

One Necessary Thing, Part 2

Luke 10:38-42

While Mary is listening with rapt attention to Jesus' teaching, we can picture Martha walking by, right? She's got her hair pulled back. She's got her sleeves rolled up, apron fastened around her waist and every time she walks by, she's peeking in and she looks over at her sister and she's just sitting there. Again. I just walked by. She was sitting there before. Now, I've walked by again and she's just sitting there again. Doesn't she notice?

You can imagine Martha maybe signaling to her sister perhaps silently, mouthing words in ways that only women can communicate and understand, interpret with each other. Gritted teeth, you get over here. So if Mary noticed her sister at all, she's probably thinking, Hmm. Get up, serve my demanding sister, Martha, and her elaborate plan and miss this? Are you kidding me? I'm not going anywhere!

So Martha's impatience and irritation, it probably only cements Mary to the floor even more, right? Martha probably

rolls her eyes at first and then she starts to huff and then she puffs and then she just absolutely loses it right? And it's not pretty when she loses it. Look at verse 40. "She went up to Jesus and she said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve all alone? Tell her then to help me.'" Yikes!

Two verses earlier, Martha welcomed him into her house, sat at his feet. She's listening to his teaching. And now it's, "Lord, don't you care?" I mean, come on. I'm quite certain that whenever Martha thought back on this moment, pictured this scene, she could clearly see what was lost in the moment; all of her best-laid plans for her warmest hospitality and they're undermined by her arbitrary self-imposed expectations.

Several things to notice here in verse 40. First, it says, "She went up to him." Where's Jesus? He's sitting down. It's the posture of teachers at the time. A number of disciples, including her sister, Mary, they're surrounding him. So she's got to barge past them in the room in order to go up to him. So she's right in the front of the room making a scene here. The stated that she's in, that fire that's blazing in her eyes. It's not a problem. She's not really aware of anything else at the moment. No one's going to get in her way.

Second, though, notice what she said. "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve all alone?" The phrasing in the original portrays this as quite manipulative. She's saying, and this is the more literal rendering here, "Lord, is not a concern to you that my sister," and then it's moved up to the front for emphasis, "all alone me she has abandoned me to serve tables." That's what it, that's how it literally reads. Really dramatic, isn't it?

The way she put the question, though, she doesn't really believe that the Lord has no care for her. That's not, that's not her fault here. She actually assumes that he does care. She presumes that to be true, but she clearly thinks his care ought to then conform to her expectations. That's the issue. So with her emotions here unchecked, not really thinking this through, she's literally trying to manipulate the Lord of glory into getting him to do what she wants done.

So the idea is, Lord, if you care, and I know that you do, it's almost like she's wagging a finger in his face. Then you will agree with me and you would not be happy that my sister has left me alone to serve. So she's trying to burden him with her own personal plans and expectation. Because obviously, if anyone should know what real hospitality looks like, what, what caring

for guests ought to look like, well, the Lord should know, right? So what my sister is doing, that is not good.

Third thing, notice how she addresses Jesus here as Lord, but then she turns around and treats him like one of her servants. So it's, Lord, since you care that my sister has left me to serve all alone, and this is obviously a problem, let me give you a little direction on how you can demonstrate your care in this situation. Tell her then to help me. Aorist imperative there, summary command, very strong, very strongly stated.

So Martha, she's trying to leverage the weight of the Lordship of Christ, to use the sovereign authority of the king of God's kingdom to make sure her hospitality plans come off the way she intends. Again, yikes! Now before you condemn Martha, consider yourself. Think about the times in your own life, think about all the times that your own agenda, not the agenda of the sovereign Lord of the universe whom you confess to be your Lord and Savior, but your own agenda.

And consider how often, almost without thinking that your personal agenda sets the course for your days, for your weeks, for your months. How your own agenda fills in your calendar. Think about how often our prayers superimpose our own expectations onto God's will. And when our expectations are

unmet, think about how common it is to give way to the temptation that God doesn't care, how common to pray as if God's care should take the shape of our own plans and expectations, just as Martha did.

