

Luke has been telling us of Jesus' journeys to Jerusalem during last year of His ministry. It seems Luke combined them all rather than putting them in a chronological order. He appears to have organized the accounts by connecting topics. The beginning of the chapter tells of Jesus sending out the seventy-two to prepare the cities for His final journey into Jerusalem when He enters on a donkey as Israel's king (10:1ⁱ; 19:37,38ⁱⁱ). This story jumps back to an earlier time, probably the same year. We know that because of John's account of the resurrection of Lazarus which took place later. Today's passage follows the account of how the seventy-two were received and that of the Good Samaritan probably to point out an example of an extremely receptive family who were helpful to Jesus' ministry.

³⁸ *Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.* Luke 10:38 Jesus and His disciples were probably on their way to the Feast of Booths or Hanukkah during the last year of Jesus' ministry. He told an inquiring follower that He had nowhere to lay His head (9:58ⁱⁱⁱ), but here in Bethany He could count on the hospitality of this home. Bethany is a few miles east of Jerusalem on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives. We learn from other passages that this is the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, a brother and his sisters (John 11:1^{iv}). I believe we can assume it is an upper middle-class home as later the women will buy an expensive alabaster jar of perfume to anoint the dead body of their brother (John 12:3^v).

In the 1890s an archeologist found three ossuaries (limestone bone boxes) in Bethany. Each had one of the names of this family inscribed. There is presently a Catholic church next to a cave that had a tomb in the back of it where the discovery is believed to have been made. The only entrance now was cut through rock from above and is held by Muslims who will charge you a fee to go down and look into the tomb. It seems to be the authentic sight. Isn't it like God to preserve an archeological site of one of the most questioned stories in the Bible, the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:43,44^{vi}).

In this short story, Lazarus is not mentioned, perhaps because he was away working or because his role in this story was insignificant to the message.

To welcome Jesus was to welcome His disciples as well. That meant hosting them for meals and probably providing shelter for the night. Martha was more than willing to help out of her gift of hospitality (Romans 12:13^{vii}). Jesus loved this family and they loved Him (John 11:5^{viii}). But it was an extraordinary effort to buy and prepare the food and ready the house for all these guests.

³⁹ *And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.* Luke 10:39 Mary took the posture of a disciple, sitting at her teacher's feet. This teacher is the Lord (kurios). That can simply mean master, but the disciples would eventually understand the title applied to Jesus was the same as LORD (Adonai) in the Old Testament, the Creator and master of all things. Skeptics tell us that the disciples didn't come to that conclusion until decades later. They overlook the Scriptures that the Gospel writers applied to Jesus while He was still among them. (See Divine Messiah.)

Jesus was unusual in that He allowed women followers to travel with Him and let them sit among His disciples (Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, p 162; Luke 8:1-3^{ix}). Mary was hungry for spiritual truth and wanted to learn from Jesus. To sit at a teacher's feet was to eagerly listen and learn from Him.

In Luke 6:47,48 Jesus taught, ⁴⁷ *Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like:* ⁴⁸ *he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.* Mary had come and she was hearing His words. Like most of us, she will struggle to act on what she hears when the storm hits (John 11:32^x), but she has begun well. She is acting on what the Master taught by coming and listening to His words. It's something that we have the wonderful privilege of doing as often as we wish. Are you taking the promise to heart? Storms are bound to come. It's not a matter of if but of when (Acts 14:22^{xi}). Will you be ready? The only way to prepare is to sit at Jesus' feet, hear His words, and do them.

⁴⁰ *But 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."* Luke 10:40 As the hostess, Martha was doing what culture dictated, preparing a meal for all those guests. Meals were simple in that time. Perhaps it was flat bread with a little olive oil, with some olives and almonds. Even so, there were a lot of mouths to feed. Serving this crowd in her home had distracted her. What had her service distracted her from? It was from doing what Mary was doing. No doubt she would have wanted to listen to Jesus too. Perhaps she thought that if Mary wouldn't be so selfish and just come help her, then soon they would both be able to listen to Jesus.

It seems her desire to hear Jesus and desire to be of service were clashing to the point that she was simmering inside. Martha blurted out, "Lord, don't you care...?" As soon as the words left her lips she probably knew it was the wrong thing to say. The disciples used that expression in Mark 4:38^{xii}? "Lord, don't you care if we drown?" Martha was stressed out, trying to take care of everyone, while wanting to finish up so she could listen to Jesus. Here was her sister not helping at all, not even seeing the dagger like glances at her. Didn't Jesus care that Martha was left to serve all by herself?

I love the honesty of Scripture and how real it is to every day life. How many times have you wondered if God cared about your situation? The one sure way to answer the question is to look at the cross. That's how much He cares! **You might not understand His hand, but you can always trust His heart.**

We often think we must do something that culture or others' expectations demand. We want to do what we think is most important, but we sense the unspoken demands of others or of culture. Sometimes that demand comes from our background, such as that of our parents' priorities. That's when we tend to make our demands of God. We pray something like, "Lord, I want to do the good thing that I know You want me to do but help me get this finished first." Or we might pray, "Move that person's heart to help me! Convict them!" Can you relate to those prayers?

