

Title: One Thing is Necessary
Text: Luke 10.38-42
Theme: The priority of God's Word
Series: Luke
Prop Stmnt: You must desire God's Word above all.

Some of you know the challenge of preparing a short speech for a wedding, a dinner, or a eulogy. In those settings the pressure comes from figuring out what not to say, rather than what to say since you have a limited amount of time. You have to make every word count. Luke's gospel is a compacted account of the life of Christ. He does not write all there is to know but what he does write is not only deliberate, but is under the direction of the Spirit of God. So, we approach the text knowing that every word counts. We pay attention to every detail. When we carefully listen to God's Word we see and feel the intensity or the pressure of its message.

In addition to electricity, natural gas is an interesting energy source for vehicles. We now have the capability of compressing gas up to 10,000 psi. That means that a 5 square-inch cylinder with 10,000 psi has enough force to lift over 50,000 pounds. God's Word is like that. It is concentrated and Holy Spirit pressurized so that when it is released it is powerful. This text is an example of that. There is so much condensed into these 5 verses. Here we learn some of the most important things we could every understand. Here Jesus says "*one thing is necessary.*" We better make certain we know and embrace what that one thing is.

Last week, we were challenged by the story that Jesus told of the Samaritan who had compassion on the man who was mugged and left half dead. Jesus was answering the lawyer's questions of, "*what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" and "*who is my neighbor?*" What did we learn? Christ calls us to give up our agenda and consider the needs of others more important than ourselves. That is very important, but there is a danger in that. If you do that and forget Jesus, you have missed the point. If your serving Jesus distracts you from actually spending time with Jesus, then you are not serving Jesus.

Read Text:

1. Three Contrasts (38-40a)

The ministry of Jesus is clarifying who is in his family and who isn't. It's the difference between life and death, heaven and hell. Jesus is defining the terms of what it means to follow him and therefore, be part of the real people of God. Back in 9.21 Jesus said, "*The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.*" Then Jesus said (v.23), "*if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*" Those who identify with Jesus should expect to face rejection like he did and suffering. This distinction and definition about who is in his family and who isn't is an important theme in this section. Jesus sends his disciples to a region of the Samaritans in order to see if they will receive him. They won't. Then (chapter 10) Jesus sends 72 followers to many local villages and towns to see if they will receive him as he makes

his way to Jerusalem. There are some who apparently do, but many others that do not. Like an old polaroid the picture starts to develop before our eyes and we see these two groups now. Those who reject Jesus is clearly the largest group. But there are still many who follow him. They are not the most powerful and respected, but they are known by God and kept by Him.

A. The contrast of Martha to her world.

We read in v.39 that as *“they went on their way”* (referring to Jesus and his disciples) that Jesus entered a village and *“a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.”* Already we like her. She is choosing to do what so many were not willing to. She was willing to be identified with Jesus, even though he was proving to be a very controversial person. In that sense, Martha is not like many in her world. Now look at v.39.

B. The contrast of Mary to her world.

“And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching.” For a woman to be sitting at the feet of a teacher was almost unheard of in those days. Jesus had many women who were part of the group that followed him. This was very unconventional. Mary is literally at his feet. She is that close. She is accepted and knows it. Jesus champions women who love and understand his Word. I love the fact that so many of our women love to learn good theology. I love it because deep thoughts about God give us big hearts for God. But the biggest contrast is...

C. The contrast between Martha and Mary.

The contrast is between what Martha is doing and what Mary is doing (and not doing). Look at v.40. It begins with the coordinating conjunction designed to display contrast. *“But Martha was distracted with much serving.”* What was she distracted from? She was distracted from listening to Jesus like Mary was doing. We may be tempted to read our own experiences into this account. You may have had a sibling who always tried to find a way to get out doing the dishes, or things like that. That may not be the case here. Let’s stick with the text because that is what we need to grasp.

Martha is the one who welcomed Jesus into “her house.” This sounds like it was her idea. She took the initiative to invite Jesus and his disciples into her home. That is a big deal and a good one. Why would you do that? Well based on his practice, you would presumably invite him into your home to hear him teach. Martha does the inviting, but Mary does the listening. Martha welcomed Jesus into her home but then lost sight of the what it was all about. The camera of this text is actually on Martha. She is the one in focus, while Mary is a bit blurry in the background. This is because we are so inclined to be like this. And the contrast between these two sisters is not a matter of sibling rivalry, or birth order stuff. The contrast is designed to help us see ourselves. Martha is a mirror that reveals how tempted we are to prioritize what we do for God instead of being in relationship with him. We see in Martha a reason as to why the gospel is so difficult for most people to accept. For one, most people bristle at the idea that

they are sinners at heart. For the few who really believe that, the next hurdle is to realize that you cannot earn God's favor by acts of service, or sacrifice, even. Whatever good you offer to God for your sins, is never good enough. That is why you need Jesus, completely. Those who have professed faith in Christ and seek to follow him, this text is convicting because in Martha we see the subtle snares of serving.

