



“First Things First”

Luke 10:38 - 42

February 17, 2019

This morning as we open to Luke Chapter 10, we have before us the tale of two sisters, two fantastic sisters in the Lord. One of the sisters was named Mary, and the other was named Martha.

When those two names are mentioned in a circle of Christian women, I often find that those names are met with facial smirks and familiar chuckles. Even yesterday when I mentioned to Kristy that I was preaching on the story of Mary and Martha, she responded, *Oh boy! Here we go.* This is a passage of Scripture that hits close to home for a lot of people.

In this portion of Scripture, we meet Mary and she was a picture of serenity. She was calm and quiet, sitting at the feet of the Lord and listening to His truths being taught. In addition to her, we are introduced to Martha. Martha came on like a locomotive. She was determined to get things done, and making sure that things were done well.

Among the sisters in the Lord, I wonder how many of you look at this picture of Mary and say that you want and need to be like that. You want to be a woman sitting at the feet of Jesus, contemplating Scripture and quietly receiving the will of God through His truth. You want to be like Mary.

But even in that desire, what you find is that the inner Martha rises up. She reminds you of everything that needs to get done. She reminds you that if you don't get it done, nobody will get it done. Even if they try to get it done, they won't do it right.

We have this story of Mary and Martha and the Lord Jesus at the end of the story, He spoke into all our hearts. He has a word for those among us who tend to be highly driven people who find it difficult to slow down and soak in the Word of the Lord.

This is a message that I think will really minister to the hearts of the sisters in Christ, but also to the men among us. I wonder how many men are hoping to be more like Mario, quiet in the presence of the Lord but your inner Marty tells you no, there are things to do so get it done.

The Lord is going to speak into all our hearts and lives through this passage. Jesus will encourage us with this message of *First Things First*. Let's get into his passage as see what the story brings.

Let's read Luke Chapter 10 and Verses 38 through 42, where we will see the situation laid out before us. Then at the end of this passage, we will hear Christ speak to us. Verse 38:

³⁸Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹And she had a sister Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰But 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? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴²but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Here we have the tale of two sisters. It is something of a story of sibling rivalry from the First Century that echoes forth with so much meaning into the Twenty-First Century as well.

Many good Bible teachers that I have read in preparation for this morning, they kind of detect two personality types in this story. I would agree with that. There is Mary that tended to be one way, then there is Martha that tended to be wired another way.

First, we have Martha. She was the first born. She was the older sister. She was the planner and the driver. She was the one who had a to do list and she intended to check off every last item on that to do list. She meant to get things done.

Martha might have been like the girl who came home from school. She puts her backpack in its proper place, and checks the chores chart. Then she begins to chop the different ingredients for dinner that night. She has everything nailed down. That is kind of like how Martha was.

Then we have Mary. She comes floating in after a very thoughtful walk home. She might come home and settle into a good book. Maybe she thinks back on all the things that were done and said at school that day. Perhaps she wants to open her journal and reflect on things in there. Maybe she just wants to stop, pour a cup of tea and have a nice slow and careful conversation about life and all that it holds.

One author said in a book written about Mary and Martha: *Well, Mary is the type that likes to walk through the garden of life and slow down, smell the roses, and look at them in all their fine detail, noticing all the exquisite beauty of it all. Then Martha is the type that might enter in and clip the rose, cut it at an angle, pluck off all the thorns, wrap a few of those roses in Babies Breath, and put it in a beautiful vase for everybody to appreciate and enjoy.*

We have different kinds of people in this story. We bring this into the disciplines and the practices of the Christian life and see that there are some people that tend to be like Mary or her male counterpart Mario.

Maybe it is easier for them to gravitate toward reflective disciplines. They like solitude and being alone. They like to study and dig deep into the Word of God. They want to mediate on Scripture and pray and fast. These are the aspects of the Christian life that some people are drawn to.

Then there are some like Martha. They go nuts if they are not active and getting things done. They are drivers and doers. They lunge toward serving, administrating, mobilizing people, fighting for justice, getting things done in Jesus Name. They need to do something.

So, we have these two types of people who are wired differently. I notice among my circle of fellowship that sometimes people tend to be one way or the other. I tend to be more like Mario than like Marty! However, both these aspects of the Christian life are absolutely biblical. Both aspects are necessary for growing and maturing Christian living.

We ought to have both these aspects present in our lives. Every Christian should be deeply interested in doctrine and studying Bible truths about the Lord, soaking it in and understanding it carefully and letting it have its way in our hearts.

