that all about? See, the aroma of Christ, of her worship of Christ follows her wherever she goes at this point. But what's important to point out, that here is Mary doing essentially something of the same essence that she was doing back in the other passage we looked at, and Martha is not objecting.

[28 : 03] Martha is happy and content to serve. And instead of looking over, looking at Mary, going, why aren't you helping me here? Jesus, come on, send her over here to help her. Rather, she probably looks over at Mary and goes, thank you, Mary.

Thank you, Mary, for worshiping Jesus for me. See, when Jesus is made the essential thing, when Jesus is made the one necessary thing, that's what Martha, I believe, happened to her after that incident we read earlier.

And now her priorities are reordered. Her identity is no longer in how much she does, but it's in the one that she serves. And, you know, you look at our spheres, worship, mission, discipleship, serving, it's all there.

Mary is offering worship, Martha's not objecting, why? Because she's grown in her discipleship as she serves. She's serving, her priorities are rightly ordered, and even mission is there, because at the end, after Judas complains about this waste of money supposedly, he says, leave her alone so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.

There's Jesus' mission. Why did he come? In order to give his life that we might live. It's all there, because Jesus is the necessary thing. He's front and center in that incident.

[29 : 16] So much so that when somebody suggests she ought not to be doing what she's doing, he says, no, no, this is entirely, completely appropriate. So, as we look at these four spheres, worship, mission, discipleship, and service, we want to keep Jesus the main thing, the one necessary thing.

And when we do that, then we're going to have moments, dare I say, like we're seeing here, where worship is being offered to Jesus that is free and unabashed, people serving at the same time with just a calm and a peace in their hearts and a gratitude for all that God has done for them.

And that people are being discipled up so they might be more and more like Jesus, and they might be more responding to the glory and beauty of salvation, and they're just ready to serve Christ in his kingdom.

So, may God give us that grace, yes, to keep Jesus the one necessary thing. And when he's the one necessary thing, everything else we do will have his aroma about it.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you so much for your word and we thank you for Jesus and indeed he is the one necessary thing.

[30 : 34] He is the one who sets everything apart. And we want to keep him front and center. We want to keep him the basis, the reason, the motivation, the image, the goal of all that we do in your name.

And when we forget that, God, forgive us, remind us, bring us back. And even as we contemplate how to go about really getting these spheres up and running and really functioning, that we remember that it's really about bringing people into a relationship with Jesus.

Because he's the one necessary thing. Everybody who walks down the street around us here needs to know who Jesus is. So we pray for them. We pray for them that we might be used to view that they would come to know Christ.

But Lord, help us. Help us. to be good signposts for them. Good signposts pointing them to the one alone that they need.

Jesus, our Lord and Savior. In his name we pray. Amen.