And I just want to point out, lest you cast stones at Martha, how much we're like Martha. I think in this text, most of us are meant to feel the sting of what Martha did here and not to identify with, oh, well, I'm more like Mary. No, we're supposed to sit in the seat of, well I guess be wrapped in the apron of Martha here. So it's not wise for us to treat the Lord like that, is it? The God of the universe, the Son of God who is our Lord and Savior, aren't his thoughts higher than our thoughts? Aren't his ways higher than our ways? So should he conform to us and serve to execute our expectations, which are so small, limited, trivial. Perhaps we should conform to him, carryout his wise and perfect plan.

So go easy on Martha in your judgment and turn the sights on yourself. Look more carefully and humbly at your own heart. Think about how often you've committed this sin. At the same time, don't let Martha or yourselves off the hook. Jesus does not let her off the hook. We shouldn't either. It takes us to a third point about his gracious correction of Martha. Martha's

fretting and fussing, hustling and bustling, trying to meet an arbitrary set of expectations, a false standard and her mindset, you need to understand this, her mindset has led her to sinning against Jesus.

That's what happened in verse 40. You need to see that as sin. Martha sinned against Christ and that is, you just have to know when she recognizes it, she's mortified. That's really troubling to her because that is the exact opposite of what she wanted to convey to Jesus Christ. She wanted him to, sho, know love, to know hospitality, to know her kindness, and care, and compassion, and feeding, and everything else, and this isn't what she intended. She started well. She was listening intently to Christ with rapt attention, just like her sister Mary was, but she stopped listening to Christ exclusively. This is our mistake, too.

She allowed unimportant distractions to carry her away. She let details take hold of her mind. And so Jesus very gently, lovingly, and tenderly, Jesus restores her. Jesus restores her, helping her to listen devotedly with singular affection. In verse 41, Jesus gently corrects Martha and in verse 42, he then redirects her anxious heart with just a word, a simple word of instruction. So first, look at the gentle, loving correction of

verse 41. It says, "The Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things,'" He repeats her name. What is that? It does several things. It gets her attention, number one. Calms her anxious heart, but I think most importantly, it expresses tender affection to her. He's not angry; loves her. He says, "Martha, Martha."

So this has a calming effect even as it commands her attention and directs it to him. Then he immediately acknowledges the trouble, her troubled state of mind. He's not wagging a finger in her face; he's actually being very kind and acknowledging. He says, "You're anxious and troubled about many things." He's not affirming her thinking. He's not commending it. He's not saying it's okay. He's just acknowledging it. He's letting her know he can see what's troubling her. He gets it.

And I've just got to say, as someone who teaches a lot and, you know, trying to hold people's attention and all the rest, this is just amazing to see Christ in action. He is occupied teaching a house full of eager, hungry learners, disciples and at the very same time, he's still cognizant of Martha's worries. He's still watching her. He's noticing her distracted frame of mind. He's attentive to her anxieties and frustrations. He doesn't belittle her. He's not minimizing anything. You just

have to see, just a footnote here, that there is no one like him, is there? We're not like that. He is. We can grow, but he's like that. That's the way he is.

When God commends his chosen Messiah to us through the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah 42, he actually highlights this characteristic of gentleness and tenderness. It says in Isaiah 42, "Behold, my," God is commending Christ to us. He says, "Behold, my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations." And you think, justice, power, strength, exactly what we would think of the warrior Messiah, king of Israel and then he says this about this one in whom his soul delights.

He says, "He will not cry aloud and," will, "not lift up his voice; or make it heard in the street," so he's a quiet, meek tender person. And then this, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench, and yet, he will faithfully bring forth justice." So he's in the middle of this proclaiming, expounding, preaching, teaching powerful great truths of God's kingdom. He's feeding this room full of hungry disciples. When he's interrupted here by one of his erring children, he just stops and shows loving tenderhearted



concern. He's compassionate toward Martha, even as he corrects her attitude, even as he redirects her thinking.

Again, think about your own correction of other people. And for us, it's mostly about just personal irritations. It's not, not about things that count or matter. Think about the way you correct, the way you deal with people. This, this always confronts me. He says, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things." To be anxious is the verb *merimnao* and it's represented as an undue concern about earthly things. It's, in Scripture, it's never commended, but always corrected. It's often condemned. And why is that? Because unbelief is always at the heart of anxiety. Unbelief is always there. Sin is at the core of an anxious attitude.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7, right in the middle of it, Matthew, chapter 6, Jesus corrects those who live with anxious thoughts and he tells them, "Do not be anxious about your life." And he tells them over and over. He says that in verse 25. He continues with that same verb *merimnao* over and over six times in just one paragraph. Don't be anxious about your food and drink, your body, your clothing, your life span, your future, none of that.