Likewise, every single Christian should be very, very careful to be active in the service of the Lord—being servant-hearted, blessing people in the Name of Jesus in practical ways and getting things done for the Lord Jesus Christ. Every Christian should be quiet in the presence of God daily. Every Christian should be active in the purposes of God daily. This is the Christian life.

If I am understanding Jesus in the passage of Scripture correctly, one of those aspects is primary. One of those aspects comes first, then the other comes after. One is the fountain. The other is the flow. One is the root. The other is the fruit that is produced.

First and foremost, we need to be people who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, taking time to know Him, to worship Him, and to understand Him that we might rightly serve Him and represent Him in this world that so badly needs to hear about Him, and in a church that needs to be built up in Him.

I pray that we will see this as we take a closer look at this passage of Scripture. We are all going to be like Mary here this morning. We are going to slow down and really take a close look at what is written for us here in this passage of Scripture.

I see the story unfold in three parts that I would like for us to walk through together this morning. First, we will see a scene of serenity. Then we will see a burst of irritability. Finally, we will hear a voice of authority that speaks to resolve the issue.

First, let's notice how there is:

1. A Scene of Serenity (38-39)

Verses 38 and 39 really is a beautiful picture. Verse 38:

³⁸Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.

This is so refreshing in view and in contrast to some of the recent things that we have studied together in the Gospel of Luke. Luke Chapter 10 ends in a more beautiful way than Luke Chapter 9.

Do you remember how recently Jesus was moving toward a Samaritan village, and Jesus wanted His disciples to go ahead and make sure they had a place to stay? That Samaritan village did not welcome Jesus. That village rejected Him. Since Jesus was going to Jerusalem, they told Him that He could just keep going to Jerusalem, and not stop there.

Right after that, there was a would-be disciple who told Jesus that he would follow Him anywhere He went. Jesus told that man that foxes have holes. The birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no where to lay down His head. That was just a description of the ongoing rejection that Jesus got in His earthly ministry.

Jesus was rejected a lot but here in contrast to that, we have Martha, our precious sister in the Lord, letting Jesus know that He was welcome there. They were so glad He was there, and invited Him into their home to stay and eat. She wanted to serve the Lord Jesus. Isn't that a just beautiful picture?

Then we move on to what else is here in this story. The scene is sweetened even more when we look at what it says in Verse 39:

³⁹And she had a sister Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.

Not only was the Lord Himself welcomed and honored in that place, but so was His truth and His teaching. You really can't separate the two, for He is the way. He is the truth. He is the life.

But here we see that His word was being received by Mary. She was sitting at His feet, listening attentively. She was captivated by what Jesus was saying. She was tuned in. Her mind was being informed. Her heart was being filled. Her soul was being nourished by the Living Word of the Lord. Christ and His word, it was getting the reception that it deserved. What a beautiful scene this is so far. Hallelujah, how wonderful!

At this point I must pause and ask: How about in your life? Is the Messiah and the inseparable Word of the Messiah—you can't separate Jesus from His teaching and His truth and His proclamation—is Jesus being warmly welcomed and rightly honored in your life?

Is He seated as Lord? The precious Messiah who spilled His blood for us. I read this scene I could not help but think about another scene that is depicted in Revelation Chapter 3, where there was a church that was described in Asia Minor, the church of Laodicea. It was the lukewarm church.

The Laodicea church had all the worldly comforts and luxuries, and they grew complacent in their walk with Christ in the midst of all the things that they had. The amazing thing about the story in Revelation Chapter 3 is that it was a church, but Jesus was not depicted as being within the church and the fellowship of the people.

Jesus was on the outside looking to get in. He was knocking to get in. Revelation Chapter 3 and Verse 20:

²⁰Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anybody hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

This is a picture of fellowship as we hear the voice of the Lord. It is Christ being rightly honored and welcomed into our daily routine as the Truth Giver. Are you communing with Christ? Is He in your life? Believe in Jesus. Believe in Jesus!

If there happens to be anybody visiting with us today or hearing this message in any form or fashion, this relationship with Jesus Christ begins with understanding that you are a created being. And Christ is the very Creator who came into this world.

The teaching of Scripture is that Jesus, the Son of God, He pre-existed His entry into the world as Jesus of Nazareth. He is the Son of God. He created everything including you. You are made in the image of Jesus. You are made in the image of God.

