

Pentecost 9

Luke 10:38-42 – How Do You Choose To Spend Your Time?

July 24-26, 2010 by: Pastor Wessel

Luke 10:38-42 – ³As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴²but only one thing is needed. ⁴³Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Introduction – Managing time is very challenging for some people. It is for me. There seems to be no end of things to do. Some things, of course, people will notice right away if you don't do them – if you miss an appointment or if you fail to prepare a meal. Other things, people won't notice until later if you don't do them – . Still other things, people may not notice at all if you don't do them, because it was your decision to do it and no one else really knew what you were planning.

How do you juggle it all? How do you sort it all out? There can be great value to having a set schedule for work and home life, so that you have at least some idea of what you are supposed to do when. The problem we will always run into, though, is that there is never enough time to do everything that we are supposed to do and never enough time to do everything that we want to do. That can leave people frustrated and anxious.

Two sisters had to figure out what to do with their time when Jesus came to visit. We aren't told how much time they had to spend with him, but we are told that they chose to spend their time in very different ways. I hope this account from the life of Jesus helps you think about this question:

How Do You Choose to Spend Your Time?

I. We know that time spent serving our Lord Jesus Christ is valuable

II. We also see that time spent listening to our Lord Jesus Christ is more valuable

I. We know that time spent serving our Lord Jesus Christ is valuable

Let's begin with a quick lesson in Marys. There are three different women in the New Testament named Mary that we read about in some detail. The most famous one, of course, is Mary of Nazareth, who was chosen by God to be the birth mother of his son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Also well known is Mary of Magdala or Mary Magdalene. The Bible tells us, kind of in passing, that Jesus had cast 7 demons from her. She was one of the first people that Jesus appeared to after he had risen from the dead on Easter morning.

The third Mary is Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and brother of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. She is the Mary that gets our attention today, along with her sister Martha. These two sisters were blessed with the opportunity to receive Jesus into their home. What an opportunity! How would you react if the Master Teacher, the Son of God, the Messiah chosen by God to save the world, came to your door? I would think that any of us would bring out the best of everything we have so that we can prepare a room and a meal fit for the King of Kings, knowing of course that anything we do would pale compared to what he actually deserves.

What Martha seems to be doing is offering the best she can possibly offer to Jesus. But Jesus shows her that she has a problem. *What* Martha was doing wasn't wrong. But *why* Martha was doing it was wrong. Those negative words really stand out, don't they? *Distracted, worried, and upset.* When you and I do good because we love our Savior and want to use our whole lives to praise him, it is wonderful in God's eyes. But when the activity that we are busy with distracts us from what is most important and we are worried and upset because it becomes more about *our* need to serve than about our God who gives us all, then we have a problem.

Are you ever driven by guilt to serve God? Are you are motivated by fear to do the right thing? Do you motivate other people by making them feel guilty if they don't? Don't get me wrong. God's law does condemn us when we are unfaithful, lazy, and unwilling to use the mind and body that God has given to us for productive work, for serving the people God has put in our lives. God will condemn those who say to him, "My life is my own! I'm going to do what I want to do."

God's law condemns us, but we are reminded that even when we do work hard, what might seem like a good deed can be tainted by sin, by wrong motives, by pride and guilt. Sometimes our effort to work hard can be self centered. Sometimes our effort to work hard is a grudging effort, doing what seem right, but in our minds we are thinking, "Do I have to?"

We don't know exactly what was motivating Martha to do what she was doing, but it wasn't right for her to become distracted from what was more important, to become worried and upset about all the things she wanted to get done. When we are in the same boat as Martha, Jesus reminds us of the perspective we ought to have on the work he gives us to do. Work in the life of a god-fearing Christian is work done in light of our Savior's sacrifice for our sin. It is work that we offer to our Savior for humbling himself to buy us back from the chains of sin and its curse. God has forgiven our sin, even the sin of serving him for the wrong reason, even the sin of serving him unwillingly. He has forgiven us so that we can offer ourselves to him daily in the freedom of the gospel that gives eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ. The responsibilities and opportunities we have to serve God and those around us are not to distract us or make us worried or upset. They are our humble offerings of praise to our God for his wonderful mercy. They come from a heart that has been filled with the peace of knowing that our sins are forgiven.

II. We also see that time spent listening to our Lord Jesus Christ is more valuable

So why wasn't Mary, Martha's sister, ready to produce those same fruits of service, so that her Lord and Savior could be treated like a king in their home? It certainly would have been appropriate, wouldn't it? If Mary and Martha had been properly motivated to serve Jesus and his disciples together, there would have been no problem. But instead, Mary chooses what Jesus holds up as being the better option and there is a contrast between the two sisters.

In terms of our salvation, it is better to spend time listening to God's Word than to spend time serving in God's Kingdom. It is God's Word that brings us the message of forgiveness and peace. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to change our hearts and make us his people, by calling us with the good news of Jesus Christ. The one thing needed in this life is the one thing that lasts forever – God's Word, which proclaims God's gift of salvation. God speaks to us in his Word and everything we do for God, to show our love and service to him in his Kingdom, pales in comparison to the incredible work he has done for us.

The time to sit at Jesus' feet was short. He was on his way to Jerusalem. There he would suffer and die and rise from the dead and not long after that would return in glory back to the Father. What an opportunity to hear the Word of God spoken from the lips of God's Son himself. I imagine that would be an opportunity that every one of Jesus' disciples throughout the centuries would glad take, even if it meant giving up everything else.

We have not been blessed to sit at the feet of Jesus Christ as was Mary. But we are blessed to hear God's Word proclaimed in the pulpits and airways of our nation. We are blessed with the freedom to gather here and worship God according to the truth of his Word. God's Word tells us that we should Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. Martin Luther explains this to mean that we should not despise preaching and God's Word, but regard it as sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

What an example this Mary is for us. She understood that time with Jesus was better spent sitting and listening to his words that bring life, than it was to become distracted, worried and upset about how to best serve him. She recognized the truth that Jesus proclaimed, that "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus accepted many invitations for meals from people. But he always seemed to do it with a purpose in mind: to teach people something important about the kingdom of God. Jesus came to teach us the truth of our sin, that we are helpless, that no work of ours can get us into heaven. He came to crush the pride of those who thought they were fine without a Savior and to lift up the hearts of those who were so filled with their guilty conscience that they thought no God would ever want them. Jesus came to show us that there is only one thing needed: to trust that he is our Savior.

We don't know exactly what Jesus was saying as Mary left her housework and sat and listened intently to her Savior's voice. But the message that Jesus sent his disciples to proclaim was that the kingdom of God was near. It wasn't a kingdom that conquers with guns and bombs and sets up boundaries with big walls to mark off its territory. The kingdom of God is within as the Holy Spirit conquers the hardened unbelieving heart by declaring, "All is done! Christ has come and removed the curse."

Jesus knew that he would move on to Jerusalem and would be handed over to be crucified and after his death he would rise and repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name. He needed to prepare both Mary and Martha for these events, so that they would follow him as his disciples, looking to him alone for eternal peace.

Conclusion – It does take time to listen to the voice of your Savior. God asks us to choose wisely how we spend our time. But remember that God not only speaks to you for the short amount of time that you are gathered with other Christians for a formal church service or devotion. As you hear his Word here and as you read his Word on your own, may it echo in your heart and mind wherever you are, so that you are listening to what God has to say every time you are with friends, every time you have important decisions to make, every time you watch the news on TV. Then, with God's Word echoing in your heart and mind, may God use you to serve him with your whole life, that with every breath you may reflect his unconditional love in your service to one another. Amen.