Think about our world that we live in and think about all the advertising that comes at us incessantly, just bombarding us. What do they all have in common? Those things: food, drink, body, clothing, health, the need to mitigate against a dark and foreboding future, all of that. We're bombarded with messaging that says, be anxious, worry, be disconnected. Here, here's the product. Here's the thing that's going to fix all that. Here's the pill that's going to take away your anxiety. Here's the next purchase that's going to make you feel better about the future, better about your present. All the rest. Jesus says don't do that.

She is totally distracted. She has dragged all over the place with her attention focused on too much serving. She's divided in her interests. She's turned away from Christ. She's turned away from his teaching. She's become anxious about all the things she's not supposed to become anxious about: food, drink, too much serving. She's taken her eyes off of that simplicity of devotion to Christ. And now her soul is ill at ease and troubled.

I'm just trying to emphasize there's singlehearted devotion for Christ and that's what Martha has been distracted from, is singlehearted devotion so she's troubled. She's *thorybazo*. She's

mentally disturbed. She is emotionally upset and agitated. She's in a state of turmoil. So her peace has departed from her. It's gone and she's become unstable, doubleminded and all the rest. And so, in the face of Martha's inappropriate sinful attempt to manipulate Jesus, he has responded so gently. She's been in an unthinking emotional huff and she's registered an unjust complaint against her sister.

Then she tried to leverage Jesus' authority to compel her sister to get up and march to her orders and notice his response. When he answers, it's not with harshness. It's not with reprimand or scolding. He answers by acknowledging her state of mind, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and trouble about many things," really about too many things. Distracted by the self-imposed expectations of service, anxious about many things, overcome to this troubled state of mind, she's overlooked the point, the point of all of her hospitality.

What is it? Jesus is there. He's there. He's in her own home. In the flesh. The prophesied Messiah is in material form, human form right in front of her and she's missing the point. He's teaching the word of God, the very word that she loves, the very word she believes. And she's completely, her mind is elsewhere. So it is time for her to put away all distractions,

set aside all of her human, small, trivial expectations and reduce the needs of service for the moment to the bare minimum. Because someone extraordinary is in front of her. And he is saying some extraordinary things.

So he says, "Martha, Martha, you're anxious and trouble about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." Hospitality is a good thing, isn't it? But it's not better than Christ being present. It's not better than the teaching of the word of God. An excellent meal in a warm and friendly home in the company of friends and family, that is good. But it's not the best thing, though, especially when Jesus is there, when he's in the flesh and when he's teaching the Bible. Who wants a Bible study with the Messiah? I do!

So those who recognize the difference between what's good, better, and best, that calls for wisdom, doesn't it? Those who are willing to sacrifice the good and favor the best, they are those who, as Jesus says here, will never lose that good portion. Like Mary, the good portion will never be taken away. So what specifically won't be taken away from Mary? Well, Christ, the Lord, the hope of the Gospel and his precious word. That won't be taken away. That is the very treasure of heaven.

It won't be taken away from Martha either because she's a true believer. But what will be taken away from Martha are all the things that distracted her. All of the things that she counted as so important in the moment, gone. They're not gonna last. So her role as mistress and hostess, the burden of responsibility that she felt for hospitality, her responsibility to feed hungry guests, to serve food, provide comfort, clean the house, clean up after everybody leaves, all the rest, none of that's going to last. None of that's going to be around forever.

Clean homes, nice things, comfortable furniture, all that's going to pass away. Education, careers, promotions, all of our human ambitions and interests, wealth, power, opportunity, all of that passes away when that trumpet sounds, right, When Christ returns. J.C. Ryle says, "Martha's mistake should be a constant warning to all Christians. If we wish to grow in grace, we must beware of the cares of this world. Unless we watch and pray, these cares will eat up our spirituality and bring leanness upon our souls. It is not open sin or flagrant breaches of God's commandments alone, which lead people to eternal ruin. Most often, it is an excessive attention to things which in themselves are lawful. We may go down to the pit of hell from the middle of lawful things."

That's a good warning, isn't it? Especially as we're studying this matter of prayer. Generally speaking, it is not because of the pursuit of evil that keeps Christians from praying. Christians are not pursuing evil, they hate evil. It's the pursuit of good things, like helping kids with schoolwork or answering emails or knocking out our to-do lists for the day. Cleaning, cleaning, cleaning, laundry, laundry, all the rest, right. It's all that stuff.

