

Luke 10:38-42 - Choosing the Best Portion

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

If you have Bible with you in one form or the other, open them to Luke chapter 10. This morning in our continuing study of Luke, we're going to look at the last few verses of chapter 10, beginning of verse 38.

So follow with me as I read from God's inspired word of truth. Now, as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village.

And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 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. And she went up to him and said, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?

[1 : 19] Tell her then to help me. But 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. Let's bow together and pray to the Spirit who gives his word that he would also give us insight into it.

Heavenly Father, we do pray that he would send your Spirit to do his work in our hearts as we study your word.

Father, I come here very painfully aware of the inadequacy of my words. But we don't trust words of men. We trust you.

And you give us your word because it draws us to you. So, Father, send your Spirit to speak to our hearts.

[2 : 26] Give us understanding. Give us also hearts that are fertile ground for the planting of your word. That it might grow and bear much fruit.

So, come we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. You know, there are many texts in scriptures that lead us to some very sad misunderstandings.

Some things that we may see on the surface look clear, but yet if we read these things that seem to be so simple, and they can lead us into some very wrong-headed thinking.

And unfortunately, I think this text is one of those. You can read this text on the surface and simply say, Well, what Jesus is calling me to do is to stop doing all my work, just spend all of my days having quiet time, reading my Bible, and praying, and that's it.

Well, I hope that's not what he's saying. And I really don't think it is. And especially, we'll see that it isn't if you go back and look all through this chapter 10, how Luke has been pointing us to something.

[3 : 52] And this last account is just one more thing of describing to us what true discipleship is. He starts up here at the beginning of chapter 10 with sending out his disciples on mission.

And that's what a life of a disciple is. We are on mission. To go before and to prepare for the coming of the king. To proclaim the presence of the kingdom.

That is what disciples do. And as his disciples are given this mission, they're also told, he says, You'll recognize kingdom people when you go into these towns because they'll show you the hospitality of the kingdom.

They'll receive you, welcome you. Into their homes, but also into their lives. And that's one of those hallmarks of a person of the kingdom is hospitality.

How the kingdom is welcomed. Well, then we get to the next story. And that is, as Will went over last week, it's the story of this lawyer who professes the kingdom, who knows the law back and

forth.

[5 : 15] And he does the worship thing and so forth, but he's missing something. And again, it's hospitality. And so he is wanting to justify himself through all of his religious works, but Jesus says, No.

The way we show the reality of the kingdom in our life is how we are a good neighbor. How we show mercy. How we follow Jesus in being merciful and gracious and lay our lives down for others. That's characteristic of a disciple. And now we get to this story. This story, this brief account of dealing with these two sisters gives us another angle to this whole theme.

And I think this is one that we all struggle with greatly. It's a case of a busy hostess who's got a major job on her hands trying to feed a bunch of people and she's got a sister sitting on her behind. And she ain't helping. And so how does she respond to this? It'd be good to know because you may have somebody like that in your house.

[6 : 45] But what do we learn about true discipleship here? And how does, again, this theme, this thread of hospitality weave into that?

Well, we first, we see Martha's struggle here. Mary and Martha, you know, they are sisters living in this village and they either have come to know Jesus in some way and developed a special friendship here because we're going to see a little bit later even in the life of Jesus, he's going to come back through Bethany.

And they have a brother as well whose name is Lazarus. And we're going to see in the Gospel of John, we see the account of how Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

But they have this relationship, so Jesus comes, enters the village and comes to Martha's house. It said it's not Mary's, but Martha is kind of the matron of this house.

And we also know that Jesus is not traveling alone. He's got his posse with him. And so they all come and that just dumps a huge responsibility onto Martha because hospitality in this culture is huge.

[8 : 12] It is, you have to be gracious. You have to serve and take care of the needs of the people that come into your house. And so, so she, Martha, is trying to be very responsible.

That's just the job that's laid on her. And so, as she's being hospitable, and notice Luke says that she welcomes them into her home.

But we also begin to see that the hospitality is only to a degree. Because she's invited them in, which is meant feeding them and so forth.

You know, but all the while, she's doing all of her job and she's fulfilling her responsibility. Mary is not in the kitchen helping her. Mary's not helping set the table.

She's not doing anything except sitting at the feet of the guest and listening to him talk. You know, maybe Martha wishes she was in there.

[9 : 31] I'm not sure. But it seems like Martha has something else very, very much on her mind.

and that is doing her job. Now, at this point, you're kind of thinking, so?

Of course she's going to do her job. And we're kind of sensing this empathy with Martha. I mean, what else is she going to do?