2. The Subtle Snares of Serving

Serving can be a good thing. Serving can be a wonderful thing. Jesus came to serve. He is pictured in Isaiah as the Suffering Servant. He displays this by washing the feet of the disciples in the upper room in John 13 and the famous text in Philippians 2.5-8 champions his role as the perfect servant who died that we might live. Romans 12 identifies service as a gift of the Holy Spirit and in Acts 6, the office of deacon was established which means servant. Serving is a wonderful and necessary thing that is commended, extolled and frankly, required for members of the church. What ministry (area of service) do you have in the church? What do you do to contribute to the health of the wholeness of this body? Some of you cannot answer that because you are hitchhiking. You are letting others buy the car, pay for the gas and repairs, while you just ride along. If you have hitched a ride and the exhaust system suddenly goes, do you offer to pay for it? Probably not. You get out, tell the guy thanks and sorry and look for another ride. If that is you, then in many cases you need to wake up or grow up. Some of you are not in a position to serve the church but you need the church to serve you. A biblical church is not an event that we attend. It is a family to which we belong and everyone has a part to play. So, serving is very important, but this text is a warning to the dangers that await us when we serve, which we must. Let's look at these snares:

A. The snare of distraction. (40a)

Martha is focused on what she is doing while Mary is focused on what Jesus is doing. Martha was distracted with much serving (40a). Distracted from what? Distracted from listening to Jesus. Beloved, it is a nice thing to make certain that your guests have a place to sit, and perhaps have something to eat or drink. But when you choose to serve others instead of listening to God's Word from God's servant, you are making a wrong decision. Why? Because you are more concerned about your relationship to others than your relationship to Christ. You cannot build a relationship without listening well. When we listen, we learn. When we listen we give attention and place importance on the one who is speaking. When serving distracts you from hearing God's Word, then serving becomes a sin because it blinds you to what you really need. It is highly likely that Martha is very concerned about the meal being prepared and is frustrated that Mary "left" her. But Jesus himself quoted Deut. 8.3 when said that "man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Mary is listening to every word that is coming from the mouth of God. This is the real food. Martha is distracted by lesser things. You can do a lot of things "for Jesus" and yet not really be connected to Jesus. Ask yourself this question: Do the things I do "for Jesus" distract me from actually spending time with Jesus? Related to that, do you think that what you do for God is a substitute for spending time listening to him? That doesn't make any sense, does it? What if Cathi says, "can we just sit

down and talk for a bit? I haven't hardly seen you all day." And I say, "Not now, but I washed your car." Is she satisfied with that? No. You need to hear God's Word with your heart way more than you need to serve. God's Word makes much of God. Serving is supposed to be done in order to make much of God, but serving can make much of us. One of the reasons why we are tempted to We are tempted to think that being noticed, praised, desired, affirmed even envied by others will fill our identity tanks with satisfying value. It never does and never will. What would you choose? an immaculate home or listening to Jesus? Martha is an easy target, but this is not an issue limited to women. I know a lot of guys who are "get the job done" guys. That is a great thing but not when you are so focused on getting the job done that you forget the mission. Therefore, serving can expose you to

B. The snare of dissatisfaction.

Serving can be enticing because it can be affirming. You may get some attention from serving and when people express appreciation, which they should, that affirmation may feed a hungry ego. When I serve in order to be affirmed, then my serving has now become my idol because I now look to my serving to give me what ultimately only God can give me. How do I know if my serving has become an idol? If you did not get affirmation and recognition, would you still do it? Do you do what you do for Jesus, or for others to applaud you for "doing this for Jesus."?

You and I need the Word of God to give us a proper view of ourselves. Without that, we are tempted to believe things about ourselves and others that are not true. Such as, my identity is my serving. If I believe that, then I am tempted to believe that my serving is the most important thing and that everyone else needs to see that and affirm that. When we think that we are serving and others aren't, we can get angry because it is not fair. You may be a high performer at work and one of those who gets things done. That means that you get punished with more work because management knows you will get it done. That can generate a lot of resentment to those whom you perceive as not pulling their weight. Mary was not serving and Martha was angry. She was so angry about Mary's insensitivity to Martha's distraction of serving that Martha accused Jesus of not caring about her.

"Lord, do you not care...." I'm not sure this was really a question. It sounds like Martha wrapped an accusation in the robe of a question. What Martha was saying was, "Jesus you don't care about me. You don't care that my sister has left me with all of this work. You don't care that this is unfair." Then Martha tells Jesus what Jesus should have noticed and should have said. "Tell her then to help me." Martha is telling the Word of God what he is supposed to say. That never goes well, does it? But Jesus does not send her back to the kitchen "where she belongs" does he? That is probably what Martha is demanding. And it may be what Martha means when she says, "*my sister has left me to serve alone.*" Mary made her choice and it did not sit well with Martha. Martha is placing her word above God's Word. She knows better than Jesus, she really believes. She believes this in the moment, because she is listening to her words instead of the words of Jesus. She believes that she is righteous. This is...