But each and every one of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We have not sinned accidentally, but we have deliberately violated God's moral will. We have committed idolatry. We don't worship the Lord like we ought to.

The Living God is neglected, and His truth is abandoned, and His teaching is dishonored by so many people. This is the case for each one of us. This neglect incurs the right judgment of the Holy Living God.

Praise the Lord, Jesus came into the world to save such sinners. He came into the world to live a perfect life of obedience in our place. Jesus came into the world to die on the cross where He would receive the payment from the just hand of God that our sin deserved in order to satisfy the righteousness of God.

Jesus came into the world to pay the price. He came into the world to pay your sin debt. When you turn from sin and trust in Christ for forgiveness, that is how you enter into a relationship with Christ. But, understand that you are to walk with Christ. He is to the Lord of your life and you are to invite His truth into your heart and daily routine. He is the Lord.

For each one who is now in Christ, are you paying attention to Him and His Word? There is a beautiful picture in this passage of Scripture of Christ getting this right reception. We need to be those who walk with the Lord.

We continue in this story. It begins with a scene of serenity. So far, so good, but as we know, trouble was brewing. Even those who are in Christ can tend to get frustrated sometimes. Even those who are followers of the Lord can get sidetracked, so that the first things are not first like they ought to be.

Something was going on here and we see it happening with our dear sister in the Lord, Martha. Let's see what happens next as we see:

2. A Burst of Irritability (40)

It says in Verse 39 again:

**³⁹And she had a sister Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.
⁴⁰But Martha was distracted with much serving...**

This is an interesting choice of words. Verse 40 says that Martha was distracted. It does not say that she was occupied with serving. It does not say that she was focused in on the task at hand of serving. It says that *she was distracted with much serving*. That word *distracted* indicates to us that her attention was not where it ought to have been.

Imagine a dad on a camping trip with his kids. The trip is meant to be a lot of good time being together. But that dad is so focused on pitching the tent perfectly. He is also consumed with stacking the firewood in the perfect teepee tent, so that the fire will catch fire and blaze. The dad is so focused on the proper application of the bug repellent and keeping the food area perfectly tidy so that no little critters can invade.

That dad is so focused on all these details, but the trip comes and goes, and he never spent any time focused on the kids, telling stories around the fire. That never happened. We would say that dad was distracted. Peripheral things were in the center, rather than staying on the periphery where they should be.

So, we have our sister Martha. Verse 40 says that she was distracted with much serving. The Greek word underlying the English word *distracted* is *perispao*. It is a compound word in the Greek. That means that it has one Greek word with a prefix attached to it.

Perispao literally means to be pulled in all kinds of different directions. The Greek word *spao* means to pull, to tug something. *Peri* means all around, like a periscope in a submarine that can look in all directions. So, Martha was being pulled all over the place but not into the presence of Jesus, the guest of the house.

This verse also says that Martha was distracted with *much* serving. That is the Greek word for large, a huge amount of serving. She was distracted with all the many great details. When I was reflecting on that sentence, I began sniffing something out.

When guests are coming to the home, is there ever a tendency for sisters in the Lord to go over the top in making an exquisite and perfect home in every way? Every glass needs to be washed. Every window needs to be sparkling clean. Every last little speck needs to be vacuumed up off the floor. The centerpiece and napkins ought to match. Does that ever happen? It is not a gender thing, because I tend to get that way too!

Likewise, there was a flurry of activity happening with Martha. It would seem that Martha was a high achiever. She was going through her house like a hurricane, making sure that all the details were in place. Martha was distracted with much serving.

It seems that Martha was getting kind of irritated since she was the only one getting things done, because her frustration reached its boiling point. It began spilling over from the pot. She was a frustrated sister in the Lord.

We see this when we continue reading in Verse 40:

⁴⁰But 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? Tell her then to help me.”

What was Jesus doing at the moment when Martha stepped up? Was this not the Master teaching His disciples? He was teaching in the main room. But Martha was not a happy lady at that point, evidenced by the fact that she stormed right up in the middle of His teaching.

Then Martha asked Jesus a question. Then she gave Him instruction: Martha felt things were not right and asked Jesus if He cared about it. Then she instructed Jesus. She gave the Lord an imperative. She told Jesus to tell her sister to help! She just laid it out. It was serious and boiled up inside of her.

I grabbed on to that phrase *don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone*. That has the nuance of departing or abandoning. The indication is that there was a point in time when Mary was helping with all the details and serving. Then, after a time, Mary was not involved. She went from helping with all the details to sitting under the presence of the Lord.