Is she going to let them go hungry? They got to eat? They have to be fed? Somebody's got to do it. And so it's like our sympathies, our hearts are kind of bending toward Martha here.

Because again, if you look at these two sisters, one of them is being responsible. But we also begin to see as Luke relates this story, there is something terribly amiss about Martha.

[10 : 45] She is, you know, she has this major job to do. She's trying to feed. She's working hard. But as she's working, there is no joy.

And we begin to see some things now coming out as she goes to Jesus and complains about her work.

And so in response to Martha's pleas for help, which again, we can all understand, Jesus scolds Martha.

So what's the problem here? Martha was doing her duty. She was not being immoral. She was being responsible.

The problem is not with what she was doing. The problem is why. The problem is not in her busyness.

[11 : 57] It is not in her trying to be responsible. The problem comes in because obviously here, as Luke is trying to draw out for us, she's trying to get something out of that for her fulfilling that

responsibility that Mary was actually getting from Jesus.

to be so what do we see here? Well, first, what Luke says there, you know, in verse 40, he says, but Martha was distracted.

It's interesting, she was distracted by what? it was her serving. It was her being responsible.

It was getting the job done. She wasn't being distracted from it, she was being distracted by it. And by Luke saying that, he's telling us that she should have been focused on something else.

But her work was taking her away from what should have been her central focus to something else.

[13:22] You know, maybe she, what was she trying to get out of it? I don't know. But she was going to her work for something, again, that she should not have been trying to get from it.

You know, the second thing we see is there's a sense of resentment that is building here too. And we could also add to that resentment a bunch of self-pity. And those two things very, very often go together.

I mean, look what she says. He says, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?

You can see the self-pity. He says, I'm all by myself. I've got all this work. Nobody cares for me. But you can hear also in that not just the self-pity, but again, she's getting angry.

She's getting angry at her sister because she feels abandoned with this work. And what Martha is trying to, the goal that Martha is trying to achieve, Mary should have been helping her achieve it, but now she's actually become an obstacle to her achieving it.

[14:46] And whatever Martha was hungry for, Mary is now seen as, again, that obstacle. hell. And then finally, the resentment, the self-pity, the distraction leads her to blaming.

Look what she says in that same phrase. She says, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? She's blaming two people.

First, she is blaming Mary. Basically said, I wouldn't be in this fix if my sister was not out there helping. But did you see who she's also blaming?

She's now blaming Jesus. Because she's saying, if you would have cared, if you loved me, you would be getting her to do her job.

And so Martha is accusing not only Mary of irresponsibility, she is accusing Jesus of not caring for her at all.

[16:15] And then it's funny. Well, at least, she said, she goes to Jesus. she's in distress, she is upset, and as Jesus says a little while she's troubled and anxious, but she goes to Jesus.

But what does she want from Jesus? Both sisters have now come to Jesus, but for two very different things. Mary has come to listen to his teaching.

it's not why Martha came. Martha comes to Jesus to get him to fix her life so that what she's trying to achieve can be achieved.

She's not coming to Jesus because of Jesus, she's coming to Jesus so that he'll fix her life and make it okay. She's pursuing something in her work.

She is hungry for something that her fulfilling that responsibility she thinks will satisfy and all she wants from Jesus is for him to satisfy the hunger she thinks she has and Jesus doesn't do it.

[17:43] he just doesn't do it. So basically in a sense we could even say this is Martha's prayer and I want you to take note of this because this is often our prayer.

Jesus my idols are hungry come and satisfy them. And Jesus said no way.

Why would I do that? So when we look at these women which one's more like you?

Well how would you know? When the pressure's on to get a job done is there a lot of joy in your life?

Is there a lot of joy? Are people happy to be around you? or do you tend to leave casualties all over the place?

[18:46] You know in our younger days when I could get down on a concrete floor and then actually get back up I used to work on my cars and I would be out there either changing the oil or changing the brakes or something like that and you know the kids would want to come out and be with me but after a while Gail learned it was dangerous not because they were going to get hurt from the car but it was there were other dangers lurking because I would get so intent and focused on fixing my car and getting it fixed right because I wanted to drive the car again and you think it's okay fine you need to focus you need to concentrate on getting that car fixed but I realized that there was something more I was getting out of fixing that car if

I didn't fix it right I had to go tell somebody and I could just dream of them saying oh who did that and so there was a sense of value in getting it done right and there was a huge sense of shame if I didn't and so fixing that car properly became my quest for identity and if anything or anyone got in the way it was not safe so what where is your what is it with you it may not be fixing the car it may be being a hostess having a dinner party where the object becomes much more oh these people are going to see how wonderful a host

