

# The Entertainer

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it's great to be with you in the service, the 8 o'clock service this morning, as we continue the series on hospitality that we have been going through at the 8 o'clock and 6.30 services this August.

And we've been looking at how God calls us to welcome people into our lives. Basically, that's what the series is about, and we're seeing that God calls each of us to have a generosity of time and resources in our relationships with one another by his power and by his leading to reach out to those who are in our lives, to bring them into our lives.

And I don't know what your experience of hospitality is like. People offer hospitality in very different ways. It depends upon how your personality is.

Some are more introverted and some are extroverted. I remember doing a talk about hospitality several years ago, and somebody came up to me and felt very sort of intimidated and self-conscious and said, you know, this is something that I struggle with.

And this was somebody who was the wife of the minister at the retreat I was at, and we had just had a whole lot of clergy at her house that she so graciously welcomed us in.

[ 1 : 19 ] But her ministry of hospitality was very different because what I saw her doing is welcoming people in her life, especially those who were on the fringes of society in that town.

And I think that we need to remember, as we're thinking about hospitality, that the way that we do it is often going to be very unique to who we are and who our gifts are, what our gifts are.

Now, we are seeking to grow in this hospitality in a culture, in a city that really struggles with welcoming others into their home or into their life because of busyness, because of distractions, because of trying to measure up.

All kinds of things really work against that in our society. So we need God to help us. And that's why I think it's really interesting that the passage that we just heard on page 869, which would be great if you turn to, follows immediately the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Because that is a picture of extreme hospitality, that parable. That this Samaritan sacrifices for the sake of an enemy, really.

[ 2 : 38 ] Someone that they had a great aversion to, Samaritans did, towards Jews. And this is what it means, Jesus says, to obey the command to love your neighbor. Now, a Jew would leave that parable, the people listening to that parable, in that first-century Palestine, and they would say, how could a Samaritan possibly overcome centuries of hatred and abuse to save the life of a Jew and to pay dearly for his recovery?

Are we to love our neighbor in that way? Who can do this? It's impossible. And the answer to who can do this is really no one.

That is the point. You need the grace-filled work of God in your heart and in your mind. And so immediately after, Luke shares this extraordinary little account of Mary and Martha because it shows us that our hospitality to Jesus, our receiving of him, is what is necessary and important in order for us to show that kind of love and hospitality to the world around us.

To people in our lives. And so let's look at this little passage because it is critical in thinking about hospitality that we begin by welcoming and receiving Jesus into our life daily.

What happens in this little account is that Jesus enters a village with disciples and they are all on their way, at this point in Luke, towards Jerusalem, where Jesus has said he is going to die and rise again for the sake of the world.

[ 4 : 20 ] And a friend of Jesus' name is Martha welcomes Jesus into her home. It's likely she was a widow. She had a home that she owned and she was the person who would receive people there.

Jesus had become a celebrity by them. So it was really quite wonderful to her that in his travels he could spend time with her.

And especially since often the crowds were pressing on Jesus, demanding of his time. So she wanted to do things very special for him. And it was also a blessed part of her culture, the culture of the Middle East, to be hospitable, especially to travelers.

And in that culture, it is shameful not to welcome the guest or the traveler into your home. And it's still very much a part of the culture in that part of the world now.

Catherine and I took our honeymoon, this was 15 years ago, in Turkey. Spent a few weeks there. And we were astounded by the friendliness and the welcome of the people there.

[ 5 : 33 ] You know, you'd go to a crowded bus stop or restaurant and people would call you over. They would stand up so that you could sit down and not have to be inconvenienced and tired.

They would give tours of their town when you were asking where to go. Spend a couple of times hours with us. People would offer to help if you looked at all loss.

They would come over and take time to be with you. It was really quite an extraordinary experience. Well, that is the culture of hospitality that Martha lived in.

And she put lots of pressure on herself to follow through with this. But also this was a special time for her to have Jesus with her. So she went all out to give Jesus a wonderful meal.

And you can see that in verse 40. Jesus says it was much serving that Martha was about. Much in the way of preparation. Now as you know, Martha's younger sister Mary was doing something very different.

[ 6 : 37 ] In verse 29, she sits at Jesus' feet and listened to his teaching. Now often that is the way rabbis taught their students.

The rabbi would sit and the students would sit at the rabbi's feet. And they would listen to the teaching. And listen attentively. And this is where the trouble starts.

Because as Jesus went on teaching and as Martha went on with all her prep, she became more and more resentful of the fact that her sister wasn't helping her. And finally, in verse 40, she went up to Jesus.

She'd had enough. And she very reproachfully said, Don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone?

Tell her then to help me. And I wonder if you notice that the speech centers completely on herself. Three times she says she refers to herself.

[ 7 : 39 ] Something has happened. The reading says that she has become distracted. And it's very likely that Martha told this story to Luke years later.

And she recognized it herself. She had become distracted with much serving. Distracted from Jesus. And in that sort of reproach, Jesus looks into her heart.

And very tenderly says, Martha, Martha. Those are words of somebody who is good friends with Martha. Who knows her well. There is a real trust between those two.

And we know in John 11 that Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. And he reveals what is going on inside of his friend.

He says to her, You are anxious and troubled about many things. And that is our human condition often, isn't it? And as Jesus looks into your heart and in your mind this morning, he may be finding anxiety.

[ 8 : 48 ] He may be finding things that trouble you or trouble me. And these things can very, very easily distract us from Jesus and who he is.

But what Jesus does here is to bring Martha back. And he brings us back, I think, as well, with the last verse. He says, One thing is necessary.

