

Here's a question that I'm not sure we ask ourselves often enough. Or if we do, we don't really consider the answer to it carefully enough. How should I spend my time? Can you remember the last time you asked yourself that? We do, sometimes. Sometimes it's because we have a ton of different things to get done and we're not sure which needs to be given priority. For others it's because we have nothing but free time and we're not sure what to pursue in our leisure time. But as I said, I'm not sure this is a question we really consider carefully enough. Sure there may have been times when you have to decide whether to watch TV or read a book or go for a walk. Or times when you have to decide whether to clean the car out or go take care of the bills. But even while doing all that, we tend to just go with what happens to us next, deal with life as it comes, jumping from one thing to the next and all the while we're failing to take a look at our lives as a whole. That can lead to a few different problems and today our Lord tries to steer us to understand the outlook we should have on life. <read text: Luke 10:38-42>

The story is as familiar as any in Scripture. Jesus (and his disciples) are taken in as guests at the home of Mary and Martha. Martha, pursuing the duties of a host, is rushing to make the necessary preparations to accommodate the sudden baker's dozen of guests she had. Mary, on the other hand, was content to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to him talk. Martha gets irate, seeing her sister idle while she's working her heart out to take care of the people under her care for the night. "Lord!" she says, "Look at how hard I'm working for you and Mary's doing nothing! Tell her to get up and help me! Don't you care how much pressure I'm under here?"

And Jesus provides the famous reply "**Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.**" (v41,42). Martha was diligently working so hard on the wrong things. She was worried about dinner and accommodations for her guests, but she was seemingly oblivious to what it meant to have these guests under her roof, or more specifically, Jesus. It's not like she didn't realize the significance of who Jesus was; she calls him "Lord". But she was so concerned about the details, she was missing the point. None of what she was worried and upset about was necessary. Only one thing was needed, and she hadn't realized it yet.

Because what would've happened if the group went to bed without dinner or had to sleep on the floor? Yeah, it would've been uncomfortable, but they still would've woken up the next day. What would've happened if Jesus were not there? Okay, that's an ambiguous question. Big scale, what if Jesus had never come? They would've all died, they would've all stood before the judge of the universe, and they *all* would've been pronounced guilty. It was absolutely necessary that Jesus come to this earth and pay for their crimes and our crimes. Without his perfect life and his willing sacrifice, none of us would have any hope of anything. He had to be there, and his being there was the most important thing in all of history.

But even narrow the question a bit. What if Jesus hadn't stopped at that house that night? What if no one told Mary and Martha about Jesus who was there to save them? Or even what if he were there and they didn't listen to him? It is the message of salvation that the Holy Spirit uses to create trust in Jesus and it is that trust, that faith that is the means by which we are saved. If this household had never heard Jesus' message, then they would be just as lost as if Jesus never walked the earth! It was absolutely necessary that they *hear* his message.

There were a lot of things to be done that night, but only *one* of them was needed. With the message of Jesus they would live forever with their God. Without it they would be condemned to eternal death. Whether the food got served or the beds got made did not make a difference in the balance. It didn't matter. Listening to God's Word was the only thing that was *needed* that night.

Now with that in mind, I'd like you to consider your life in light of this event. If your life were a night with Jesus in the house, which role would you be playing? Would you be Martha, running this way and that, perhaps listening in on what Jesus has to say every time you happen to walk by him? Or would you be Mary, diligently sitting at your Lord's feet, giving him the attention that he deserves because of who he is and because of what he can do and has done for you?

Okay, that's a pretty black and white question and doesn't really explore some of the issues involved. So let's take some time to dig a little deeper into this. The premise Jesus puts before us is simple. Listening to him is the single most important thing that can happen in your life. It is the *only* thing that is needed in your life. There're hundreds of other things that are useful, beneficial, nice, fun whatever. But only Jesus, only his message is *needed*. And not just needed once for all. Trust in him is created by the Spirit and fed by the Spirit through his word. Without being fed, that trust dies. The less we feed it, the greater chance we give it to starve, the more we risk losing the only thing we need.

If that's true, shouldn't we just spend every waking moment reading and listening to God's Word? No, not only is that absurd, it goes against the Word itself. Let's not extrapolate this evening too far, the question is one of attitudes. Is Jesus and his word the central point around which our human lives revolve, or is he in the house of our lives and we're just sort of aware that he's there, but we're too busy with other things to give him any amount of full attention?

Too often we fall into the latter category, the "Martha" mode. But it's not like we do it on purpose, that's something else entirely. Martha wasn't trying to snub Jesus. She just was so distracted she didn't really see what was going on. And that's what can happen to us if we're not watching for it. The world itself is at odds with our God and it seeks constantly to keep us in that state of mind we talked about at the beginning. The one that just goes and deals with the never ending stream of *things* without ever stopping to think about where our life is really going. We know, intellectually, that God is important. We understand that without him we are lost forever, and we're constantly meaning to give him some more time and attention, when we get the chance.

But it doesn't work that way. We need to take a conscious and directed stand against the distractions of the world for this to work. We need to stand behind the statement that Jesus is all that is truly needed. I'm not saying you quit your job or go without food or water. But I'm saying you make him a priority. Priority number one. Until you sit down and compare what it is sucking up your time against what Jesus is giving you in his word, you are never going to find enough time for him. The world will not stop trying to distract you and all of it will seem oh-so important until you make a conscious effort to put it all away and sit at the master's feet.

And the amazing thing is that the more we sit and listen, the more we come to understand how little else there is to get worried or upset about. Sure, there are other things we need to *do* beyond just hearing God's word. God expects us to put our faith into action. He expects us to fill the roles he's given us in our lives, whether that's mother, father, husband, wife, son, daughter, worker, boss, student, teacher, whatever. But taking the time to regularly sit at his feet and listen reminds us that it is not the doing that makes us saved or not. It is not the doing that defines our life. He is what defines. His selfless rescue from our deepest need is what defines us. Whatever mistakes we make, whatever problems arise, whatever troubles come...none of them will change the fact that we have a risen savior. None of them will change our eternal destination. And so much else that we are fooled into thinking we have to do we come to realize is just wasted time. The more time we spend at the feet of our Savior, the more the cares and worries melt away, the more things we thought we needed to do just melt away too, and the more refreshed and invigorated we are to do the things we should do.

I just want to take a moment to illuminate this one point a little further. Because I want us to understand that when I say there's very little worth getting worried and upset about, and when I say that the world tries to use all these things to distract us from Jesus, I mean even things that get done in our midst here. Take a second look at Martha. Was she doing something wrong? No, she was carrying out a role that was appropriate, she was being a good hostess. Jesus didn't say Mary chose what was right, just what was better. Martha was doing a good thing, but she was doing it at the expense of listening to God's word. It is entirely possible for any one of us to get so wrapped up in doing even good and noble things that we fail to take the time to feed our faith and our souls properly with God's word. This is also something we need to watch out for.

There are many things for us each to do every day. And some days it seems like every single one is a priority one case. We need to remember every day what the ultimate priority is; our relationship with Jesus. Only he can provide us with the one thing we actually need, and he only does that through the Word of God. Take the time, make the effort not just to say you'll make it a priority, but to actually do something about it. Set down your work and consider how you are using the time God has given you in this life. Ask yourself, am I doing what is good...or what is better? Amen.