We must wonder how that scene went down. It could have happened in a confrontational way or it could have happened more subtly. If it was confrontational, perhaps Mary realized that Martha had a picture in her mind of how special serving Jesus could be, but got tired of taking orders from her older sister.

Maybe Mary came to the point of realizing that the Lord of glory was sitting in her living room teaching like no one else. Unlike the rabbis, Jesus did not require the women to sit on the perimeter or in another room. Rather, He invited them right into His presence. Mary just realized it was time for her to go and listen. It could have been something like that, or it could have been something more subtle.

Maybe Mary had been working on all the details of preparation, but one of her responsibilities took her into the room where Jesus was teaching, and Mary was taken in by the teaching that He was giving. She was drawn in and soon enough she was seated absolutely taken in by everything that Jesus taught.

It is easy to get carried away thinking about how this scene went down but, in the end, who knows? But something like that must have happened. However, what we do know is that Martha was upset, and she wanted the issue to be resolved.

Do you remember how we talked about how the disciples, according to Dr. J. Vernon McGee, they put themselves on the Board of Directors to tell the Lord Jesus Christ what to do? And now we have the Chairwomen of the Board of Directors telling the Lord Jesus what to do.

Martha accessed the situation and told Jesus that He was not rightly concerned about the situation, and needed to do something. She then told Him what He needed to do. Wow! The people of God need to be very careful about what might rise up within them.

We need to have a little bit of humility, especially in the times of frustration and especially at times when we are consternated, and somebody is not doing what we think they should do. We get upset and shoot off an email or text to them that might backfire!

Rather, we need to pull back, chill, let the blood pressure drop, and think how Jesus might respond. In this particular situation, Jesus did respond. We continue and see:

3. A Voice of Authority (41-42)

Jesus' voice of authority spoke forth with all grace and with such a kind spirit, but with a straight forward reply. Verses 41 and 42:

⁴¹But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴²but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

What is very interesting to me about this is that Jesus used food language here with the language of the *portion*. It is almost as though there was a spread that was laid out at the dinner table, with different dishes to draw from. And Mary took from the most nourishing and satisfying and health-giving dish.

Mary was feeding herself well, and the Lord was saying, *No, Martha, she has chosen the better portion and it is not, it is not, going to be taken away from her. In other words, she ought to be listening to my teaching right now. She is doing what she should be doing.*

Jesus answered Martha in a straightforward way. What we see here is that Jesus also gave this diagnosis of Martha's condition and the remedy for it. We see the diagnosis in Verse 41:

⁴¹But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things

This is a picture of stress that was overcoming our sister in the Lord, Martha. Jesus used two words to describe that stress—anxious and troubled. The word anxious is a mind word. The

Greek for anxious is *merimnao*. *Nao* is mind and *merim* is the division of mind. It is like the mind is going in all kinds of different directions.

How many of you know what it is like when different thoughts and details or things that could happen spin around in your mind? This anxiety is a description of what was happening in the mind of Martha.

Then Jesus told Martha that she was troubled about a great many things. That is a condition of what was happening in her heart and stomach. Jesus told His disciples, *Do not let your hearts be troubled*. Jesus used the exact same kind of language here.

I tend to experience anxiety, and I experience it much more than I ought to. It starts in my head and it moves its way to my stomach. I think that both these things are depicted here as Jesus told Martha that she was anxious and troubled about so many things.

I wonder how many of us know what that is like. Living in this society when life goes at such a frenzied pace, there are so many things to do and so much work to be done. Wherever you work, your laptop goes home with you. Whenever you go on a vacation, your smartphone goes with you. As a result, it can be very challenging to find that time of rest. We must prioritize it.

Verse 41 was Jesus diagnosing the situation. Then He gave a remedy in Verse 42:

⁴²but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

I am thinking back to the Psalm that Chris read this morning. In Psalm 27:4, David said:

**⁴One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to inquire in his temple.**

There is one thing, and here we have Mary gazing upon the beauty of the Lord, hearing the truth of the Lord—not in the temple, but in the living room. Jesus said, *One thing is necessary and at this moment, Mary is the depiction of what is necessary in this life*.

We need to have the bread of life consumed, the Living Word of God, in us. This is the one thing that is necessary. This is what it boils down to. First and foremost, first things first, it is knowing Jesus Christ personally, taking in His truth.