I am not oh look how loved how much enjoyment there is to be with do we get angry at people when they frustrate us when the pressure is on you know do we lose perspective do we lose control and it just becomes a lot more fun for everybody just to vacate you know when I have a major to do list does that keep me from sitting at the feet of Jesus what gives me more of a sense of identity what gives me that sense of joy what is it that gives me that sense of security is it fulfilling the tasks or is it simply learning from him when our identity gets too wrapped up in how we perform or when our hospitality ministry to others becomes more of a demonstration of our decorating and social skills or when our reputation is now put on the line when we serve someone or that we're we get bent failure then maybe we need to be careful because at that point the more we have riding on what we produce the more likely it is that we have traded our doing and performing for

Jesus himself and our doing and performing has become our savior and not Jesus and so what Jesus is doing here with Martha is incredibly important because on one hand she wasn't so far off like an adulteress but on another hand she was just like the lawyer had failed to welcome Jesus so had Martha she welcomed him into her home but that's about as far as he got so the problem then for Martha was not that she was working hard she just needed to welcome Jesus and unfortunately this is a scary kind of a scary picture of what Luke had written what Jesus had said right at the end of chapter nine where he said no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of

God because in a lot of ways Martha had put her hand to the plow but she was not looking down the row so what's the difference in Mary's approach well Mary welcomed Jesus we would say well it really does seem like Mary was being irresponsible here but what Jesus is commending is that she has chosen not something that would only satisfy possibly maybe for a brief moment but she actually chose to go to the one who could satisfy her heart deeply Mary had the posture of a disciple and that is sitting at Jesus feet learning from Jesus being with Jesus and there is nothing more important there is nothing of more value there is nothing that will give us more satisfaction than that you know there's a

[25 : 14] Mary's priority we can see those three things one it was to learn from Jesus she was sitting there listening to his teaching and there was his words were satisfying to her soul she just sat at his feet and soaked it in you know in many ways I think Mary is is such an anomaly especially when we look at our modern culture Martha fits in with our modern culture not Mary and from the context of our modern culture we look at Mary and what she's doing and we think that's impossible because the high value for our culture is to be busy is to work I think for us the worst thing the worst insult you could say to somebody is that they're lazy they're not doing enough they're just sitting on their cans because if people you'll greet people they say how you doing it says oh life is really really busy it's like it's a badge of honor you you you know our kids are involved in everything under the sun our work occupies all our attention our extended families are all demanding our time our recreational pursuits our sports commitments on and on and on the list goes and one thing we don't do we don't sit at the feet of

Jesus because we think our souls are going to be satisfied through doing all these other things we're going to find our identity in these other things there just isn't time we are this distracted culture and society you know I have a terrible time being quiet I think you know we're going to talk about prayer in these next few weeks in chapter 11 and I haven't been looking forward to it because it convicts the stew out of me because every time I go sit down and pray as soon as I pray I start thinking I have a to do list and I don't do to do lists I don't get them until I start to pray and then when

I start to pray everything else in the world pops up that I ought to be doing that I got to remember that I got to do this and when I am able to pray it's most likely Jesus fixed my life so my idols I am so much like Martha so how do we cultivate our souls you know this is a challenge you know this is not just we live a life of contemplation of isolating ourselves from all the distractions putting away our phones and tablets heaven forbid how do we you know to be honest I'm not sure but

I know this I don't need to finish my to do list like I need Jesus I need if I'm going to remember in this life when I face my failures if I'm going to remember the forgiveness that was given to me by a savior who died if I'm going to remember the promises that are made to me by my heavenly father that will not fail if I'm going to remember and have the right perspective on this world that everything I see is temporary but a new kingdom is on the way if I'm going to remember that the power that is at work in me is far greater than any power out here if

I'm going to remember how much I am loved I have to go to the source and there feed my soul the news won't do it Facebook Twitter Instagram won't do it reading other just good books won't do it I need Jesus I need to run to him and feed on him and learn from him I need to cultivate a soul that is not distracted from the good portion and the good portion is Jesus himself I don't want to be [30 : 59] Martha it's exhausting and I'm left hungry but instead of this cheap snack that I'm pursuing in my doing Jesus offers a banquet a feast of grace of life of hope and of love where are you feeding your soul and why are you feeling hungry let's go to the source and choose the good portion because it alone is satisfying let's pray together father would you help us we we are helpless in this fight we know the truth we can understand what the truth is but yet to guide our hearts to that truth is impossible by your spirit would you speak to us would you change us and would you work in such a way that we'll be convinced that nothing else satisfies like

Jesus and then draw us to him and help us to choose life in its utmost fullness and we pray in his name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org