Let's not become distracted or so distracted by the good. We shouldn't become distracted by the good at the expense of the better or the best. So don't be like those who hear the Word of God, those people who go on their way and they're choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life and their fruit doesn't mature because they're taking too many vacations. Instead, "You seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you."

And that is what Martha needed to hear, that her heart might here be redirected to Christ, recalibrated of what truly matters in life to the only necessary thing. Listening to Jesus Christ with a, with a view to worship or the view to a submissive heart and obedient faith, that is what matters most to Christ. That's what makes him feel welcomed that you're

hospitable. It's what honors him. It's what shows a receptive heart. It's what pleases him the most.

As J.C. Ryle puts it, "We need to make soul business our first business and think comparatively little of the things of this world." So what Christ counts as hospitality when it comes to receiving him is a heart to listen to his voice, to serve him, to worship him by humble submission and a zealous obedience. That's greater to him than the very best meal you could serve. That's better to him than the warmest home environment with the most comfortable seating. It's better than any gifts you might receive. Obedience is better than sacrifice, right? Contrition of heart and humility better than all sacrifice.

So whatever Mary's faults or shortcomings, and she had them, we know that, whatever they were, she seemed to know instinctively here that listening to Jesus, being intent on worshiping, obeying him, that is the fundamental way that one receives Jesus Christ. Single-minded, wholehearted, singularly devoted, that's what she was. And Mary, then is a model for all of us about how to listen carefully and submissively and obediently. We learn from Mary's example because that is how we receive Christ.

So just to put a little epilogue on this story, did Martha ever settle her heart here? Did she listen? Did she learn to listen to Jesus intently, and exclusively, and devotedly? Did she receive the correction that Jesus gave and follow his instruction? You better believe it! And it's a good thing. It's so good to see her strengths come out, as well, in Scripture. Mary's testimony to Jesus is precious, but we could see hers here is a silent testimony, for the most part, in Scripture. She's quietly listening at Jesus' feet, worshiping and devotion. We never hear her speak here.

Less than a week before Jesus' crucifixion, it's the same Mary who's going to anoint Jesus' feet with the, an expensive perfumed ointment and she's going to wipe his feet with her hair. Again, her actions testify to a loving devotion, but again, in that context, we don't hear her speak there either.

By contrast, Martha does speak in Scripture. She's like a female Peter. Sometimes she's speaking when she shouldn't, as we read in verse 40. Other times, like Peter, what she says is profoundly important, theologically pinpoint accurate and so very helpful. And we all do well to take notice to that, to listen when she gives a verbal testimony of the truth.



There's another tender moment at a, at a later time, closer to Jesus' crucifixion, where her brother has died and Jesus is in town and she doesn't know it, but he's going to raise Lazarus from the dead. But Jesus says to Martha in that moment in John 11:25, he says, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, though he die yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." He looks her in the eye and he says, "Do you believe this?" And she said, "Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world." Isn't that interesting because that is exactly what Peter said, isn't it? "Flesh and blood did not reveal that to her either, but the Father who's in heaven." So it looks like Martha and Mary both, they both learned how to listen, how listen intently, exclusively, and devotedly.

What about you? How are you guarding your own heart? How are you protecting your own heart, your family, your home from the demands of false expectations that perhaps you yourself set on your home? Even good distractions, even good things that you must get done in your life, is it taking the place of the better or even the best thing? Do you set your heart to listen well and pay close attention to the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ? You, too, are going to experience all the joy, the blessing of the saving Gospel, find rest for your soul like Mary did at the feet

of Jesus Christ. She chose the good portion which will not be taken away from her. And that's what we inherit, too, when we listen carefully.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for this special text of Scripture, that this unique passage in Luke's Gospel that he records and no one else does and we're so grateful that you chose to insert this account into the record for our benefit because we are all, all of us, at times like Martha. We can become so easily distracted by, by a lot of good things. But that list of good things can become so consuming and overwhelming, and we need your help to set aside the distraction, clear away the clutter that we might see our way every single day, to sit at Jesus' feet, to listen carefully to him, listen intently to him, exclusively to him, devotedly to him, so that we might have our souls fed through his lifegiving word. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.