We need to slow down so that our Creator, our Savior, our Risen Lord, can speak into our hearts eternal truth and perspective, conveying His grace and love and wisdom to us. That is first—knowing Christ is first and receiving from Him His grace through His truth. That is first and foremost.

The events mentioned in this passage of Scripture happened. Imagine when Jesus and His team approached the house. Then Martha came out, and what did she do? She welcomed Jesus. She told Jesus that He was most welcome in her house. He was welcomed and desired in her home. She asked Him to make Himself at home in her home.

Then Martha probably excused herself because she had some details to attend to. She had so many things she wanted to get ready. But there was Jesus in the living room. Do you see that picture? Because that is what happened there.

I wonder how many of us have Christ in our lives. We believe. The Holy Spirit has given us understanding. We are sinners and Jesus is the answer. We need Jesus. He is in our lives, but we are spinning around with so many of the details of life so that we are not communing in fellowship with Christ. That was the issue here, and Jesus said to Martha

⁴²but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

We cannot, we simply cannot, go wrong by carving out an hour or more every day where we are quiet in the presence of the Lord, with His truth washing over our souls and responding to His truth with concerns and prayers. You can't go wrong, and the Lord won't take that away from you. We are designed for that. We need time in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

There are two absolute priorities in the Christian life that are presented to us in the passage of Scripture. One of them is time spent with Jesus, receiving and knowing His presence, hearing His truth. This one of the vital aspects of the Christian life. The second vital aspect of the Christian life is serving Jesus by being active, getting things done, bearing fruit, and doing things well.

Both aspects are vital. Both aspects are involved in true Christianity, but first things first. If we are to rightly do the one, we must first do the other. We need time spent in the presence of Jesus Christ.

How are you doing? Are you spending time with Jesus? Do you have a quiet time? Is your quiet time the exception or the rule? Say you carved out an hour for Jesus. Is that the first time in a year, or is that your daily routine? What is the exception and what is the rule?

Life in this world can be so stressful. I need to confess to you that I deal with anxiety, and if I did not spend that time with Jesus by getting up early and asking Him to get me through the day, I would be even more of a wreck than I often am. We need Jesus, and we need that time with Him.

I want to go back and say something else: Details are beautiful and pleasing in the sight of the Lord, like the beauty of our church with its stained-glass windows. Somebody did that for the Lord at some point. All the place settings and centerpieces, these are elements of creativity that

God has put into us, and they are good. Do those things, but not to the exclusion of time with Christ.

If we flurry around like the Tasmanian devil of Loony-Tunes with details and not spending time with Jesus, He might tell us that we are anxious and troubled about a great many things. We need the grace, presence, and the truth of Jesus washing into our hearts daily. So, we need to read the Bible and pray the Bible. Read good books that teach the Bible in a sound and rightly-divided way. We need teaching.

Listen to me: A Christian is a disciple. A disciple is a student. We are a lifelong careful learner of the everlasting, infallible truths of God. If we are not taking these in, how will we be transformed by the renewing of our mind?

We need to dwell in the presence of Jesus, then He will push us out into the different ways He has uniquely gifted us to be a blessing to others. But when we are blessings to others, we won't be like a storm cloud with thunder and lightening crashing down as well. We need to rest in the presence of the Lord.

What we have here in this text is does not negate what we read in I Corinthians 15:58

⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Christians ought to break a sweat with details. But if it is to the exclusion of fellowship with Christ, then we are neglecting something, and we need to repent of the sin of neglecting a relationship with Jesus by which He is speaking into our lives.

We need to be those who walk with Jesus, and hear from Jesus, and serve Jesus. When we put Mary and Martha together, both of them focused on Jesus but with different internal wiring, they just needed to be balanced out.

The Mary's need to be a little bit more like Martha. People can't just sit and read, read, read and study eight hours a day and not actually do anything practical to help anybody out, unless, of course, that studying issues forth in writings that help others. There is a labor that comes from that. For those of you who are like Martha, you need to be more like Mary just slowing down and finding that time to be with Jesus.

In conclusion:

The Word + Prayer = Intimacy with God

But I think I need to adjust that formula.

The Word + Prayer + Time = Intimacy with God

We must not rush our devotional time—getting our little five-minute reading in—so we can check it off our lists. It is good to have those quick times all throughout the day, but we need time with the Lord. Carve it out. Make it a priority. We must make it so that we are determined to spend time with Jesus, that He might have His truth lifting our countenance and helping us to walk in His ways.

Let's close in a word of prayer.