C. The snare of self-righteousness

Busy, busy, busy. Some of you are so busy and you feed on that. You find significance and worth in your busyness. I'm in school, working 2 jobs, remodeling my house, and teaching in a homeschool co-op. Look at what I am doing! Look at how hard I am working! It's not fair that no one is helping me out. No one appreciates all that I am doing. Jesus, you owe me fairness. My serving has obligated you to doing what I demand. Serving can reinforce the lie that God owes you something when you serve for yourself instead of for God. Tell my sister to help me! When we feel that we have been wronged (and there are plenty of times when that is true), we can be blind to our own sin, particularly our self-righteousness. In John 8, the religious leaders bring a woman to Jesus that they caught in adultery and they want to know what he is going to do about it. They demand him to take sides, but he is slow to do that. Instead, he draws something in the dirt while they are carrying on, and he then asks them about their own heart condition. In Luke 12, a man claims that his brother refuses to share his inheritance with him and demands Jesus do something. Instead, Jesus warns him about the deceitfulness of riches and challenges him to guard his own heart so that he does not fall into the sin of covetousness. The same pattern is here. Instead of siding with her, Jesus gently and lovingly helps Martha see her own part in this. Jesus' response in v.41 is so tender and truthful. "Martha, Martha" Jesus is taking her seriously. He is paying personal attention to her and he helps her see what she has to see.

D. The snare of anxiety. (41)

Where is all of this effort getting Martha? Jesus points out that she is anxious and troubled about many things. I cannot tell if the many things are the many details of the meal that Martha wants to prepare or many things in life, like the meal, that seem to demand a lot of attention. But Jesus kindly points out that for all of Martha's efforts, she is not finding any peace. Martha, it seems, has an internal engine, or alarm clock, that she cannot shut off.

Like many of you, if not all of you I have had many seasons in my life marked by anxiety. Rarely are my fears rational or reasonable at 2am. Praise God they have been seasons and not my life in general. Anxiety is a consequence of living in this sin-cursed world. But anxiety does not have to own us. It owns many of you. It owned Martha. But what did Jesus tell her? He told her what I have observed from Scripture, from my own life and from watching people for over six decades. People who prioritize listening to Jesus, do not tend to be anxious. You get anxious because there are problems that are so big that you can't find a solution. I think that's the point. You can't. But He can. He will make a way, but if you don't spend time with him and listen to him, rest in him and talk with him, you won't know what that way is. It is not a coincidence that the very next text talks about prayer. Jesus is the King of the upside down kingdom. He is not obsessed with power, but focuses on relationships created and bound by love. Mary chose to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to him. She did it because she chose in that moment to do nothing else.

3. The Essential Place of Listening.

Listening means to hear with your heart. Listening to the word of Christ is not simply hearing a voice or noise. It means to place yourself under the Word. The Psalmist said, "*Incline my heart to your testimonies.*" (Ps. 119.36) Cause my heart to lean so that my internal direction, my default response is to align with your Word. Give my innermost being a hunger, thirst and motivation to know, understand, embrace and delight in your Word. This is the kind of listening that God describes throughout the Bible. When we listen to God's Word we accept his voice of authority over ours. We do not listen to argue, to compete, to disagree, to judge, but we listen with faith from a posture that assumes God is true, good and wise. The truth is, it is way easier in a sense to be Martha than to be Mary. Mary is hearing Christ speak which means that there will be things that she learns about God and about herself that she will need to take to heart. There will be some changes that she needs to make and sacrifices she will be called upon to do. It means that if she chooses to believe in Christ, that her belief is going to be challenged by her world and may appear to be challenged by Christ. Mary is has chosen the good portion. Mary has chosen the "one necessary thing" but it is not the easy thing. It may look easy to Martha at the moment while Martha is stressing out about everything getting done but in reality listening to God's Word and believing it above anything else is never easy.

A. Listening produces faith and love.

The rest of what we know about Mary bears this out. She listened to Christ and the word of God gave her a faith and a love that was so deep that she was willing to believe him even when her brother died and Jesus did not come to stop it. (John 11) But Mary also served.

B. Faith and love produce serving.

In John 12 Jesus is back in this home for a meal and Martha was serving and so did Mary. In fact Mary humbled herself like the lowliest of servants and anointed the feet of Jesus with a costly ointment and then wiped his feet with her hair. She sat at his feet and now she washed them. Later she would witness his death and then help prepare his body for burial. Her listening with her heart motivated her sacrificial serving. Martha said, "tell her to help me." The truth is, she did and she has helped all of us see what a follower of Jesus looks like.

Many years ago, when I was in my early 30's I met a guy in his 70's at a local gym. He was there all the time. He was always telling people what they needed to do whether or not they asked. His life was the gym because he was desperate to hold on to a little bit of what he used to look like. But even the gym-life won't stop death. I found out one day that he was in the hospital and I went to visit him. I found out that I was about the only one who came. He spent so much time in the gym on himself, that he had no relationships that mattered. He looked good for his age, but the truth is, he had no life. He missed the entire point. Jesus is the point of life. He is the "one thing" that is necessary. He is what will never be taken from you, ever.