And in the original, he repeats it. He says, One thing Mary has chosen. The good portion, which shall not be taken away from her. And so the question for us is, What is the one thing necessary? What is the one thing that Mary has chosen? And the answer is the one thing I hope you get from my sermon this morning. And that is that Mary has chosen to listen to Jesus.

To sit at his feet and to be with him. To simply be with him. And that is something that can never be taken away from her.

[ 9 : 52 ] Because as Peter said, Jesus has the words of eternal life. The words that Mary was listening to bring people into relationship with God that will never end.

And they put all of life into the right perspective. That which we are created for is shown in the words that Jesus is speaking.

And his works, his word, shapes all we are and all we say and all we do. The Holy Spirit works through them to transform our hearts and minds.

So you see, what Luke's point here isn't that, you know, it's better to be the contemplative person than the person who is doing all the work. Or it's better to listen than to do.

What he is saying is that Jesus and his word is a treasure greater than anything in this world. And in fact, it transforms all of the things that we are about in all of our life.

[ 11 : 02 ] It is a treasure greater than anything. We were talking about this passage in the office this week. And Aaron brought up this liturgy that was used for the queen at her coronation back in 1953.

And there's a part of the service, and I looked up the liturgy of the service and went through it, where the Archbishop of Canterbury gives the queen a Bible.

And this is before the crown is put upon her head, you know, with crown jewels, with jewels worth hundreds of millions of dollars. And I want you to listen to the words that the Archbishop of Canterbury says long before the crown is put on her head.

He says this to her as he gives her the Bible. Our gracious queen, to keep your majesty ever mindful of the law and the gospel of God as the rule for the whole life and the government of Christian princes, we present you with this book, the most valuable thing that the world offers. Isn't that marvelous? That would be something good to give to presidents and to dictators. It is the lesson of this passage, because Jesus' words in the Bible are the most valuable thing that the world affords.

[ 12 : 25 ] That's what's being said here. And what Martha was really distracted from was the deep significance of Jesus being in her home. Because really, God himself has come into her house and is speaking his words to her.

He is bringing the kingdom of God into the world. And so not only does Jesus gently guide Martha back to himself, but he says, look, Mary has chosen the good portion.

And that word is wonderful because it has the connotation of a meal. He's really saying Mary has chosen the right meal, the good meal. She has shown hospitality to Jesus in receiving his word, in receiving the meal that he has offered, which is an extraordinary gift.

Quite a few years ago, somebody gave me a t-shirt from their university Bible study. In fact, I brought it today because I think you need to wake up a little bit.

This is a very old t-shirt. And what it said was, real food. And it has a person, as you can see, with a knife and fork in front of the Bible.

[ 13 : 44 ] And the thing about that shirt is that I was wearing this one day when I was shopping for clothes. It looked much better than this. This was, you know, 10, 15 years ago. And the salesperson said, why does it say real food on there?

And then she thought about it for a second. English was not her first language. It was a second language. She was from Eastern Europe. And she said, oh, yeah. She said, you know, actually, books are like food, aren't they?

And I said, yeah. And look at the back. It says campus Bible study. And I said, that's particularly true of the Bible. It's particularly true of the Bible.

Now, of course, that brings all kinds of conversations with it. But what Jesus is saying is that his word is a meal to us. Martha was doing in her serving something incredibly important.

You know, Jesus said, if you want to be great, you want to serve. You want to become the least. You want to serve in the way Martha was serving. But the one thing that Jesus says is needful and that shapes all of our serving and all we do in life is to feed on him and his word.

[ 14 : 56 ] To receive that meal that he is constantly offering to us. And I think that as we leave this passage, there is a real practical response that God calls us to.

I was listening this week to a testimony of a very successful Christian hedge fund manager. There are such a thing as those people. And it was in London in the UK.

And he had made a commitment to himself that he would not turn on any electronic devices in the morning until he had read something from the Bible.

Even a little section. And to prayerfully ask Jesus to show him who he was, who Jesus was, and how he could follow him that day.

It's a wonderful commitment because he must have wakened up every morning wondering what are the markets like today? What's happening in the world? But the first thing he did was to do this each day. And I think that the question we can ask ourselves as we leave this passage is, Am I being distracted from hearing Jesus speak to us?

[16:07] Are we being distracted from hospitably receiving Jesus and his word? Listening to him in our lives. To feed on the good food of his word.

And that is a very important question for us. Because there are many practical ways that we can address this. There are yearly Bibles you can read that's ready made for you to have a little Bible reading each day.

There is the prayer book that is in front of you. Cranmer, who wrote the prayer book, had an agenda. And that is that everybody would feed on God's word every day.

Would be hospitable to Jesus. Would be able to take a little time each day. To be able to prayerfully listen to who Jesus is.

And to his will for their lives. You can tailor Bible reading in a way that's manageable. But God uses passages like the one we heard today to bring us back from distraction.

[17:13] Distraction that often involves very, very good things. That's why it is something that is so easy to fall into. Serving is a fantastic thing. Hospitality is. Hospitality is. But it must start and be fed always by what Jesus is offering.

And I think that this passage is so relevant for us today. Because there is so much to distract us from Jesus and his priority in our lives. We are inundated by voices. From the many forms of media in our lives.

We are pushed always towards an over-scheduled life. Full of very good activity. And I personally find that there is a real temptation in ministry.

In full-time ministry. To serve as Martha was. To prepare Bible studies and sermons in a good way. But then to find that my time of really prayerfully listening to Jesus in his word.

In the Bible. Is pushed out. But today. Jesus lovingly and gently calls you by name. In his love.

[18:16] As he said Martha, Martha. In this passage. He calls us to choose the one thing that is needful. So may God the Holy Spirit. Give us grace.

To listen at Jesus' feet. Amen.