Martha told Jesus what to do. "Tell her to help me!" Of course we would never make demands of God, right (Matthew 16:22^{xiii})? We tell Him when to heal, how to work

in a life, what we think we need, and when to do it, like right now! But if we just step back and look from an eternal perspective, maybe we would see the urgency we feel is from our own heart and not from others' demands. Maybe God is using suffering to refine a person's character. We might be praying our will instead of God's will.

What if Martha sat down with Mary, and then when the teaching was over asked her to help prepare the meal? What if we do what we know from God's Word is most important and don't worry about what people think or expect of us? How would our prayers change if we first asked God what we should be praying? **Wouldn't it be better to put Jesus' words first in our priorities? What if the next time you hit a conflict of priorities you thought about what Scripture teaches us should be first?** Can you see how that would relieve the tension and help us trust the Lord for the rest of what needs to be done (Psalm 62:8^{xiv})?

It is so human to think that Jesus needs our work and that He cannot do without us. The preacher wonders what would become of the church without him (and perhaps the people dream of what it would be like without him!). An elder might think that if he were removed, the whole place would crumble. The evangelist imagines that no one would be converted if he were to retire. How self-deceived we tend to be. A fly on the wall of the church might as well imagine that everything going on below him is dependent upon his presence and would cease if he flew away! (Hughes, K. - *Preaching the Word- Luke, Volume I: That You May Know the Truth.*) We should give our all as if everything depended on it, but of course it doesn't. To think it really does is a prideful thought. Everything is dependent on God.

The grace that enables you to serve can just as well enable someone else to serve. Overestimating your importance is not only prideful, it will give you an ulcer and have you making demands of God like Martha's demand. People sometimes leave a church because the leadership doesn't make their pet issue their favorite issue as well. And if our pet issue keeps us from what is needful, which is hearing the Word of the Lord, we will become resentful and wither on the vine (John 15:6^{xv}).

⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, Luke 10:41 Jesus told Martha what she knew was true. She was anxious and troubled about more than just preparing a meal. What did people think of her? Where were they all going to sleep? How could she draw enough water for them all? When is Lazarus going to get home? Martha was a great host, but she was also distracted by her worries and self-imposed responsibilities.

The soul that knows Jesus is in charge of all things, and has everything under control, and that He knows the future and even has planned good things for us in advance (Ephesians 2:10^{xvi}), will not be anxious about anything (Philippians 4:6^{xvii}). I can just imagine Martha peeking into the doorway to count heads, and then peeking back in again to glare at Mary, and then recounting to be sure she was right, each time being a distraction from the teaching.

Then, she interrupted Jesus and told Him what He needed to do. Oh, Lord please help us! Where is our trust in God? Did she even realize she was being a distraction and ordering the Lord of the universe to do her bidding?

Do we realize how arrogant we can be in prayer? I do not mean to imply that God won't put something on our hearts to ask with persistence (Hebrews 4:16^{xviii}; Luke 18:1^{xix}). However, when we make our demands to God, we need to realize how we must sound to Almighty God who is perfectly holy, all knowing, and infinite in power, the God who has each day of your life planned before we were born (Psalm 139:16^{xx}). Prayer is too often a one-way conversation, which isn't really a conversation at all.

Considering that reality, see how graciously Jesus responded. He could have rebuked her and said, "Quit being a distraction and sit down by your sister and listen!" But instead He could see the conflict in her, wanting to serve and wanting to hear the Word being taught. He answered her with compassion, gentleness, but also with honesty. He was matter of fact, but He also helped Martha see what the real problem was, which was her anxious and troubled soul. If we will take time in prayer and the Word, we will find Jesus is as gracious and gentle with us. He will show us what our real problems are and how to be an overcomer (Revelation 12:11^{xxi}).

⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:42 Jesus' loving answer first addressed her heart condition to help her see her lack of trust. Then He patiently explained why He would not do as she commanded. Mary had chosen the good portion. Doing something out of duty is very different from listening out of love. Lovingly listen or grudgingly serve, Mary made the best choice between the two. Jesus wasn't going to deny her the best, which was feasting on His words while He was still among them (Psalm 19:10^{xxii}). Martha could have made the same choice.

And so, the disciples all starved. Ha! When we put it that way we can laugh at the urgency of our self-imposed demands and expectations. We know they all eventually ate, and so what if dinner was later than expected. They were all at the spiritual feast of Jesus' words. Three short years the Word made flesh taught men and women face to face (John 1:14^{xxiii}). What an opportunity! What was a delayed meal compared to that opportunity?

We might think that was a unique opportunity that we don't have. In a way it was, but from another perspective, we are even more blessed. We have His Words in print, on our phones, in our computers, and in the songs we sing. We can feast on them anytime. Have we chosen the good portion or are we constantly busy with what we think is urgent? **"One thing is necessary!" That is what Jesus said. Do we hear it? Do we believe it? Do we act on it?** If we don't act on it, we should question our belief (James 1:22^{xxiv}).

One way to know that you believe it is if you see it as a priority when you start your day. Do you sit at Jesus' feet with the Word open before you and your heart attentive to what He would say? Or do you start the day with your list of what is necessary and squeeze in a little time for the Word if you can fit it in between all *your* other priorities?

Today and tomorrow and weeks from now, those of us who want to have everything done on time and just right will be anxious and troubled about many things. It means we care. It means we are trying to be a blessing. But let us never forget that God has it all under control (Deuteronomy 32:4^{xxv}), and the world won't end if we don't get something done. If the Holy Spirit is speaking and prompting you, trust God to take care

of the details. If life is too busy to get it all done, trust God that it didn't all need to be done today. Keep Jesus in first place. **Make sure He is the good portion that you choose each day, all day.** The time will come to prepare the meal or some other task but put His Words first. Relax, God's got this. He's still on the throne. He doesn't need you to tell Him what to do. He doesn't mind you asking if He cares, but His answer may reveal the reason that you asked was your lack of faith in Him. Sit at His feet. Listen, and then do what you learn from Him (Matthew 11:28-30^{xxvi}). He is not a hard taskmaster!

There are those of us who are on the opposite spectrum. We don't worry about what needs to be done until the last second. We just let life come at us minute by minute. We don't prioritize. You can say that is trusting God, but sometimes it is just a lack of self-discipline which is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23^{xxvii}). If you are in Christ, you can discipline yourself to make your time in the Word a necessity. You can choose the best part.

Whatever personality we have been given and developed, we should all hear that one thing is necessary. Every child of God needs to set aside the cares of this life and make it a priority to sit at Jesus' feet and then do what He teaches us. Only then can we face the coming storms of life.

At the Congress for Evangelism and Discipleship in 1976, Billy Graham spoke to 1,500 young people in San Diego regarding his father-in-law's dedication to the Word of God. Dr. Nelson Bell was the sole doctor for a 400-bed hospital in China. Think of the responsibility on his shoulders. Yet, He made it his habit *to rise every morning at four-thirty and spend two to three hours in Bible reading. He didn't use that time to read commentaries or write; he didn't do his correspondence or any of his other work. He just read the Scriptures every morning, and he was a walking Bible encyclopedia. People wondered at the holiness and the greatness in his life.* (Hughes, Kent - Preaching the Word – Luke, Volume I: That You May Know the Truth.) And we think we are too busy! It is a matter of conviction. What do you think is necessary? That is what you will act on. And when your heart and your head don't agree, ask God to unite them to put Him first.

Questions

- 1 What was the relationship of Jesus and the Bethany home?
- 2 What did Mary do? What does it signify?
- 3 What is the promise of Luke 6:47,48?
- 4 What distracted Martha?
- 5 What did she demand of Jesus? Why?
- 6 How do you know God cares?
- 7 Can Jesus get by without us? Are you sure?
- 8 What troubled Martha? What was the remedy?
- 9 What is necessary? Do you really believe it?
- 10 How did Dr. Bell demonstrate what is necessary?

ⁱ **Luke 10:1 (ESV)**

¹ After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.

ⁱⁱ **Luke 19:37-38 (ESV)**

³⁷ As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

ⁱⁱⁱ **Luke 9:58 (ESV)**

⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

^{iv} **John 11:1 (ESV)**

¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

^v **John 12:3 (ESV)**

³ Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

^{vi} **John 11:43-44 (ESV)**

⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”

⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

^{vii} **Romans 12:13 (ESV)**

¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

^{viii} **John 11:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

^{ix} **Luke 8:1-3 (ESV)**

¹ Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, ² and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³ and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

^x **John 11:32 (ESV)**

³² Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

^{xi} **Acts 14:22 (ESV)**

²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

^{xii} **Mark 4:38 (ESV)**

³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

^{xiii} **Matthew 16:22 (ESV)**

²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”

^{xiv} **Psalms 62:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah

^{xv} **John 15:6 (ESV)**

⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

^{xvi} **Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

^{xvii} **Philippians 4:6 (ESV)**

⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

^{xviii} **Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

^{xix} **Luke 18:1 (ESV)**

¹ And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

^{xx} **Psalms 139:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

^{xxi} **Revelation 12:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

^{xxii} **Psalms 19:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

^{xxiii} **John 1:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

^{xxiv} **James 1:22 (ESV)**

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

^{xxv} **Deuteronomy 32:4 (ESV)**

⁴ "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.

^{xxvi} **Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)**

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

^{xxvii} **Galatians 5:23 (ESV)**

²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.